

The Loves of Sakura Jiro and the Three Headed Maid

Onoto Watanna

Table of Contents

<u>The Loves of Sakura Jiro and the Three Headed Maid</u>	1
<u>Onoto Watanna</u>	2

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SAKURA JIRO had not been in the country long, nor, indeed, had he attained to that exalted position that he afterward occupied in the regard of fad-seeking society women, fascinated by the serpent of mysticism, when he found himself walking through East Fourteenth street. Nowadays Jiro rarely goes beyond the environs of a certain pretentious hyphenated hostelry, but in those days he had no social position to cherish on the better streets. On the day when ambition was suddenly presented to him through the medium of a glaring poster, Jiro had eaten no breakfast. His resources would not permit that extravagance. Jiro had been expecting a remittance from home that thus far had obstinately refused to come out of the East.

Jiro's people were not always to be depended upon. Their respect for him had not been increased by his latter courses. When the time had arrived for Jiro to go into the army, he had demurred.

"What I mek myself fighter for, which—even?" he asked his American friend in Yedo. "Me? Why, I a poet, a dreamer, no swallower of blood."

His friend agreed. "Why not go to America?" he had suggested.

"I go ad your honorable country," Jiro decided.

That had been some eight months before. Up to this time Jiro's relatives had furnished him with the means to pursue his study of the "barbarians" who fascinated him. Now, seemingly, they had deserted him. The conviction had been steadily forced upon Jiro that he must find employment. So he had gone to certain Japanese business men in New York. Some of them had liked him and some of them had not. One of the former told him that he had a very promising opening that would just suit Jiro.

"You will have to attend to my Japanese correspondence, be down here in the morning to open up the place, do the type-writing, wait on customers, and solicit orders from the mail department in the evenings. It's a very fine opening. You will start on seven dollars a week, and win rapid promotion as ability is shown," was the attractive proposition made to him.

Jiro had just come from this man's place as he wandered depressed through Fourteenth street. He had paused to look at the red-brick building which housed "those strange barbarian gents who come from liddle bit isle to run New York," when a gaudy poster caught his eye. The main figure was that of a man picturesquely attired. But it was not the dress or the frankly Irish face that held the attention of Sakura Jiro; out of the mouth of the poster man rolled a mass of flame as red as flaring ink could make it. Underneath was a legend that Jiro made out to be something about "Ostero, the Spanish juggler."

The thing amused him. Familiar as he was with the marvelous feats of his countrymen, it seemed ridiculous, and sad too, that a mere fire-eater should be billed as a feature.

"Any babby in all Nippon do thad," he muttered.

Yet, yet if people wanted to see such a poor antic as that, why couldn't he — ? Yes, he could; he would. Jiro, with the quickened movement of a man who thinks he sees a way out of despair, moved farther through the street. At last he stood before the entrance of the place where "the wonders of every clime, assembled from millions of miles into one colossal aggregation, were offered to public gaze for the nominal sum of one dime." Up to the box-office he went. The ticket-seller eyed him stolidly.

"Say, you god one manager ad this place?" queried Jiro.

"Yes, we've got one manager," testily answered the other.

"Say, I wan' go in unto this place to see thad same manager, augustness," continued Jiro. "I belong unto thad — thad — thad — profesh."

It was an inspiration, the source of which was a chorus-girl who lived in Jiro's boarding-house.

"Got any credentials?"

"Creden'ls! Whad may those honorable things be?"

The Loves of Sakura Jiro and the Three Headed Maid

"Oh, can you prove you belong to the profesh?"

"Say, augustness, you look ad me liddle bit while."

Jiro was busy fumbling in an inner pocket. Then he drew forth what seemed to be a long, slender Japanese dagger, which he handed to the man behind the window.

"It's jus' a liddle knife, you see," observed Jiro, carelessly.

"Seems to be nothing more. Well?"

Jiro laid his hand palm upward upon the ledge in front of the window. Then, with a sharp, quick movement, he seemingly drove the blade completely through his hand, so that the point protruded on the other side. Smiling, he held aloft the pierced hand.

The ticket-seller looked startled. Jiro held out the hand to him.

"Pull out that honorable knife," he said.

The ticket-man hesitated.

"Pull it out. See, ther' 's nod blood."

With a nervous movement the man removed the knife from the wound of Jiro. The Japanese passed his other hand lightly over both sides of the wounded member. Offering it again to the gaze of the other, he smiled.

"Say, it 's good as new. It naever hurt."

The ticket-man's eyes bulged.

"Say, young fellow," he gasped, "you're all right. Men like you ought to have carpets put down for you. The earth ain't good enough for your feet. Pass in."

Jiro went in. The crowd about the entrance, having seen a part of his feat, sent up a cheer. Before Jiro could reach the interior hall, where were assembled the "illustrious galaxy," an attendant sent by the box-office man rushed the manager to the side of the Japanese. There was some business parley, and then the manager conducted Jiro through the place. Jiro, however, thinking to appear familiar with American ways, held back from any bargain.

"We'll have to have another platform in here if you join us," the manager explained to Jiro, as they traversed the main hall.

While they were talking Jiro regarded with tolerating cynicism the performance of "Ostero, the Spanish juggler." All of the attractions were ranged about the room, each upon its own platform. Next to Ostero was Yido, the snake-charmer. Just across the hall was a figure inclosed in a cabinet that pleased Jiro. It was Marva, the three-headed lady. In his own country Jiro never had heard of any such wonder; but these Americans were capable of producing anything, and why not a three-headed lady? So Jiro had no doubt that it was genuine, and must be a mark of the extreme favor of the gods.

"Thad a beautiful thought of the gods," he told the manager; "she mek good wife."

"Yes, she would," said the manager; "but think what a talkin' to she could give a fellow."

"No, nod thad; but there's three mouths to kiss." For Jiro had learned American ways.

The manager pointed across the hall to Ostero.

"He's rather stuck on her himself," he said — Ostero there — though Kelly's his real name."

Jiro now saw that all of the Irish Spaniard's feats were directed at the three-headed lady. His mind was now decided.

"Gentle lady of the three heads," he murmured, "I'll join myself unto this honorable company."

"I'm wiz you," he told the manager.

"Good!" exclaimed the purveyor of amusement. "We'll put you up a stand there by Ostero. It will be the East and the West, side by side, exploiting the best of their characteristic civilizations."

Then he sent for the press-agent, and the fact was duly chronicled. Thus it was that Sakura Jiro, descended from the samurai, came to earning his living in Fourteenth street through illusionary feats.

For a time Jiro prospered. His tricks and demonstrations, though of a subtle, weird, delicate character, excited the wonder of Third Avenue and the approbation of the snake-charmer, his neighbor.

"You are a real addition to us with talent," she told him on an off day when the crowd was small because of the storm.

Although the manager and his patrons were pleased with the new acquisition, there was one who could not be won to more than a passing interest in anything Jiro did. The three-headed lady, although possessed, in popular

The Loves of Sakura Jiro and the Three Headed Maid

belief at least, with three times the eyesight of ordinary folk, remained indifferent to the subtle courtship established by Jiro. In vain he threw three balls into the air, to have them descend a shower that filled a bushel basket; in vain he grew a multitude of arms out of his body; and all in vain he borrowed lace handkerchiefs, to turn them into white rabbits that ran about upon the heads of the favored spectators.

"Them are all very fine," the three mouths said, "just like any lady that happened to be born a Hindu could do; but there's nothin' manly and bold—like 'bout them."

Ostero had only to put a quid of tobacco into his mouth, with his Gaelic grin, and shoot out balls of flame, to move the triple-necked lady to admiration.

"That Kelly's a monstrous—fine man, bold and brave—like," would float across the hall.

Then the inspired Kelly would stand upon his head, while flames belched forth from his toes.

Jiro was not despondent at first. Every time Kelly, basking in the lady's favor, invented a new trick, he would follow suit. In this way were born many of those illusions that in later days made the name of Sakura Jiro renowned among polite people. Alas! it was to no purpose.

One dull, rainy day Jiro gave signs of breaking down under the strain of the competition that led nowhere. He had just borrowed a baby from the throng and grown from its hair a beautiful flowering plant that, springing upward inch by inch, was applauded by the outsiders, without winning more than a pitying smile from the lady with whom Jiro now openly admitted he was madly in love.

"What's the use?" he sighed.

Yido, the snake-charmer, lounging easily upon a corner seat composed of the inter-twining bodies of two boa-constrictors, leaned across to him.

"You're not doin' the right thing to win her over, old man," she whispered.

It didn't occur to Jiro to ask how the snake-charmer knew. He was concerned only with her hint.

"My tricks — they are good," he hazarded.

Yido answered:

"Good! Of course they are. They're 'way above the heads of our people, and'll make your fortune some day; but they'll never give you her."

"Why nod?"

"The way to get her is to do something more in Kelly's line, but something better than he can ever do."

Jiro looked across the hall at the radiant blond three heads of his mistress. All the intense longing of his soul throbbled through his being. He could not live without those three heads. How dear they all were to him! He must win the right to kiss them. He would! For, despite his months of residence in America and his Oriental familiarity with illusions, Jiro still had faith in the reality of his three-headed lady-love. Perhaps Yido was right. He would adopt her suggestion.

"Not only do that, but make her jealous. Get me on your platform to aid you in some new feat you think up," went on Yido. "Besides, the manager is thinking of getting rid of one juggler and paying the other more money."

Here were incentives enough. Jiro, earning an increased salary, could easily afford to marry, even if he added to himself all three of the heads requiring separate hats and individual meals. FOUR days later, the manager, in leading the crowds from platform to platform in his adjective-distributing trip, paused dramatically before the platform of Jiro. He waited a moment for complete attention.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "each of you has some ambition in life dearer than all else. Each of you has some wish to whose fulfilment every step of your life thus far has been directed. To some of you it is a great fortune, to some a limit to your fortune with which you will be content; to others simpler, more elementary things, such as the possession of a little home of your own. The people here on our platforms are no different from you in this. They, too, have ambitions. Sakura Jiro, known throughout the world as the 'Japanese wonder,' has an ambition, great as have been the things he has already accomplished. He has striven during his whole life to perfect a feat he is now about to perform. Now success seems within his reach.

"You, ladies and gentlemen, may know the joy — the holy joy, I might say — that comes with the accomplishment of your greatest, your dearest ambition. You are now about to witness the accomplishment of the ambition of Sakura Jiro, known through the world as the 'Japanese wonder,' and to share with him the joy — the holy joy — of accomplishment."

It was a good speech, the manager felt. It had been written by the new press-agent. Women throughout the

The Loves of Sakura Jiro and the Three Headed Maid

crowd were in tears, and men felt a quickened pulsation. Some held up their children that all might see clearly what the manager told them in an addition to his speech made without the advice of the press-agent. About the hall the other attractions leaned far out across their platforms, lost in an absorbing interest. The lady of the three heads was watching the scene with all six of her organs of sight. The intense gaze of all was concentrated upon Jiro.

Upon the platform with the Japanese wonder was Yido, the snake-charmer, in rather unusual attire. She wore a dainty red dress cut as a kimono. Upon her head was a white cap, and a housewife's apron was about her waist.

"She looks quite domestic," one woman told another.

With a low obeisance, first to the snake-charmer and then to the throng, Jiro walked steadily to the back of the stage, where a long rubber tube led down from a gas-jet. With another bow he turned the cock and placed the tube to his lips.

"Heavens! He wants to kill himself!" cried a woman.

"His dearest wish is to die," added a man who appeared to be a country clergyman.

The manager waved a silencing hand.

"Hush! Stuff!" he said sternly.

Jiro filled his lungs with gas without seeming to be affected beyond a slight bulging of his eyes. Then he picked up from a little table a long iron tube, the end of which, resting on the table, terminated in a gas-burner that looked as though it had just been taken from some gas-cooking range. The other end Jiro applied to his mouth. Slowly he blew through it with distended cheeks.

The domesticated snake-charmer applied a match to the burner on the table. The gas ignited. There was a burst of applause from the crowd, in which the ossified man joined. Quickly the snake-charmer set a frying-pan over the flame, the source of which was in Jiro's chest. >From a little pail at her side she poured a batter into the pan. It sizzled and smoked. Four cakes were cooking in the pan. When they seemed done, she turned them with a little shovel. The other attractions were dumfounded. Marva was pale, and Ostero looked completely crestfallen.

"Breakfast is ready," called the snake-charmer.

Jiro lowered the pipe from his mouth. Pale and trembling, he approached Yido. She offered him the cakes. One he ate, amid thunderous applause. The second he passed to the audience, where it fell from the frightened fingers of an old woman into the eager hands of a newsboy.

The third cake Jiro hurled defiantly into the face of Ostero. He was now staggering, and had just strength enough to toss the last feebly at the feet of Marva, his triple love. Then, with a half-sigh, he toppled over on the floor.

Upon the instant there was wild confusion. The spectators were seized with a panic. Unmindful of the dignity of her position, and forgetful of the presence of spectators, Marva, slipping off her two false heads, vaulted over the rail to the floor. Her two abandoned heads flapped forlornly behind in their place in her cabinet. In a moment she had two heads on her body, but one was that of Sakura Jiro, the Japanese wonder.

"He did it for me, he did it all for me!" she sobbed.

The snake-charmer bent pityingly over both.

"If he had only known," said the snake-charmer.

"I love him," fiercely retorted the one-headed lady. WHEN Jiro regained consciousness in the hospital, four hours later, he found one of the three heads dear to him bowed above his bed.

"I feelin' so queer, an' you look lek you only had one head," he moaned, gazing up at her.

"You did it all for me, dear," she said amid her tears.

"I am mad," he said. "Where are those udder heads?"

"Why, dear, I have only one, like you," she said. "It was all a trick. But this one head is yours. I love you."

"Dear leddy, I so happy I shall love you enough for three," he said.