

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Madame Chrysanther

Pierre Loti

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Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Madame Chrysantheme, v2

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BOOK 2.

CHAPTER XII. HAPPY FAMILIES!

July 18th.

By this time, four officers of my ship are married like myself, and inhabiting the slopes of the same suburb. This arrangement is quite an ordinary occurrence, and is brought about without difficulties, mystery, or danger, through the offices of the same M. Kangourou.

As a matter of course, we are on visiting terms with all these ladies.

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Madame Chrysantheme, v2

First, there is our very merry neighbor Madame Campanule, who is little Charles N –'s wife; then Madame Jonquille, who is even merrier than Campanule, like a young bird, and the daintiest fairy of them all; she has married X –, a fair northerner who adores her; they are a lover– like and inseparable pair, the only one that will probably weep when the hour of parting comes. Then Sikou–San with Doctor Y –; and lastly the midshipman Z with the tiny Madame Touki–San, no taller than a boot: thirteen years old at the outside, and already a regular woman, full of her own importance, a petulant little gossip. In my childhood I was sometimes taken to the Learned Animals Theatre, and I remember a certain Madame de Pompadour, a principal role, filled by a gayly dressed old monkey; Touki–San reminds me of her.

In the evening, all these folk usually come and fetch us for a long processional walk with lighted lanterns. My wife, more serious, more melancholy, perhaps even more refined, and belonging, I fancy, to a higher class, tries when these friends come to us to play the part of the lady of the house. It is comical to see the entry of these ill–matched pairs, partners for a day, the ladies, with their disjointed bows, falling on all fours before Chrysantheme, the queen of the establishment. When we are all assembled, we set out, arm in arm, one behind another, and always carrying at the end of our short sticks little white or red paper lanterns; it is a pretty custom.

We are obliged to scramble down the kind of street, or rather goat's– path, which leads to the Japanese Nagasaki with the prospect, alas! of having to climb up again at night; clamber up all the steps, all the slippery slopes, stumble over all the stones, before we shall be able to get home, go to bed, and sleep. We make our descent in the darkness, under the branches, under the foliage, among dark gardens and venerable little houses that throw but a faint glimmer on the road; and when the moon is absent or clouded over, our lanterns are by no means unnecessary.

When at last we reach the bottom, suddenly, without transition, we find ourselves in the very heart of Nagasaki and its busy throng in a long illuminated street, where vociferating djins hurry along and thousands of paper lanterns swing and gleam in the wind. It is life and animation, after the peace of our silent suburb.

Here, decorum requires that we should separate from our wives. All five take hold of each others' hands, like a batch of little girls out walking. We follow them with an air of indifference. Seen from behind, our dolls are really very dainty, with their back hair so tidily arranged, their tortoiseshell pins so coquettishly placed. They shuffle along, their high wooden clogs making an ugly sound, striving to walk with their toes turned in, according to the height of fashion and elegance. At every minute they burst out laughing.

Yes, seen from behind, they are very pretty; they have, like all Japanese women, the most lovely turn of the head. Moreover, they are very funny, thus drawn up in line. In speaking of them, we say: "Our little trained dogs," and in truth they are singularly like them.

This great Nagasaki is the same from one end to another, with its numberless petroleum lamps burning, its many–colored lanterns flickering, and innumerable panting djins. Always the same narrow streets, lined on each side with the same low houses, built of paper and wood. Always the same shops, without glass windows, open to all the winds, equally rudimentary, whatever may be sold or made in them; whether they display the finest gold lacquer ware, the most marvellous china jars, or old worn–out pots and pans, dried fish, and ragged frippery. All the salesmen are seated on the ground in the midst of their valuable or trumpery merchandise, their legs bared nearly to the waist.

And all kinds of queer little trades are carried on under the public gaze, by strangely primitive means, by workmen of the most ingenious type.

Oh, what wonderful goods are exposed for sale in those streets! What whimsical extravagance in those bazaars!

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Madame Chrysantheme, v2

No horses, no carriages are ever seen in the town; nothing but people on foot, or the comical little carts dragged along by the runners. Some few Europeans straggling hither and thither, wanderers from the ships in harbor; some Japanese (fortunately as yet but few) dressed up in coats; other natives who content themselves with adding to their national costume the pot-hat, from which their long, sleek locks hang down; and all around, eager haggling, bargaining, and laughter.

In the bazaars every evening our mousmes make endless purchases; like spoiled children they buy everything they fancy: toys, pins, ribbons, flowers. And then they prettily offer one another presents, with childish little smiles. For instance, Campanule buys for Chrysantheme an ingeniously contrived lantern on which, set in motion by some invisible machinery, Chinese shadows dance in a ring round the flame. In return, Chrysantheme gives Campanule a magic fan, with paintings that change at will from butterflies fluttering around cherry-blossoms to outlandish monsters pursuing each other across black clouds. Touki offers Sikou a cardboard mask representing the bloated countenance of Dai-Cok, god of wealth; and Sikou replies with a present of a long crystal trumpet, by means of which are produced the most extraordinary sounds, like a turkey gobbling. Everything is uncouth, fantastical to excess, grotesquely lugubrious; everywhere we are surprised by incomprehensible conceptions, which seem the work of distorted imaginations.

In the fashionable tea-houses, where we finish our evenings, the little serving-maids now bow to us, on our arrival, with an air of respectful recognition, as belonging to the fast set of Nagasaki. There we carry on desultory conversations, full of misunderstandings and endless 'quid pro quo' of uncouth words, in little gardens lighted up with lanterns, near ponds full of goldfish, with little bridges, little islets, and little ruined towers. They hand us tea and white and pink-colored sweetmeats flavored with pepper that taste strange and unfamiliar, and beverages mixed with snow tasting of flowers or perfumes.

To give a faithful account of those evenings would require a more affected style than our own; and some kind of graphic sign would have also to be expressly invented and scattered at haphazard among the words, indicating the moment when the reader should laugh rather a forced laugh, perhaps, but amiable and gracious. The evening at an end, it is time to return up there.

Oh! that street, that road, that we must clamber up every evening, under the starlit sky or the heavy thunder-clouds, dragging by the hands our drowsy mousmes in order to regain our homes perched on high halfway up the hill, where our bed of matting awaits us.

CHAPTER XIII. OUR "VERY TALL FRIEND"

The cleverest among us has been Louis de S—. Having formerly inhabited Japan, and made a marriage Japanese fashion there, he is now satisfied to remain the friend of our wives, of whom he has become the 'Komodachi taksan takai' ("the very tall friend," as they say, on account of his excessive height and slenderness). Speaking Japanese more readily than we, he is their confidential adviser, disturbs or reconciles our households at will, and has infinite amusement at our expense.

This "very tall friend" of our wives enjoys all the fun that these little creatures can give him, without any of the worries of domestic life. With brother Yves, and little Oyouki (the daughter of Madame Prune, my landlady), he makes up our incongruous party.

CHAPTER XIV. OUR PIOUS HOSTS

M. Sucre and Madame Prune, my landlord and his wife, two perfectly unique personages recently escaped from the panel of some screen, live below us on the ground floor; and very old they seem to have this daughter of fifteen, Oyouki, who is Chrysantheme's inseparable friend.

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Both of them are entirely absorbed in the practices of Shinto religion: perpetually on their knees before their family altar, perpetually occupied in murmuring their lengthy orisons to the spirits, and clapping their hands from time to time to recall around them the inattentive essences floating in the atmosphere. In their spare moments they cultivate, in little pots of gayly painted earthenware, dwarf shrubs and unheard-of flowers which are delightfully fragrant in the evening.

M. Sucre is taciturn, dislikes society, and looks like a mummy in his blue cotton dress. He writes a great deal (his memoirs, I fancy), with a paint-brush held in his fingertips, on long strips of rice-paper of a faint gray tint.

Madame Prune is eagerly attentive, obsequious, and rapacious; her eyebrows are closely shaven, her teeth carefully lacquered with black, as befits a lady of gentility, and at all and no matter what hours, she appears on all fours at the entrance of our apartment, to offer us her services.

As to Oyouki, she rushes upon us ten times a day whether we are sleeping or dressing like a whirlwind on a visit, flashing upon us, a very gust of dainty youthfulness and droll gayety a living peal of laughter. She is round of figure, round of face; half baby, half girl; and so affectionate that she bestows kisses on the slightest occasion with her great puffy lips a little moist, it is true, like a child's, but nevertheless very fresh and very red.

CHAPTER XV

Our dwelling is open all the night through, and the lamps burning before the gilded Buddha bring us the company of the insect inhabitants of every garden in the neighborhood. Moths, mosquitoes, cicadas, and other extraordinary insects of which I don't even know the names all this company assembles around us.

It is extremely funny, when some unexpected grasshopper, some free-and-easy beetle presents itself without invitation or excuse, scampering over our white mats, to see the manner in which Chrysantheme indicates it to my righteous vengeance merely pointing her finger at it, without another word than "Hou!" said with bent head, a particular pout, and a scandalised air.

There is a fan kept expressly for the purpose of blowing them out of doors again.

CHAPTER XVI. SLEEPING JAPAN

Here I must own that my story must appear to the reader to drag a little.

Lacking exciting intrigues and tragic adventures, I wish I knew how to infuse into it a little of the sweet perfumes of the gardens which surround me, something of the gentle warmth of the sunshine, of the shade of these graceful trees. Love being wanting, I should like it to breathe of the restful tranquillity of this faraway spot. Then, too, I should like it to reecho the sound of Chrysantheme's guitar, in which I begin to find a certain charm, for want of something better, in the silence of the lovely summer evenings.

All through these moonlit nights of July, the weather has been calm, luminous, and magnificent. Ah, what glorious clear nights! What exquisite roseate tints beneath that wonderful moon, what mystery of blue shadows in the thick tangle of trees! And, from the heights where stood our veranda, how prettily the town lay sleeping at our feet!

After all, I do not positively detest this little Chrysantheme, and when there is no repugnance on either side, habit turns into a makeshift of attachment.

CHAPTER XVII. THE SONG OF THE CICALA

Forever, throughout everything, rises day and night from the whole country the song of the cicalas, ceaseless, strident, and insistent. It is everywhere, and never-ending, at no matter what hour of the burning day, or what hour of the refreshing night. From the harbor, as we approached our anchorage, we had heard it at the same time from both shores, from both walls of green mountains. It is wearisome and haunting; it seems to be the manifestation, the noise expressive of the kind of life peculiar to this region of the world. It is the voice of summer in these islands; it is the song of unconscious rejoicing, always content with itself and always appearing to inflate, to rise, in a greater and greater exultation at the sheer happiness of living.

It is to me the noise characteristic of this country this, and the cry of the falcon, which had in like manner greeted our entry into Japan. Over the valleys and the deep bay sail these birds, uttering, from time to time, their three cries, "Ha! ha! ha!" in a key of sadness that seems the extreme of painful astonishment. And the mountains around reecho their cry.

CHAPTER XVIII. MY FRIEND AND MY DOLL

Chrysantheme, Yves, and little Oyouki have struck up a friendship so intimate that it amuses me. I even think that in my home life this intimacy is what affords me the greatest entertainment. They form a contrast which gives rise to the most absurd jokes, and unexpected situations. He brings into this fragile little paper house his nautical freedom and ease of manner, and his Breton accent; and these tiny mousmes, with affected manners and bird-like voices, small as they are, rule the big fellow as they please; make him eat with chop-sticks; teach him Japanese pigeon-vole, cheat him, and quarrel, and almost die of laughter over it all.

Certainly he and Chrysantheme take a pleasure in each other's society. But I remain serenely undisturbed, and can not imagine that this little doll, with whom I play at married life, could possibly occasion any serious trouble between this "brother" and me.

CHAPTER XIX. MY JAPANESE RELATIVES

Japanese relatives, very numerous and conspicuous, are a great source of amusement to those of my brother officers who visit me in my villa on the hill most especially to 'komodachi taksan takai' ("the tall friend").

I have a charming mother-in-law quite a woman of the world tiny sisters -in-law, little cousins, and aunts who are still quite young.

I have even a poor second cousin, who is a djin. There was some hesitation in owning this latter to me; but, behold! during the ceremony of introduction, we exchanged a smile of recognition. It was Number 415!

Over this poor Number 415 my friends on board crack no end of jokes one in particular, who, less than any one has the right to make them, little Charles N -, for his mother-in-law was once a concierge, or something of the kind, at the gateway of a pagoda.

I, however, who have a great respect for strength and agility, much appreciate this new relative of mine. His legs are undoubtedly the best in all Nagasaki, and whenever I am in haste, I always beg Madame Prune to send down to the djin-stand and engage my cousin.

CHAPTER XX. A DEAD FAIRY

Today I arrived unexpectedly at Diou–djen–dji, in the midst of burning noonday heat. At the foot of the stairs lay Chrysantheme's wooden shoes and her sandals of varnished leather.

In our rooms, upstairs, all was open to the air; bamboo blinds hung on the sunny side, and through their transparency came warm air and golden threads of light. Today the flowers Chrysantheme had placed in the bronze vases were lotus, and as I entered, my eyes fell upon their wide rosy cups.

According to her usual custom, Chrysantheme was lying flat on the floor enjoying her daily siesta.

What a singular originality these bouquets of Chrysantheme always have: a something, difficult to define, a Japanese slightness, an artificial grace which we never should succeed in imparting to them.

She was sleeping, face down, upon the mats, her high headdress and tortoise–shell pins standing out boldly from the rest of the horizontal figure. The train of her tunic appeared to prolong her delicate little body, like the tail of a bird; her arms were stretched crosswise, the sleeves spread out like wings, and her long guitar lay beside her.

She looked like a dead fairy; still more did she resemble some great blue dragon–fly, which, having alighted on that spot, some unkind hand had pinned to the floor.

Madame Prune, who had come upstairs after me, always officious and eager, manifested by her gestures her sentiments of indignation on beholding the careless reception accorded by Chrysantheme to her lord and master, and advanced to wake her.

"Pray do nothing of the kind, my good Madame Prune; you don't know how much I prefer her like that!" I had left my shoes below, according to custom, beside the little shoes and sandals; and I entered on the tips of my toes, very, very, softly to sit awhile on the veranda.

What a pity this little Chrysantheme can not always be asleep; she is really extremely decorative seen in this manner and like this, at least, she does not bore me. Who knows what may be passing in that little head and heart! If I only had the means of finding out! But strange to say, since we have kept house together, instead of advancing in my study of the Japanese language, I have neglected it, so much have I felt the impossibility of ever interesting myself in the subject.

Seated upon my veranda, my eyes wandered over the temples and cemeteries spread at my feet, over the woods and the green mountains, over Nagasaki lying bathed in the sunlight. The cicadas were chirping their loudest, the strident noise trembling feverishly in the hot air. All was calm, full of light and full of heat.

Nevertheless, to my taste, it is not yet enough so! What, then, can have changed upon the earth? The burning noondays of summer, such as I can recall in days gone by, were more brilliant, more full of sunshine; Nature seemed to me in those days more powerful, more terrible. One would say this was only a pale copy of all that I knew in early years a copy in which something is wanting. Sadly do I ask myself Is the splendor of the summer only this? Was it only this? or is it the fault of my eyes, and as time goes on shall I behold everything around me fading still more?

Behind me comes a faint and melancholy strain of music melancholy enough to make one shiver and shrill, shrill as the song of the grasshoppers, it began to make itself heard, very softly at first, then growing louder and rising in the silence of the noonday like the diminutive wail of some poor Japanese soul in pain and anguish; it was Chrysantheme and her guitar awaking together.

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Madame Chrysantheme, v2

It pleased me that the idea should have occurred to her to greet me with music, instead of eagerly hastening to wish me good-morning. At no time have I ever given myself the trouble to pretend the slightest affection for her, and a certain coldness even has grown up between us, especially when we are alone. But to-day I turn to her with a smile, and wave my hand for her to continue. "Go on, it amuses me to listen to your quaint little impromptu." It is singular that the music of this essentially merry people should be so plaintive. But undoubtedly that which Chrysantheme is playing at this moment is worth listening to. Whence can it have come to her? What unutterable dreams, forever hidden from me, surge beneath her ivory brow, when she plays or sings in this manner?

Suddenly I hear some one tapping three times, with a harsh and bony finger, against one of the steps of our stairs, and in our doorway appears an idiot, clad in a suit of gray tweed, who bows low. "Come in, come in, Monsieur Kangourou. You come just in the nick of time! I was actually becoming enthusiastic over your country!"

M. Kangourou brought a little laundry bill, which he wished respectfully to hand to me, with a profound bend of the whole body, the correct pose of the hands on the knees, and a long, snake-like hiss.

CHAPTER XXI. ANCIENT TOMBS

Pursuing the path that winds past our dwelling, one passes a dozen or more old villas, a few garden-walls, and then sees nothing but the lonely mountain-side, with little paths winding upward toward the summit through plantations of tea, bushes of camellias, underbrush, and rocks. The mountains round Nagasaki are covered with cemeteries; for centuries and centuries they have brought their dead up here.

But there is neither sadness nor horror in these Japanese sepulchres; it seems as if, among this frivolous and childish people, death itself could not be taken seriously. The monuments are either granite Buddhas, seated on lotus, or upright tombstones with inscriptions in gold. They are grouped together in little enclosures in the midst of the woods, or on natural terraces delightfully situated, and are usually reached by long stairways of stone carpeted with moss. Sometimes these pass under one of the sacred gateways, of which the shape, always the same, rude and simple, is a smaller reproduction of those in the temples.

Above us, the tombs of our mountain are of an antiquity so hoary that they no longer alarm any one, even at night. It is a region of forsaken cemeteries. The dead hidden away there have long since become one with the earth around them; and these thousands of little gray stones, these multitudes of ancient little Buddhas, eaten away by lichens, seem to be now no more than a proof of a series of existences, long anterior to our own, and lost forever and altogether in the mysterious depths of ages.

CHAPTER XXII. DAINY DISHES FOR A DOLL

The meals that Chrysantheme enjoys are something almost indescribable.

She begins in the morning, when she wakes, with two little green wild plums pickled in vinegar and rolled in powdered sugar. A cup of tea completes this almost traditional breakfast of Japan, the very same that Madame Prune is eating downstairs, the same that is served in the inns to travellers.

At intervals during the day the meals are continued by two little dinners of the drollest description. They are brought up on a tray of red lacquer, in microscopic cups with covers, from Madame Prune's apartment, where they are cooked: a hashed sparrow, a stuffed prawn, seaweed with a sauce, a salted sweetmeat, a sugared chili! Chrysantheme tastes a little of all, with dainty pecks and the aid of her little chopsticks, raising the tips of her fingers with affected grace. At every dish she makes a face, leaves three parts of it, and dries her finger-tips after it in apparent disgust.

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These menus vary according to the inspiration that may have seized Madame Prune. But one thing never varies, either in our household or in any other, neither in the north nor in the south of the Empire, and that is the dessert and the manner of eating it: after all these little dishes, which are a mere make-believe, a wooden bowl is brought in, bound with copper an enormous bowl, fit for Gargantua, and filled to the very brim with rice, plainly cooked in water. Chrysantheme fills another large bowl from it (sometimes twice, sometimes three times), darkens its snowy whiteness with a black sauce flavored with fish, which is contained in a delicately shaped blue cruet, mixes it all together, carries the bowl to her lips, and crams down all the rice, shovelling it with her two chop-sticks into her very throat. Next the little cups and covers are picked up, as well as the tiniest crumb that may have fallen upon the white mats, the irrefragable purity of which nothing is allowed to tarnish. And so ends the dinner.

CHAPTER XXIII. A FANTASTIC FUNERAL

Below, in the town, a street-singer had established herself in a little thoroughfare; people had gathered around her to listen to her singing, and we three that is, Yves, Chrysantheme, and I who happened to be passing, stopped also.

She was quite young, rather fat, and fairly pretty, and she strummed her guitar and sang, rolling her eyes fiercely, like a virtuoso executing feats of difficulty. She lowered her head, stuck her chin into her neck, in order to draw deeper notes from the furthest recesses of her body; and succeeded in bringing forth a great, hoarse voice a voice that might have belonged to an aged frog, a ventriloquist's voice, coming whence it would be impossible to say (this is the best stage manner, the last touch of art, in the interpretation of tragic pieces).

Yves cast an indignant glance upon her.

"Good gracious," said he, "she has the voice of a " (words failed him, in his astonishment) "the voice of a a monster!"

And he looked at me, almost frightened by this little being, and desirous to know what I thought of it.

Yves was out of temper on this occasion, because I had induced him to come out in a straw hat with a turned-up brim, which did not please him.

"That hat suits you remarkably well, Yves, I assure you," I said.

"Oh, indeed! You say so, you. For my part, I think it looks like a magpie's nest!"

As a fortunate diversion from the singer and the hat, here comes a cortege, advancing toward us from the end of the street, something remarkably like a funeral. Bonzes march in front, dressed in robes of black gauze, having much the appearance of Catholic priests; the principal object of interest of the procession, the corpse, comes last, laid in a sort of little closed palanquin, which is daintily pretty. This is followed by a band of mousmes, hiding their laughing faces beneath a kind of veil, and carrying in vases of the sacred shape the artificial lotus with silver petals indispensable at a funeral; then come fine ladies, on foot, smirking and stifling a wish to laugh, beneath parasols on which are painted, in the gayest colors, butterflies and storks.

Now they are quite close to us, we must stand back to give them room. Chrysantheme all at once assumes a suitable air of gravity, and Yves bares his head, taking off the magpie's nest.

Yes, it is true, it is death that is passing!

I had almost lost sight of the fact, so little does this procession recall it.

The procession will climb high above Nagasaki, into the heart of the green mountain covered with tombs. There the poor fellow will be laid at rest, with his palanquin above him, and his vases and his flowers of silvered paper. Well, at least he will lie in a charming spot commanding a lovely view.

Then they will return half laughing, half snivelling, and tomorrow no one will think of it again.

CHAPTER XXIV. SOCIABILITY

August 4th.

Our ship, the 'Triomphante', which has been lying in the harbor almost at the foot of the hill on which stands my house, enters the dock to-day to undergo repairs rendered necessary by the long blockade of Formosa.

I am now a long way from my home, and am compelled to cross by boat the whole breadth of the bay when I wish to see Chrysantheme; for the dock is situated on the shore, opposite to Diou-djen-dji. It is sunk in a little valley, narrow and deep, midst all kinds of foliage bamboos, camellias, trees of all sorts; our masts and spars, seen from the deck, look as if they were tangled among the branches.

The situation of the vessel no longer afloat gives the crew a greater facility for clandestine escapes from the ship at no matter what hour of the night, and our sailors have made friends with all the girls of the villages perched on the mountains above us.

These quarters, and this excessive liberty, give me some uneasiness about my poor Yves; for this country of frivolous pleasure has a little turned his head.

Moreover, I am more and more convinced that he is in love with Chrysantheme.

It is really a pity that the sentiment has not occurred to me instead, since it is I who have gone the length of marrying her.

CHAPTER XXV. UNWELCOME GUESTS

Despite the increased distance, I continue my regular visits to Diou-djen-dji. When night has fallen, and the four couples who compose our society have joined us, as well as Yves and the "amazingly tall friend" we descend again into the town, stumbling by lantern-light down the steep stairways and slopes of the old suburb.

This nocturnal ramble is always the same, and is accompanied always by the same amusements: we pause before the same queer booths, we drink the same sugared drinks served to us in the same little gardens. But our troop is often more numerous: to begin with, we chaperon Oyouki, who is confided to our care by her parents; then we have two cousins of my wife's pretty little creatures; and lastly friends guests of sometimes only ten or twelve years old, little girls of the neighborhood to whom our mousmes wish to show some politeness.

Thus a singular company of tiny beings forms our suite and follows us into the tea-gardens in the evenings! The most absurd faces, with sprigs of flowers stuck in the oddest fashion in their comical and childish heads. One might suppose it was a whole school of mousmes out for an evening's frolic under our care.

Yves returns with us, when the time comes to remount our hill; Chrysantheme heaves great sighs like a tired child, and stops on every step, leaning on our arms.

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When we have reached our destination he says "Goodnight," just touches Chrysantheme's hand, and descending once more by the slope which leads to the quays and the shipping, he crosses the roadstead in a sampan, to get on board the "Triomphante."

Meantime, we, with the aid of a sort of secret key, open the door of our garden, where Madame Prune's pots of flowers, ranged in the darkness, send forth delicious odors in the night air. We cross the garden by moonlight or starlight, and mount to our own rooms.

If it is very late a frequent occurrence we find all our wooden panels drawn and tightly shut by the careful M. Sucre (as a precaution against thieves), and our apartment is as close and as private as if it were a real European house.

In this dwelling, when every chink is thus closed, a strange odor mingles with the musk and the lotus an odor essential to Japan, to the yellow race, belonging to the soil or emanating from the venerable woodwork; almost an odor of wild beasts. The mosquito—curtain of dark—blue gauze, ready hung for the night, falls from the ceiling with the air of a mysterious vellum. The gilded Buddha smiles eternally at the night—lamps burning before him; some great moth, a constant frequenter of the house, which during the day sleeps clinging to our ceiling, flutters at this hour under the very nose of the god, turning and flitting round the thin, quivering flames. And, motionless on the wall, its feelers spread out star—like, sleeps some great garden spider, which one must not kill because it is night. "Hou!" says Chrysantheme, indignantly, pointing it out to me with levelled finger. Quick! where is the fan kept for the purpose, wherewith to hunt it out of doors?

Around us reigns a silence which is almost oppressive after all the joyous noises of the town, and all the laughter, now hushed, of our band of mousmes a silence of the country, of some sleeping village.

CHAPTER XXVI. A QUIET SMOKE

The sound of the innumerable wooden panels, which at nightfall are pulled and shut in every Japanese house, is one of the peculiarities of the country which will remain longest imprinted on my memory. From our neighbor's houses these noises reach us one after the other, floating to us over the green gardens, more or less deadened, more or less distant.

Just below us, Madame Prune's panels move very badly, creak and make a hideous noise in their wornout grooves.

Ours are somewhat noisy too, for the old house is full of echoes, and there are at least twenty screens to run over long slides in order to close in completely the kind of open hall in which we live. Usually, it is Chrysantheme who undertakes this piece of household work, and a great deal of trouble it gives her, for she often pinches her fingers in the singular awkwardness of her too tiny hands, which never have been accustomed to do any work.

Then comes her toilette for the night. With a certain grace she lets fall the day—dress, and slips on a more simple one of blue cotton, which has the same pagoda sleeves, the same shape all but the train, and which she fastens round her waist with a sash of muslin of the same color.

The high head—dress remains untouched, it is needless to say that is, all but the pins, which are taken out and laid beside her in a lacquer box.

Then there is the little silver pipe that must absolutely be smoked before going to sleep; this is one of the customs which most provoke me, but it has to be borne.

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Madame Chrysantheme, v2

Chrysantheme squats like a gipsy before a certain square box, made of red wood, which contains a little tobacco-jar, a little porcelain stove full of hot embers, and finally a little bamboo pot serving at the same time as ash-tray and cuspidor. (Madame Prune's smoking-box downstairs, and every smoking-box in Japan, is exactly the same, and contains precisely the same objects, arranged in precisely the same manner; and wherever it may be, whether in the house of the rich or the poor, it always lies about somewhere on the floor.)

The word "pipe" is at once too trivial and too big to be applied to this delicate silver tube, which is perfectly straight and at the end of which, in a microscopic receptacle, is placed one pinch of golden tobacco, chopped finer than silken thread.

Two puffs, or at most three; it lasts scarcely a few seconds, and the pipe is finished. Then tap, tap, tap, tap, the little tube is struck smartly against the edge of the smoking-box to knock out the ashes, which never will fall; and this tapping, heard everywhere, in every house, at every hour of the day or night, quick and droll as the scratchings of a monkey, is in Japan one of the noises most characteristic of human life.

"Anata nominase!" ("You must smoke too!") says Chrysantheme.

Having again filled the tiresome little pipe, she puts the silver tube to my lips with a bow. Courtesy forbids my refusal; but I find it detestably bitter.

Before laying myself down under the blue mosquito-net, I open two of the panels in the room, one on the side of the silent and deserted footpath, the other on the garden side, overlooking the terraces, so that the night air may breathe upon us, even at the risk of bringing the company of some belated cockchafer, or more giddy moth.

Our wooden house, with its thin old walls, vibrates at night like a great dry violin, and the slightest noises have a startling resonance.

Beneath the veranda are hung two little AEolian harps, which, at the least ruffle of the breeze running through their blades of grass, emit a gentle tinkling sound, like the harmonious murmur of a brook; outside, to the very farthest limits of the distance, the cicalas continue their sonorous and never-ending concert; over our heads, on the black roof, is heard passing, like a witch's sabbath, the raging battle, to the death, of cats, rats, and owls.

Presently, when in the early dawn a fresher breeze, mounting upward from the sea and the deep harbor, reaches us, Chrysantheme rises and slyly shuts the panels I have opened.

Before that, however, she will have risen at least three times to smoke: having yawned like a cat, stretched herself, twisted in every direction her little amber arms, and her graceful little hands, she sits up resolutely, with all the waking sighs and broken syllables of a child, pretty and fascinating enough; then she emerges from the gauze net, fills her little pipe, and breathes a few puffs of the bitter and unpleasant mixture.

Then comes tap, tap, tap, tap, against the box to shake out the ashes. In the silence of the night it makes quite a terrible noise, which wakes Madame Prune. This is fatal. Madame Prune is at once seized also with a longing to smoke which may not be denied; then, to the noise from above, comes an answering tap, tap, tap, tap, from below, exactly like it, exasperating and inevitable as an echo.

CHAPTER XXVII. THE PRAYERFUL MADAME PRUNE

More cheerful are the sounds of morning: the cocks crowing, the wooden panels all around the neighborhood sliding back upon their rollers; or the strange cry of some fruit-seller, patrolling our lofty suburb in the early dawn. And the grasshoppers actually seem to chirp more loudly, to celebrate the return of the sunlight.

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Madame Chrysantheme, v2

Above all, rises to our ears from below the sound of Madame Prune's long prayers, ascending through the floor, monotonous as the song of a somnambulist, regular and soothing as the splash of a fountain. It lasts three quarters of an hour at least, it drones along, a rapid flow of words in a high nasal key; from time to time, when the inattentive spirits are not listening, it is accompanied by a clapping of dry palms, or by harsh sounds from a kind of wooden clapper made of two discs of mandragora root. It is an uninterrupted stream of prayer; its flow never ceases, and the quavering continues without stopping, like the bleating of a delirious old goat.

"After washing the hands and feet," say the sacred books, "the great God Ama-Terace-Omi-Kami, who is the royal power of Japan, must be invoked; the manes of all the defunct emperors descended from him must also be invoked; next, the manes of all his personal ancestors, to the farthest generation; the spirits of the air and the sea; the spirits of all secret and impure places; the spirits of the tombs of the district whence you spring, etc., etc."

"I worship and implore you," sings Madame Prune, "O Ama-Terace-Omi-Kami, royal power! Cease not to protect your faithful people, who are ready to sacrifice themselves for their country. Grant that I may become as holy as yourself, and drive from my mind all dark thoughts. I am a coward and a sinner: purge me from my cowardice and sinfulness, even as the north wind drives the dust into the sea. Wash me clean from all my iniquities, as one washes away uncleanness in the river of Kamo. Make me the richest woman in the world. I believe in your glory, which shall be spread over the whole earth, and illuminate it for ever for my happiness. Grant me the continued good health of my family, and above all, my own, who, O Ama-Terace-Omi-Kami! do worship and adore you, and only you, etc., etc."

Here follow all the emperors, all the spirits, and the interminable list of ancestors.

In her trembling old woman's falsetto, Madame Prune sings all this, without omitting anything, at a pace which almost takes away her breath.

And very strange it is to hear: at length it seems hardly a human voice; it sounds like a series of magic formulas, unwinding themselves from an inexhaustible roller, and escaping to take flight through the air. By its very weirdness, and by the persistency of its incantation, it ends by producing in my half-awakened brain an almost religious impression.

Every day I wake to the sound of this Shintoist litany chanted beneath me, vibrating through the exquisite clearness of the summer mornings while our night-lamps burn low before the smiling Buddha, while the eternal sun, hardly risen, already sends through the cracks of our wooden panels its bright rays, which dart like golden arrows through our darkened dwelling and our blue gauze tent.

This is the moment at which I must rise, descend hurriedly to the sea by grassy footpaths all wet with dew, and so regain my ship.

Alas! in the days gone by, it was the cry of the muezzin which used to awaken me in the dark winter mornings in faraway, night-shrouded Stamboul.

CHAPTER XXVIII. A DOLL'S CORRESPONDENCE

Chrysantheme has brought but few things with her, knowing that our domestic life would probably be brief.

She has placed her gowns and her fine sashes in little closed recesses, hidden in one of the walls of our apartment (the north wall, the only one of the four which can not be taken to pieces). The doors of these niches are white paper panels; the standing shelves and inside partitions, consisting of light woodwork, are put together almost too

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Madame Chrysantheme, v2

finically and too ingeniously, giving rise to suspicions of secret drawers and conjuring tricks. We put there only things without any value, having a vague feeling that the cupboards themselves might spirit them away.

The box in which Chrysantheme stores away her gewgaws and letters, is one of the things that amuse me most; it is of English make, tin, and bears on its cover the colored representation of some manufactory in the neighborhood of London. Of course, it is as an exotic work of art, as a precious knickknack, that Chrysantheme prefers it to any of her other boxes in lacquer or inlaid work. It contains all that a mousme requires for her correspondence: Indian ink, a paintbrush, very thin, gray-tinted paper, cut up in long narrow strips, and odd-shaped envelopes, into which these strips are slipped (having been folded up in about thirty folds); the envelopes are ornamented with pictures of landscapes, fishes, crabs, or birds.

On some old letters addressed to her, I can make out the two characters that represent her name: Kikousan ("Chrysantheme, Madame"). And when I question her, she replies in Japanese, with an air of importance:

"My dear, they are letters from my woman friends."

Oh, those friends of Chrysantheme, what funny little faces they have! That same box contains their portraits, their photographs stuck on visiting cards, which are printed on the back with the name of Uyeno, the fashionable photographer in Nagasaki the little creatures fit only to figure daintily on painted fans, who have striven to assume a dignified attitude when once their necks have been placed in the head-rest, and they have been told: "Now, don't move."

It would really amuse me to read the letters of my mousme's friends and above all her replies!

CHAPTER XXIX. SUDDEN SHOWERS

August 10th.

It rained this evening heavily, and the night was close and dark. About ten o'clock, on our return from one of the fashionable tea-houses we frequent, we arrived Yves, Chrysantheme and I at the familiar angle of the principal street, the turn where we must take leave of the lights and noises of the town, to climb up the dark steps and steep paths that lead to our dwelling at Diou-djen-dji.

But before beginning our ascent, we must first buy lanterns from an old tradeswoman called Madame Tres-Propre, whose regular customers we are. It is amazing what a quantity of these paper lanterns we consume. They are invariably decorated in the same way, with painted nightmoths or bats; fastened to the ceiling at the farther end of the shop, they hang in enormous clusters, and the old woman, seeing us arrive, gets upon a table to take them down. Gray or red are our usual choice; Madame Tres-Propre knows our preferences and leaves the green or blue lanterns aside. But it is always hard work to unhook one, on account of the little short sticks by which they are held, and the strings with which they are tied getting entangled together. In an exaggerated pantomime, Madame Tres-Propre expresses her despair at wasting so much of our valuable time: oh! if it only depended on her personal efforts! but ah! the natural perversity of inanimate things which have no consideration for human dignity! With monkeyish antics, she even deems it her duty to threaten the lanterns and shake her fist at these inextricably tangled strings which have the presumption to delay us.

It is all very well, but we know this manoeuvre by heart; and if the old lady loses patience, so do we. Chrysantheme, who is half asleep, is seized with a fit of kitten-like yawning which she does not even trouble to hide behind her hand, and which appears to be endless. She pulls a very long face at the thought of the steep hill we must struggle up tonight through the pelting rain.

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Madame Chrysantheme, v2

I have the same feeling, and am thoroughly annoyed. To what purpose do I clamber up every evening to that suburb, when it offers me no attractions whatever?

The rain increases; what are we to do? Outside, djins pass rapidly, calling out: "Take care!" splashing the foot-passengers and casting through the shower streams of light from their many-colored lanterns. Mousmes and elderly ladies pass, tucked up, muddy, laughing nevertheless under their paper umbrellas, exchanging greetings, clacking their wooden pattens on the stone pavement. The whole street is filled with the noise of the pattering feet and pattering rain.

As good luck will have it, at the same moment passes Number 415, our poor relative, who, seeing our distress, stops and promises to help us out of our difficulty; as soon as he has deposited on the quay an Englishman he is conveying, he will come to our aid and bring all that is necessary to relieve us from our lamentable situation.

At last our lantern is unhooked, lighted, and paid for. There is another shop opposite, where we stop every evening; it is that of Madame L'Heure, the woman who sells waffles; we always buy a provision from her, to refresh us on the way. A very lively young woman is this pastry-cook, and most eager to make herself agreeable; she looks quite like a screen picture behind her piled-up cakes, ornamented with little posies. We will take shelter under her roof while we wait; and, to avoid the drops that fall heavily from the waterspouts, wedge ourselves tightly against her display of white and pink sweetmeats, so artistically spread out on fresh and delicate branches of cypress.

Poor Number 415, what a providence he is to us! Already he reappears, most excellent cousin! ever smiling, ever running, while the water streams down his handsome bare legs; he brings us two umbrellas, borrowed from a China merchant, who is also a distant relative of ours. Like me, Yves has till now never consented to use such a thing, but he now accepts one because it is droll: of paper, of course, with innumerable folds waxed and gummed, and the inevitable flight of storks forming a wreath around it.

Chrysantheme, yawning more and more in her kitten-like fashion, becomes coaxing in order to be helped along, and tries to take my arm.

"I beg you, mousme, this evening to take the arm of Yves-San; I am sure that will suit us all three."

And there they go, she, tiny figure, hanging on to the big fellow, and so they climb up. I lead the way, carrying the lantern that lights our steps, whose flame I protect as well as I can under my fantastic umbrella. On each side of the road is heard the roaring torrent of stormy waters rolling down from the mountain-side. To-night the way seems long, difficult, and slippery; a succession of interminable flights of steps, gardens, and houses piled up one above another; waste lands, and trees which in the darkness shake their dripping foliage on our heads.

One would say that Nagasaki is ascending at the same time as ourselves; but yonder, and very far away, is a vapory mist which seems luminous against the blackness of the sky, and from the town rises a confused murmur of voices and laughter, and a rumbling of gongs.

The summer rain has not yet refreshed the atmosphere. On account of the stormy heat, the little suburban houses have been left open like sheds, and we can see all that is going on. Lamps burn perpetually before the altars dedicated to Buddha and to the souls of the ancestors; but all good Nipponese have already lain down to rest. Under the traditional tents of bluish-green gauze, we can see whole families stretched out in rows; they are either sleeping, or hunting the mosquitoes, or fanning themselves. Nipponese men and women, Nipponese babies too, lying side by side with their parents; each one, young or old, in his little dark-blue cotton nightdress, and with his little wooden block on which to rest the nape of his neck.

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Madame Chrysantheme, v2

A few houses are open, where amusements are still going on; here and there, from the sombre gardens, the sound of a guitar reaches our ears, playing some dance which gives in its weird rhythm a strange impression of sadness.

Here is the well, surrounded by bamboos, where we are wont to make a nocturnal halt for Chrysantheme to take breath. Yves begs me to throw forward the red gleam of my lantern, in order to recognize the place, for it marks our halfway resting-place.

And at last, at last, here is our house! The door is closed, all is silent and dark. Our panels have been carefully shut by M. Sucre and Madame Prune; the rain streams down the wood of our old black walls.

In such weather it is impossible to allow Yves to return down hill, and wander along the shore in quest of a sampan. No, he shall not return on board to-night; we will put him up in our house. His little room has indeed been already provided for in the conditions of our lease, and notwithstanding his discreet refusal, we immediately set to work to make it. Let us go in, take off our boots, shake ourselves like so many cats that have been out in a shower, and step up to our apartment.

In front of Buddha, the little lamps are burning; in the middle of the room, the night-blue gauze is stretched.

On entering, the first impression is favorable; our dwelling is pretty this evening; the late hour and deep silence give it an air of mystery. And then, in such weather, it is always pleasant to get home.

Come, let us at once prepare Yves's room. Chrysantheme, quite elated at the prospect of having her big friend near her, sets to work with a good will; moreover, the task is easy; we have only to slip three or four paper panels in their grooves, to make at once a separate room or compartment in the great box we live in. I had thought that these panels were entirely white; but no! on each is a group of two storks painted in gray tints in those inevitable attitudes consecrated by Japanese art: one bearing aloft its proud head and haughtily raising its leg, the other scratching itself. Oh, these storks! how tired one gets of them, at the end of a month spent in Japan!

Yves is now in bed and sleeping under our roof.

Sleep has come to him sooner than to me to-night; for somehow I fancy I had seen long glances exchanged between him and Chrysantheme.

I have left this little creature in his hands like a toy, and I begin to fear lest I should have caused some perturbation in his mind. I do not trouble my head about this little Japanese girl. But Yves it would be decidedly wrong on his part, and would greatly diminish my faith in him.

We hear the rain falling on our old roof; the cicadas are mute; odors of wet earth reach us from the gardens and the mountain. I feel terribly dreary in this room to-night; the noise of the little pipe irritates me more than usual, and as Chrysantheme crouches in front of her smoking-box, I suddenly discover in her an air of low breeding, in the very worst sense of the word.

I should hate her, my mousme, if she were to entice Yves into committing a fault a fault which I should perhaps never be able to forgive.

CHAPTER XXX. A LITTLE DOMESTIC DIFFICULTY

August 12th.

The Y and Sikou-San couple were divorced yesterday. The Charles N – and Campanule household is getting

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Madame Chrysantheme, v2

on very badly. They have had some trouble with those prying, grinding, insupportable little men, dressed up in gray suits, who are called police agents, and who, by threatening their landlord, have had them turned out of their house (under the obsequious amiability of this people lurks a secret hatred toward Europeans) they are therefore obliged to accept their mother-in-law's hospitality, a very disagreeable situation. And then Charles N – fancies his mousme is faithless. It is hardly possible, however, for us to deceive ourselves: these would-be maidens, to whom M. Kangourou has introduced us, have already had in their lives one adventure, at least, and perhaps more; it is therefore only natural that we should have our suspicions.

The Z – and Touki–San couple jog on, quarrelling all the time.

My household maintains a more dignified air, though it is none the less dreary. I had indeed thought of a divorce, but have really no good reason for offering Chrysantheme such a gratuitous affront; moreover, there is another more imperative reason why I should remain quiet: I, too, have had difficulties with the civilian authorities.

The day before yesterday, M. Sucre, quite upset, Madame Prune, almost swooning, and Mademoiselle Oyouki, bathed in tears, stormed my rooms. The Nipponese police agents had called and threatened them with the law for letting rooms outside of the European concession to a Frenchman morganatically married to a Japanese; and the terror of being prosecuted brought them to me, with a thousand apologies, but with the humble request that I should leave.

The next day I therefore went off, accompanied by "the wonderfully tall friend" who expresses himself in Japanese better than I to the registry office, with the full intention of making a terrible row.

In the language of this exquisitely polite people, terms of abuse are totally wanting; when very angry, one is obliged to be satisfied with using the 'thou', a mark of inferiority, and the familiar conjugation, habitually used toward those of low birth. Sitting upon the table used for weddings, among the flurried little policemen, I opened the conversation in the following terms:

"In order that thou shouldst leave me in peace in the suburb I am inhabiting, what bribe must I offer thee, oh, little beings more contemptible than any mere street porter?"

Great and general dismay, silent consternation, and low bows greet my words.

They at last reply that my honorable person shall not be molested, indeed, they ask for nothing better. Only, in order to subscribe to the laws of the country, I ought to have come here and given my name and that of the young person that with whom

"Oh! that is going too far! I came here for that purpose, contemptible creatures, not three weeks ago!"

Then, taking up myself the civil register, and turning over the pages rapidly, I found my signature and beside it the little hieroglyphics drawn by Chrysantheme:

"There, idiots, look at that!"

Arrival of a very high functionary a ridiculous little old fellow in a black coat, who from his office had been listening to the row:

"What is the matter? What is it? What is this annoyance put upon the French officers?"

I state my case politely to this personage, who can not make apologies and promises enough. The little agents prostrate themselves on all fours, sink into the earth; and we leave them, cold and dignified, without returning

their bows.

M. Sucre and Madame Prune may now make their minds easy; they will not be disturbed again.

CHAPTER XXXI. BUTTERFLIES AND BEETLES

August 23d.

The prolonged sojourn of the Triomphante in the dock, and the distance of our dwelling from the town, have been my excuse these last two or three days for not going up to Diou–djen–dji to see Chrysantheme.

It is dreary work in these docks. At early dawn a legion of little Japanese workmen invade us, bringing their dinners in baskets and gourds like the workmen in our arsenals, but with a poor, shabby appearance, and a ferreting, hurried manner which reminds one of rats. Silently they slip under the keel, at the bottom of the hold, in all the holes, sawing, nailing, repairing.

The heat is intense in this spot, overshadowed by the rocks and tangled masses of foliage.

At two o'clock, in the broad sunlight, we have a new and far prettier invasion: that of the beetles and butterflies.

There are butterflies as wonderful as those on the fans. Some, all black, giddily dash up against us, so light and airy that they seem merely a pair of quivering wings fastened together without any body.

Yves, astonished, gazes at them, saying, in his boyish manner: "Oh, I saw such a big one just now, such a big one, it quite frightened me; I thought it was a bat attacking me."

A steersman who has captured a very curious specimen carries it off carefully to press between the leaves of his signal–book, like a flower. Another sailor, passing by, taking his small roast to the oven in a mess–bowl, looks at him quizzically and says:

"You had much better give it to me. I'd cook it!"

CHAPTER XXXII. STRANGE YEARNINGS

August 24th.

Nearly five days have passed since I abandoned my little house and Chrysantheme.

Since yesterday we have had a tremendous storm of rain and wind (a typhoon that has passed or is passing over us). We beat to quarters in the middle of the night to lower the topmasts, strike the lower yards, and take every precaution against bad weather. The butterflies no longer hover around us; everything tosses and writhes overhead: on the steep slopes of the mountain the trees shiver, the long grasses bend low as if in pain; terrible gusts rack them with a hissing sound; branches, bamboo leaves, and earth fall like rain upon us.

In this land of pretty little trifles, this violent tempest is out of harmony; it seems as if its efforts were exaggerated and its music too loud.

Toward evening the dark clouds roll by so rapidly that the showers are of short duration and soon pass over. Then I attempt a walk on the mountain above us, in the wet verdure: little pathways lead up it, between thickets of camellias and bamboo.

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Madame Chrysantheme, v2

Waiting till a shower is over, I take refuge in the courtyard of an old temple halfway up the hill, buried in a wood of century plants with gigantic branches; it is reached by granite steps, through strange gateways, as deeply furrowed as the old Celtic dolmens. The trees have also invaded this yard; the daylight is overcast with a greenish tint, and the drenching torrent of rain is full of torn-up leaves and moss. Old granite monsters, of unknown shapes, are seated in the corners, and grimace with smiling ferocity: their faces are full of indefinable mystery that makes me shudder amid the moaning music of the wind, in the gloomy shadows of the clouds and branches.

They could not have resembled the Japanese of our day, the men who had thus conceived these ancient temples, who built them everywhere, and filled the country with them, even in its most solitary nooks.

An hour later, in the twilight of that stormy day, on the same mountain, I encountered a clump of trees somewhat similar to oaks in appearance; they, too, have been twisted by the tempest, and the tufts of undulating grass at their feet are laid low, tossed about in every direction. There was suddenly brought back to my mind my first impression of a strong wind in the woods of Limoise, in the province of Saintonge, twenty-eight years ago, in a month of March of my childhood.

That, the first wind-storm my eyes ever beheld sweeping over the landscape, blew in just the opposite quarter of the world (and many years have rapidly passed over that memory), the spot where the best part of my life has been spent.

I refer too often, I fancy, to my childhood; I am foolishly fond of it. But it seems to me that then only did I truly experience sensations or impressions; the smallest trifles I saw or heard then were full of deep and hidden meaning, recalling past images out of oblivion, and reawakening memories of prior existences; or else they were presentiments of existences to come, future incarnations in the land of dreams, expectations of wondrous marvels that life and the world held in store for me—for a later period, no doubt, when I should be grown up. Well, I have grown up, and have found nothing that answered to my indefinable expectations; on the contrary, all has narrowed and darkened around me, my vague recollections of the past have become blurred, the horizons before me have slowly closed in and become full of gray darkness. Soon will my time come to return to eternal rest, and I shall leave this world without ever having understood the mysterious cause of these mirages of my childhood; I shall bear away with me a lingering regret for I know not what lost home that I have failed to find, of the unknown beings ardently longed for, whom, alas, I never have embraced.

CHAPTER XXXIII. A GENEROUS HUSBAND

Displaying many affectations, M. Sucre dips the tip of his delicate paint-brush in India-ink and traces a pair of charming storks on a pretty sheet of rice-paper, offering them to me in the most courteous manner, as a souvenir of himself. I have put them in my cabin on board, and when I look at them, I fancy I can see M. Sucre tracing them with an airy touch and with elegant facility.

The saucer in which he mixes his ink is in itself a little gem. It is chiselled out of a piece of jade, and represents a tiny lake with a carved border imitating rockwork. On this border is a little mamma toad, also in jade, advancing as if to bathe in the little lake in which M. Sucre carefully keeps a few drops of very dark liquid. The mamma toad has four little baby toads, in jade, one perched on her head, the other three playing about under her.

M. Sucre has painted many a stork in the course of his lifetime, and he really excels in reproducing groups and duets, if one may so express it, of this bird. Few Japanese possess the art of interpreting this subject in a manner at once so rapid and so tasteful; first he draws the two beaks, then the four claws, then the backs, the feathers, dash, dash, dash with a dozen strokes of his clever brush, held in his daintily posed hand, it is done, and always perfectly well done!

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Madame Chrysantheme, v2

M. Kangourou relates, without seeing anything wrong in it whatever, that formerly this talent was of great service to M. Sucre. It appears that Madame Prune how shall I say such a thing, and, who could guess it now, on beholding so devout and sedate an old lady, with eyebrows so scrupulously shaven? however, it appears that Madame Prune used to receive a great many visits from gentlemen gentlemen who always came alone which led to some gossip. Therefore, when Madame Prune was engaged with one visitor, if a new arrival made his appearance, the ingenious husband, to induce him to wait patiently, and to wile away the time in the anteroom, immediately offered to paint him some storks in a variety of attitudes.

And this is why, in Nagasaki, all the Japanese gentlemen of a certain age have in their collections two or three of these little pictures, for which they are indebted to the delicate and original talent of M. Sucre!