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Title: Madame Chrysantheme, v4

Author: Pierre Loti

Release Date: April, 2003 [Etext #3994]
[Yes, we are about one year ahead of schedule]
[The actual date this file first posted = 10/01/01]
[Most recently updated: November 22, 2001]

Edition: 11

Language: English

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Additional proofing by Dagny, dagnyj@hotmail.com

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Additional proofing by Dagny, dagnyj@hotmail.com

MADAME CHRYSANTHEME

By PIERRE LOTI

BOOK 4.

CHAPTER XLVII

A MIDNIGHT ALARM

It is the middle of the night, perhaps about two o'clock in the morning. Our lamps are burning somewhat dimly before our placid idols. Chrysantheme wakes me suddenly, and I turn to look at her: she has raised herself on one arm, and her face expresses the most intense terror; she makes a sign, without daring to speak, that some one or something is near, creeping up to us. What ill-timed visit is this? A feeling of fear gains possession of me also. I have a rapid impression of some great unknown danger, in this isolated spot, in this strange country of which I do not even yet comprehend the inhabitants and the mysteries. It must be something very frightful to hold her there, rooted to the spot, half dead with fright, she who does comprehend all these things.

It seems to be outside; it is coming from the garden; with trembling hand she indicates to me that it will come through the veranda, over Madame Prune's roof. Certainly, I hear faint noises, and they do approach us.

I suggest to her

"Neko-San?" ("It is Messieurs the cats?")

"No!" she replies, still terrified, and in an alarmed tone.

"Bakemono-Sama?" ("Is it my lords the ghosts?") I have already the Japanese habit of expressing myself with excessive politeness.

"No! 'Dorobo!'" ("Thieves!")

Thieves! Ah! this is better; I much prefer this to a visit such as I have just been dreading in the sudden awakening from sleep: from ghosts or spirits of the dead; thieves, that is to say, worthy fellows very much alive, and having, undoubtedly, inasmuch as they are Japanese thieves, faces of the most meritorious oddity. I am not in the least frightened, now that I know precisely what to expect, and we will immediately set to work to ascertain the truth, for something is certainly moving on Madame Prune's roof; some one is walking upon it.

I open one of our wooden panels and look out.

I can see only a vast expanse, calm, peaceful, and exquisite under the full brilliance of the moonlight; sleeping Japan, lulled by the sonorous song of the grasshoppers, is charming indeed to-night, and the free, pure air is delicious.

Chrysantheme, half hidden behind my shoulder, listens tremblingly, peering forward to examine the gardens and the roofs with dilated eyes like a frightened cat. No, nothing! not a thing moves. Here and there are a few strangely substantial shadows, which at first glance were not

easy to explain, but which turn out to be real shadows, thrown by bits of wall, by boughs of trees, and which preserve an extremely reassuring stillness. Everything seems absolutely tranquil, and profound silence reigns in the dreamy vagueness which moonlight sheds over all.

Nothing; nothing to be seen anywhere. It was Messieurs the cats after all, or perhaps my ladies the owls; sounds increase in volume in the most amazing manner at night, in this house of ours.

Let us close the panel again carefully, as a measure of prudence, and then light a lantern and go downstairs to see whether there may be any one hidden in corners, and whether the doors are tightly shut; in short, to reassure Chrysantheme we will go the round of the house.

Behold us, then, on tiptoe, searching together every hole and corner of the house, which, to judge by its foundations, must be very ancient, notwithstanding the fragile appearance of its panels of white paper. It contains the blackest of cavities, little vaulted cellars with worm-eaten beams; cupboards for rice which smell of mould and decay; mysterious hollows where lies accumulated the dust of centuries. In the middle of the night, and during a hunt for thieves, this part of the house, as yet unknown to me, has an ugly look.

Noiselessly we step across the apartment of our landlord and landlady. Chrysantheme drags me by the hand, and I allow myself to be led. There they are, sleeping in a row under their blue gauze tent, lighted by the night-lamps burning before the altars of their ancestors. Ha! I observe that they are arranged in an order which might give rise to gossip. First comes Mademoiselle Oyouki, very taking in her attitude of rest! Then Madame Prune, who sleeps with her mouth wide open, showing her rows of blackened teeth; from her throat arises an intermittent sound like the grunting of a sow. Oh! poor Madame Prune! how hideous she is!! Next, M. Sucre, a mere mummy for the time being. And finally, at his side, last of the row, is their servant, Mademoiselle Dede!

The gauze hanging over them throws reflections as of the sea upon them; one might suppose them victims drowned in an aquarium. And withal the sacred lamps, the altar crowded with strange Shintoist symbols, give a mock religious air to this family tableau.

'Honi soit qui mal y pense', but why is not that maidservant rather laid by the side of her mistresses? Now, when we on the floor above offer our hospitality to Yves, we are careful to place ourselves under our mosquito-net in a more correct style!

One corner, which as a last resort we inspect, inspires me with a certain amount of apprehension. It is a low, mysterious loft, against the door of which is stuck, as a thing no longer wanted, a very old, pious image Kwanon with the thousand arms, and Kwanon with the horses' head, seated among clouds and flames, both horrible to behold with their spectral grins.

We open the door, and Chrysantheme starts back uttering a fearful cry. I

should have thought the robbers were there, had I not seen a little gray creature, rapid and noiseless, rush by her and disappear; a young rat that had been eating rice on the top of a shelf, and, in its alarm, had dashed in her face.

CHAPTER XLVIII

UNUSUAL HOSPITALITY

September 16th.

Yves has let fall his silver whistle in the ocean, the whistle so absolutely indispensable for the manoeuvres; and we search the town all day long, followed by Chrysantheme and Mesdemoiselles La Neige and La Lune, her sisters, in the endeavor to find another.

It is, however, very difficult to find such a thing in Nagasaki; above all, very difficult to explain in Japanese what is a sailor's whistle of the traditional shape, curved, and with a little ball at the end to modulate the trills and the various sounds of official orders. For three hours we are sent from shop to shop; at each one they pretend to understand perfectly what is wanted and trace on tissue-paper, with a paint-brush, the addresses of the shops where we shall without fail meet with what we require. Away we go, full of hope, only to encounter some fresh mystification, till our breathless djins get quite bewildered.

They understand admirably that we want a thing that will make a noise, music, in short; thereupon they offer us instruments of every, and of the most unexpected, shape--squeakers for Punch-and-Judy voices, dog-whistles, trumpets. Each time it is something more and more absurd, so that at last we are overcome with uncontrollable fits of laughter. Last of all, an aged Japanese optician, who assumes a most knowing air, a look of sublime wisdom, goes off to forage in his back shop, and brings to light a steam fog-horn, a relict from some wrecked steamer.

After dinner, the chief event of the evening is a deluge of rain, which takes us by surprise as we leave the teahouses, on our return from our fashionable stroll. It so happened that we were a large party, having with us several mousme guests, and from the moment that the rain began to fall from the skies, as if out of a watering-pot turned upside down, the band became disorganized. The mousmes run off, with bird-like cries, and take refuge under doorways, in the shops, under the hoods of the djins.

Then, before long--when the shops shut up in haste, when the emptied streets are flooded, and almost black, and the paper lanterns, piteous objects, wet through and extinguished--I find myself, I know not how it happens, flattened against a wall, under the projecting eaves, alone in the company of Mademoiselle Fraise, my cousin, who is crying bitterly because her fine robe is wet through. And in the noise of the rain, which is still falling, and splashing everything with the spouts and

gutters, which in the darkness plaintively murmur like running streams, the town appears to me suddenly an abode of the gloomiest sadness.

The shower is soon over, and the mousmes come out of their holes like so many mice; they look for one another, call one another, and their little voices take the singular, melancholy, dragging inflections they assume whenever they have to call from afar.

"Hi! Mademoiselle Lu-u-u-u-une!"

"Hi! Madame Jonqui-i-i-i-ille!"

They shout from one to another their outlandish names, prolonging them indefinitely in the now silent night, in the reverberations of the damp air after the great summer rain.

At length they are all collected and united again, these tiny personages with narrow eyes and no brains, and we return to Diou-djen-dji all wet through.

For the third time, we have Yves sleeping beside us under our blue tent.

There is a great noise shortly after midnight in the apartment beneath us: our landlord's family have returned from a pilgrimage to a far-distant temple of the Goddess of Grace. (Although Madame Prune is a Shintoist, she reveres this deity, who, scandal says, watched over her youth.) A moment after, Mademoiselle Oyouki bursts into our room like a rocket, bringing, on a charming little tray, sweetmeats which have been blessed and bought at the gates of the temple yonder, on purpose for us, and which we must positively eat at once, before the virtue is gone out of them. Hardly rousing ourselves, we absorb these little edibles flavored with sugar and pepper, and return a great many sleepy thanks.

Yves sleeps quietly on this occasion, without dealing any blows to the floor or the panels with either fists or feet. He has hung his watch on one of the hands of our gilded idol in order to be more sure of seeing the hour at any time of the night, by the light of the sacred lamps. He gets up betimes in the morning, asking: "Well, did I behave properly?" and dresses in haste, preoccupied about duty and the roll-call.

Outside, no doubt, it is daylight already: through the tiny holes which time has pierced in our wooden panels, threads of morning light penetrate our chamber, and in the atmosphere of our room where night still lingers, they trace vague white rays. Soon, when the sun shall have risen, these rays will lengthen and become beautifully golden. The cocks and the cicalas make themselves heard, and now Madame Prune will begin her mystic drone.

Nevertheless, out of politeness for Yves-San, Chrysantheme lights a lantern and escorts him to the foot of the dark staircase. I even fancy that, on parting, I hear a kiss exchanged. In Japan this is of no consequence, I know; it is very usual, and quite admissible; no matter where one goes, in houses one enters for the first time, one is quite at

liberty to kiss any mousme who may be present, without any notice being taken of it. But with regard to Chrysantheme, Yves is in a delicate position, and he ought to understand it better. I begin to feel uneasy about the hours they have so often spent together alone; and I make up my mind that this very day I will not play the spy upon them, but speak frankly to Yves, and make a clean breast of it.

Suddenly from below, *clac! clac!* two dry hands are clapped together; it is Madame Prune's warning to the Great Spirit. And immediately after her prayer breaks forth, soars upward in a shrill nasal falsetto, like a morning alarum when the hour for waking has come, the mechanical noise of a spring let go and running down.

".....The richest woman in the world! Cleansed from all my sins,
O Ama-Terace-Omi-Kami! in the river of Kamo."

And this extraordinary bleating, hardly human, scatters and changes my ideas, which were very nearly clear at the moment I awoke.

CHAPTER XLIX

RUMORS OF DEPARTURE

September 15th.

Rumor of departure is in the air. Since yesterday there has been vague talk of our being sent to China, to the Gulf of Peking; one of those rumors which spread, no one knows how, from one end of the ship to the other, two or three days before the official orders arrive, and which usually turn out tolerably correct. What will the last act of my little Japanese comedy be? the denouement, the separation? Will there be any touch of sadness on the part of my mousme, or on my own, just a tightening of the heartstrings at the moment of our final farewell? At this moment I can imagine nothing of the sort. And then the adieus of Yves and Chrysantheme, what will they be? This question preoccupies me more than all.

Nothing very definite has been learned as yet, but it is certain that, one way or another, our stay in Japan is drawing to a close. It is this, perhaps, which disposes me this evening to look more kindly on my surroundings. It is about six o'clock, after a day spent on duty, when I reach Diou-djen-dji. The evening sun, low in the sky, on the point of setting, pours into my room, and floods it with rays of red gold, lighting up the Buddhas and the great sheaves of quaintly arranged flowers in the antique vases. Here are assembled five or six little dolls, my neighbors, amusing themselves by dancing to the sound of Chrysantheme's guitar. And this evening I experienced a real charm in feeling that this dwelling and the woman who leads the dance are mine. On the whole, I have perhaps been unjust to this country; it seems to me that my eyes are at last opened to see it in its true light, that all my

senses are undergoing a strange and abrupt transition. I suddenly have a better perception and appreciation of all the infinity of dainty trifles among which I live; of the fragile and studied grace of their forms, the oddity of their drawings, the refined choice of their colors.

I stretch myself upon the white mats; Chrysantheme, always eagerly attentive, brings me my pillow of serpent's-skin; and the smiling mousmes, with the interrupted rhythm of a while ago still running in their heads, move around me with measured steps.

Their immaculate socks with the separate great toes make no noise; nothing is heard, as they glide by, but a 'froufrou' of silken stuffs. I find them all pleasant to look upon; their dollish air pleases me now, and I fancy I have discovered what it is that gives it to them: it is not only their round, inexpressive faces with eyebrows far removed from the eyelids, but the excessive amplitude of their dress. With those huge sleeves, it might be supposed they have neither back nor shoulders; their delicate figures are lost in these wide robes, which float around what might be little marionettes without bodies at all, and which would slip to the ground of themselves were they not kept together midway, about where a waist should be, by the wide silken sashes--a very different comprehension of the art of dressing to ours, which endeavors as much as possible to bring into relief the curves, real or false, of the figure.

And then, how much I admire the flowers in our vases, arranged by Chrysantheme, with her Japanese taste, lotus-flowers, great, sacred flowers of a tender, veined rose color, the milky rose-tint seen on porcelain; they resemble, when in full bloom, great water-lilies, and when only in bud might be taken for long pale tulips. Their soft but rather cloying scent is added to that other indefinable odor of mousmes, of yellow race, of Japan, which is always and everywhere in the air. The late flowers of September, at this season very rare and expensive, grow on longer stems than the summer blooms; Chrysantheme has left them in their large aquatic leaves of a melancholy seaweed-green, and mingled with them tall, slight rushes. I look at them, and recall with some irony those great round bunches in the shape of cauliflowers, which our florists sell in France, wrapped in white lace-paper!

Still no letters from Europe, from any one. How things change, become effaced and forgotten! Here am I, accommodating myself to this finical Japan and dwindling down to its affected mannerism; I feel that my thoughts run in smaller grooves, my tastes incline to smaller things--things which suggest nothing greater than a smile. I am becoming used to tiny and ingenious furniture, to doll-like desks, to miniature bowls with which to play at dinner, to the immaculate monotony of the mats, to the finely finished simplicity of the white woodwork. I am even losing my Western prejudices; all my preconceived ideas are this evening evaporating and vanishing; crossing the garden I have courteously saluted M. Sucre, who was watering his dwarf shrubs and his deformed flowers; and Madame Prune appears to me a highly respectable old lady, in whose past there is nothing to criticise.

We shall take no walk to-night; my only wish is to remain stretched out

where I am, listening to the music of my mousme's 'chamecen'.

Till now I have always used the word guitar, to avoid exotic terms, for the abuse of which I have been so reproached. But neither the word guitar nor mandolin suffices to designate this slender instrument with its long neck, the high notes of which are shriller than the voice of the grasshopper; and henceforth, I will write 'chamecen'.

I will also call my mousme Kikou, Kikou-San; this name suits her better than Chrysantheme, which, though translating the sense exactly, does not preserve the strange-sounding euphony of the original.

I therefore say to Kikou, my wife:

"Play, play on for me; I shall remain here all the evening and listen to you."

Astonished to find me in so amiable a mood, she requires pressing a little, and with almost a bitter curve of triumph and disdain upon her lips, she seats herself in the attitude of an idol, raises her long, dark-colored sleeves, and begins. The first hesitating notes are murmured faintly and mingle with the music of the insects humming outside, in the quiet air of the warm and golden twilight. First she plays slowly, a confused medley of fragments which she does not seem to remember perfectly, of which one waits for the finish and waits in vain; while the other girls giggle, inattentive, and regretful of their interrupted dance. She herself is absent, sulky, as if she were only performing a duty.

Then by degrees, little by little, the music becomes more animated, and the mousmes begin to listen. Now, tremblingly, it grows into a feverish rapidity, and her gaze has no longer the vacant stare of a doll. Then the music changes again; in it there is the sighing of the wind, the hideous laughter of ghouls; tears, heartrending plaints, and her dilated pupils seem to be directed inwardly in settled gaze on some indescribable Japanesery within her own soul.

I listen, lying there with eyes half shut, looking out between my drooping eyelids, which are gradually lowering, in involuntary heaviness, upon the enormous red sun dying away over Nagasaki. I have a somewhat melancholy feeling that my past life and all other places in the world are receding from my view and fading away. At this moment of nightfall I feel almost at home in this corner of Japan, amidst the gardens of this suburb. I never have had such an impression before.

CHAPTER L

A DOLLS' DUET

September 16th.

Seven o'clock in the evening. We shall not go down into Nagasaki tonight; but, like good Japanese citizens, remain in our lofty suburb.

In undress uniform we shall go, Yves and I, in a neighborly way, as far as the fencing-gallery, which is only two steps away, just above our villa, and almost abutting on our fresh and scented garden.

The gallery is closed already, and a little mousko, seated at the door, explains, with many low bows, that we come too late, all the amateurs are gone; we must come again tomorrow.

The evening is so mild and fine that we remain out of doors, following, without any definite purpose, the pathway which rises ever higher and higher, and loses itself at length in the solitary regions of the mountain among the upper peaks.

For an hour at least we wander on--an unintended walk--and finally find ourselves at a great height commanding an endless perspective lighted by the last gleams of daylight; we are in a desolate and mournful spot, in the midst of the little Buddhist cemeteries, which are scattered over the country in every direction.

We meet a few belated laborers, who are returning from the fields with bundles of tea upon their shoulders. These peasants have a half-savage air. They are half naked, too, or clothed only in long robes of blue cotton; as they pass, they salute us with humble bows.

No trees in this elevated region. Fields of tea alternate with tombs: old granite statues which represent Buddha in his lotus, or else old monumental stones on which gleam remains of inscriptions in golden letters. Rocks, brushwood, uncultivated spaces, surround us on all sides.

We meet no more passers-by, and the light is failing. We will halt for a moment, and then it will be time to turn our steps homeward.

But, close to the spot where we stand, a box of white wood provided with handles, a sort of sedan-chair, rests on the freshly disturbed earth, with its lotus of silvered paper, and the little incense-sticks, burning yet, by its side; clearly some one has been buried here this very evening.

I can not picture this personage to myself; the Japanese are so grotesque in life that it is almost impossible to imagine them in the calm majesty of death. Nevertheless, let us move farther on, we might disturb him; he is too recently dead, his presence unnerves us. We will go and seat ourselves on one of these other tombs, so unutterably ancient that there can no longer be anything within it but dust. And there, seated in the dying sunlight, while the valleys and plains of the earth below are already lost in shadow, we will talk together.

I wish to speak to Yves about Chrysantheme; it is indeed somewhat in view

of this that I have persuaded him to sit down; but how to set about it without hurting his feelings, and without making myself ridiculous, I hardly know. However, the pure air playing round me up here, and the magnificent landscape spread beneath my feet, impart a certain serenity to my thoughts which makes me feel a contemptuous pity, both for my suspicions and the cause of them.

We speak, first of all, of the order for departure, which may arrive at any moment, for China or for France. Soon we shall have to leave this easy and almost amusing life, this Japanese suburb where chance has installed us, and our little house buried among flowers. Yves perhaps will regret all this more than I. I know that well enough; for it is the first time that any such interlude has broken the rude monotony of his hard-worked career. Formerly, when in an inferior rank, he was hardly more often on shore, in foreign countries, than the sea-gulls themselves; while I, from the very beginning, have been spoiled by residence in all sorts of charming spots, infinitely superior to this, in all sorts of countries, and the remembrance still haunts me pleasurably.

In order to discover how the land lies, I risk the remark:

"You will perhaps be more sorry to leave little Chrysantheme than I."

Silence reigns between us.

After which I go on, and, burning my ships, I add:

"You know, after all, if you have such a fancy for her, I haven't really married her; one can't really consider her my wife."

In great surprise he looks in my face.

"Not your wife, you say? But, by Jove, though, that's just it; she is your wife."

There is no need of many words at any time between us two; I know exactly now, by his tone, by his great good-humored smile, how the case stands; I understand all that lies in the little phrase: "That's just it, she is your wife." If she were not, well, then, he could not answer for what might happen--notwithstanding any remorse he might have in the depths of his heart, since he is no longer a bachelor and free as air, as in former days. But he considers her my wife, and she is sacred. I have the fullest faith in his word, and I experience a positive relief, a real joy, at finding my stanch Yves of bygone days. How could I have so succumbed to the demeaning influence of my surroundings as to suspect him even, and to invent for myself such a mean, petty anxiety?

We never shall even mention that doll again.

We remain up there very late, talking of other things, gazing at the immense depths below, at the valleys and mountains as they become, one by one, indistinct and lost in the deepening darkness. Placed as we are at an enormous height, in the wide, free atmosphere, we seem already to have

quitted this miniature country, already to be freed from the impression of littleness which it has given us, and from the little links by which it was beginning to bind--us to itself.

Seen from such heights as these, all the countries of the globe bear a strong resemblance to one another; they lose the imprint made upon them by man, and by races; by all the atoms swarming on the surface.

As of old, in the Breton marshes, in the woods of Toulven, or at sea in the night-watches, we talk of all those things to which thoughts naturally revert in darkness; of ghosts, of spirits, of eternity, of the great hereafter, of chaos--and we entirely forget little Chrysantheme!

When we arrive at Diou-djen-dji in the starry night, the music of her 'chamecen', heard from afar, recalls to us her existence; she is studying some vocal duet with Mademoiselle Oyouki, her pupil.

I feel myself in very good humor this evening, and, relieved from my absurd suspicions about my poor Yves, am quite disposed to enjoy without reserve my last days in Japan, and to derive therefrom all the amusement possible.

Let us then repose ourselves on the dazzling white mats, and listen to the singular duet sung by those two mousmes: a strange musical medley, slow and mournful, beginning with two or three high notes, and descending at each couplet, in an almost imperceptible manner, into actual solemnity. The song keeps its dragging slowness; but the accompaniment, becoming more and more accentuated, is like the impetuous sound of a far-off hurricane. At the end, when these girlish voices, usually so soft, give out their hoarse and guttural notes, Chrysantheme's hands fly wildly and convulsively over the quivering strings. Both of them lower their heads, pout their underlips in the effort to bring out these astonishingly deep notes. And at these moments their little narrow eyes open, and seem to reveal an unexpected something, almost a soul, under these trappings of marionettes.

But it is a soul which more than ever appears to me of a different species from my own; I feel my thoughts to be as far removed from theirs as from the flitting conceptions of a bird, or the dreams of a monkey; I feel there is between them and myself a great gulf, mysterious and awful.

Other sounds of music, wafted to us from the distance, interrupt for a moment those of our mousmes. From the depths below, in Nagasaki, arises a sudden noise of gongs and guitars; we rush to the balcony of the veranda to hear it better.

It is a 'matsouri', a fete, a procession passing through the quarter which is not so virtuous as our own, so our mousmes tell us, with a disdainful toss of the head. Nevertheless, from the heights on which we dwell, seen thus in a bird's-eye view, by the uncertain light of the stars, this district has a singularly chaste air, and the concert going on therein, purified in its ascent from the depths of the abyss to our lofty altitudes, reaches us confusedly, a smothered, enchanted,

enchanted sound.

Then it diminishes, and dies away into silence.

The two little friends return to their seats on the mats, and once more take up their melancholy duet. An orchestra, discreetly subdued but innumerable, of crickets and cicadas, accompanies them in an unceasing tremolo--the immense, far-reaching tremolo, which, gentle and eternal, never ceases in Japan.

CHAPTER LI

THE LAST DAY

September 17th

At the hour of siesta, a peremptory order arrives to start tomorrow for China, for Tche-fou (a terrible place, in the gulf of Peking). Yves comes to wake me in my cabin to bring me the news.

"I must positively get leave to go on shore this evening," he says, while I endeavor to shake myself awake, "if it is only to help you to dismantle and pack up."

He gazes through my port-hole, raising his glance toward the green summits, in the direction of Diou-djen-dji and our echoing old cottage, hidden from us by a turn of the mountain.

It is very nice of him to wish to help me in my packing; but I think he counts also upon saying farewell to his little Japanese friends up there, and I really can not find fault with that.

He finishes his work, and does in fact obtain leave, without help from me, to go on shore at five o'clock, after drill and manoeuvres.

As for myself I start at once, in a hired sampan. In the vast flood of midday sunshine, to the quivering noise of the cicadas, I mount to Diou-djen-dji.

The paths are solitary, the plants are drooping in the heat. Here, however, is Madame Jonquille, taking the air in the bright, grasshoppers' sunshine, sheltering her dainty figure and her charming face under an enormous paper parasol, a huge circle, closely ribbed and fantastically striped.

She recognizes me from afar, and, laughing as usual, runs to meet me.

I announce our departure, and a tearful pout suddenly contracts her childish face. After all, does this news grieve her? Is she about to shed tears over it? No! it turns to a fit of laughter, a little nervous

perhaps, but unexpected and disconcerting--dry and clear, peeling through the silence and warmth of the narrow paths, like a cascade of little mock pearls.

Ah, there indeed is a marriage-tie which will be broken without much pain! But she fills me with impatience, poor empty-headed linnet, with her laughter, and I turn my back upon her to continue my journey.

Above-stairs, Chrysantheme sleeps, stretched out on the floor; the house is wide open, and the soft mountain breeze rustles gently through it.

That same evening we had intended to give a tea-party, and by my orders flowers had already been placed in every nook and corner of the house. There were lotus in our vases, beautifully colored lotus, the last of the season, I verily believe. They must have been ordered from a special gardener, out yonder near the Great Temple, and they will cost me dear.

With a few gentle taps of a fan I awake my surprised mousme; and, curious to catch her first impressions, I announce my departure. She starts up, rubs her eyelids with the backs of her little hands, looks at me, and hangs her head: something like an expression of sadness passes in her eyes.

This little sinking at the heart is for Yves, no doubt!

The news spreads through the house.

Mademoiselle Oyouki dashes upstairs, with half a tear in each of her babyish eyes; kisses me with her full red lips, which always leave a wet ring on my cheek; then quickly draws from her wide sleeve a square of tissue-paper, wipes away her stealthy tears, blows her little nose, rolls the bit of paper in a ball, and throws it into the street on the parasol of a passer-by.

Then Madame Prune makes her appearance; in an agitated and discomposed manner she successively adopts every attitude expressive of dismay. What on earth is the matter with the old lady, and why does she keep getting closer and closer to me, till she is almost in my way?

It is wonderful to think of all that I still have to do this last day, and the endless drives I have to make to the old curiosity-shops, to my tradespeople, and to the packers.

Nevertheless, before my rooms are dismantled, I intend making a sketch of them, as I did formerly at Stamboul. It really seems to me as if all I do here is a bitter parody of all I did over there.

This time, however, it is not that I care for this dwelling; it is only because it is pretty and uncommon, and the sketch will be an interesting souvenir.

I fetch, therefore, a leaf out of my album, and begin at once, seated on the floor and leaning on my desk, ornamented with grasshoppers in relief,

while behind me, very, very close to me, the three women follow the movements of my pencil with astonished attention. Japanese art being entirely conventional, they have never before seen any one draw from nature, and my style delights them. I may not perhaps possess the steady and nimble touch of M. Sucre, as he groups his charming storks, but I am master of a few notions of perspective which are wanting in him; and I have been taught to draw things as I see them, without giving them an ingeniously distorted and grimacing attitudes; and the three Japanese are amazed at the air of reality displayed in my sketch.

With little shrieks of admiration, they point out to one another the different things, as little by little their shape and form are outlined in black on my paper. Chrysantheme gazes at me with a new kind of interest "Anata itchiban!" she says (literally "Thou first!" meaning: "You are really quite wonderful!")

Mademoiselle Oyouki is carried away by her admiration, and exclaims, in a burst of enthusiasm:

"Anata bakari!" ("Thou alone!" that is to say: "There is no one like you in the world, all the rest are mere rubbish!")

Madame Prune says nothing, but I can see that she does not think the less; her languishing attitudes, her hand that at each moment gently touches mine, confirm the suspicions that her look of dismay a few moments ago awoke within me: evidently my physical charms speak to her imagination, which in spite of years has remained full of romance! I shall leave with the regret of having understood her too late!

Although the ladies are satisfied with my sketch, I am far from being so. I have put everything in its place most exactly, but as a whole, it has an ordinary, indifferent, French look which does not suit. The sentiment is not given, and I almost wonder whether I should not have done better to falsify the perspective--Japanese style--exaggerating to the very utmost the already abnormal outlines of what I see before me. And then the pictured dwelling lacks the fragile look and its sonority, that reminds one of a dry violin. In the pencilled delineation of the woodwork, the minute delicacy with which it is wrought is wanting; neither have I been able to give an idea of the extreme antiquity, the perfect cleanliness, nor the vibrating song of the cicadas that seems to have been stored away within it, in its parched-up fibres, during hundreds of summers. It does not convey, either, the impression this place gives of being in a far-off suburb, perched aloft among trees, above the drollest of towns. No, all this can not be drawn, can not be expressed, but remains undemonstrable, indefinable.

Having sent out our invitations, we shall, in spite of everything, give our tea-party this evening--a parting tea, therefore, in which we shall display as much pomp as possible. It is, moreover, rather my custom to wind up my exotic experiences with a fete; in other countries I have done the same.

Besides our usual set, we shall have my mother-in-law, my relatives, and

all the mousmes of the neighborhood. But, by an extra Japanese refinement, we shall not admit a single European friend--not even the "amazingly tall" one. Yves alone shall be admitted, and even he shall be hidden away in a corner behind some flowers and works of art.

In the last glimmer of twilight, by the light of the first twinkling star, the ladies, with many charming curtseys, make their appearance. Our house is soon full of the little crouching women, with their tiny slit eyes vaguely smiling; their beautifully dressed hair shining like polished ebony; their fragile bodies lost in the many folds of the exaggerated, wide garments, that gape as if ready to drop from their little tapering backs and reveal the exquisite napes of their little necks.

Chrysantheme, with somewhat a melancholy air, and my mother-in-law, Madame Renoncule, with many affected graces busy themselves in the midst of the different groups, where ere long the miniature pipes are lighted. Soon there arises a murmuring sound of discreet laughter, expressing nothing, but having a pretty exotic ring about it, and then begins a harmony of tap! tap! tap!--sharp, rapid taps against the edges of the finely lacquered smoking-boxes. Pickled and spiced fruits are handed round on trays of quaint and varied shapes. Then transparent china teacups, no larger than half an egg-shell, make their appearance, and the ladies are offered a few drops of sugarless tea, poured out of toy kettles, or a sip of 'saki'--(a spirit made from rice which it is the custom to serve hot, in elegantly shaped vases, long-necked like a heron's throat).

Several mousmes execute, one after another, improvisations on the 'chamecen'. Others sing in sharp, high voices, hopping about continually, like cicalas in delirium.

Madame Prune, no longer able to make a mystery of the long-pent up feelings that agitate her, pays me the most marked and tender attentions, and begs my acceptance of a quantity of little souvenirs: an image, a little vase, a little porcelain goddess of the moon in Satsuma ware, a marvellously grotesque ivory figure;--I tremblingly follow her into the dark corners whither she calls me to give me these presents in tete-a-tete.

About nine o'clock, with a silken rustling, arrive the three geishas in vogue in Nagasaki: Mesdemoiselles Purete, Orange, and Printemps, whom I have hired at four dollars each--an enormous price in this country.

These three geishas are indeed the very same little creatures I heard singing on the rainy day of my arrival, through the thin panelling of the Garden of Flowers. But as I have now become thoroughly Japanized, today they appear to me more diminutive, less outlandish, and in no way mysterious. I treat them rather as dancers that I have hired, and the idea that I ever had thought of marrying one of them now makes me shrug my shoulders--as it formerly made M. Kangourou.

The excessive heat caused by the respiration of the mousmes and the

burning lamps, brings out the perfume of the lotus, which fills the heavy-laden atmosphere; and the scent of camellia-oil, which the ladies use in profusion to make their hair glisten, is also strong in the room.

Mademoiselle Orange, the youngest geisha, tiny and dainty, her lips outlined with gilt paint, executes some delightful steps, donning the most extraordinary wigs and masks of wood or cardboard. She has masks imitating old, noble ladies which are valuable works of art, signed by well-known artists. She has also magnificent long robes, fashioned in the old style, with trains trimmed at the bottom with thick pads, in order to give to the movements of the costume something rigid and unnatural which, however, is becoming.

Now the soft balmy breezes blow through the room, from one veranda to the other, making the flames of the lamps flicker. They scatter the lotus flowers faded by the artificial heat, which, falling in pieces from every vase, sprinkle the guests with their pollen and large pink petals, looking like bits of broken, opal-colored glass.

The sensational piece, reserved for the end, is a trio on the 'chamecen', long and monotonous, that the geishas perform as a rapid pizzicato on the highest strings, very sharply struck. It sounds like the very quintessence, the paraphrase, the exasperation, if I may so call it, of the eternal buzz of insects, which issues from the trees, old roofs, old walls, from everything in fact, and which is the foundation of all Japanese sounds.

Half-past ten! The programme has been carried out, and the reception is over. A last general tap! tap! tap! the little pipes are stowed away in their chased sheaths, tied up in the sashes, and the mousmes rise to depart.

They light, at the end of short sticks, a quantity of red, gray, or blue lanterns, and after a series of endless bows and curtseys, the guests disperse in the darkness of the lanes and trees.

We also go down to the town, Yves, Chrysantheme, Oyouki and I--in order to conduct my mother-in-law, sisters-in-law, and my youthful aunt, Madame Nenufar, to their house.

We wish to take one last stroll together in our old familiar pleasure-haunts, to drink one more iced sherbet at the house of the Indescribable Butterflies, buy one more lantern at Madame Tres-Propre's, and eat some parting waffles at Madame L'Heure's!

I try to be affected, moved, by this leave-taking, but without success. In regard to Japan, as with the little men and women who inhabit it, there is something decidedly wanting; pleasant enough as a mere pastime, it begets no feeling of attachment.

On our return, when I am once more with Yves and the two mousmes climbing up the road to Diou-djen-dji, which I shall probably never see again, a vague feeling of melancholy pervades my last stroll.

It is, however, but the melancholy inseparable from all things that are about to end without possibility of return.

Moreover, this calm and splendid summer is also drawing to a close for us--since to-morrow we shall go forth to meet the autumn, in Northern China. I am beginning, alas! to count the youthful summers I may still hope for; I feel more gloomy each time another fades away, and flies to rejoin the others already disappeared in the dark and bottomless abyss, where all past things lie buried.

At midnight we return home, and my removal begins; while on board the "amazingly tall friend" kindly takes my watch.

It is a nocturnal, rapid, stealthy removal--"doyobo (thieves) fashion," remarks Yves, who in visiting the mousmes has picked up a smattering of the Nipponese language.

Messieurs the packers have, at my request, sent in the evening several charming little boxes, with compartments and false bottoms, and several paper bags (in the untearable Japanese paper), which close of themselves and are fastened by strings, also in paper, arranged beforehand in the most ingenious manner--quite the cleverest and most handy thing of its kind; for little useful trifles these people are unrivalled.

It is a real treat to pack them, and everybody lends a helping hand--Yves, Chrysantheme, Madame Prune, her daughter, and M. Sucre. By the glimmer of the reception-lamps, which are still burning, every one wraps, rolls, and ties up expeditiously, for it is already late.

Although Oyouki has a heavy heart, she can not prevent herself from indulging in a few bursts of childish laughter while she works.

Madame Prune, bathed in tears, no longer restrains her feelings; poor old lady, I really very much regret

Chrysantheme is absent-minded and silent.

But what a fearful amount of luggage! Eighteen cases or parcels, containing Buddhas, chimeras, and vases, without mentioning the last lotus that I carry away tied up in a pink cluster.

All this is piled up in the djins' carts, hired at sunset, which are waiting at the door, while their runners lie asleep on the grass.

A starlit and exquisite night. We start off with lighted lanterns, followed by the three sorrowful ladies who accompany us, and by abrupt slopes, dangerous in the darkness, we descend toward the sea.

The djins, stiffening their muscular legs, hold back with all their might the heavily loaded little cars which would run down by themselves if let alone, and that so rapidly that they would rush into empty space with my most valuable chattels. Chrysantheme walks by my side, and expresses, in

a soft and winning manner, her regret that the "wonderfully tall friend" did not offer to replace me for the whole of my night-watch, as that would have allowed me to spend this last night, even till morning, under our roof.

"Listen!" she says, "come back to-morrow in the daytime, before getting under way, to bid one good-by; I shall not return to my mother until evening; you will find me still up there."

And I promise.

They stop at a certain turn, whence we have a bird's-eye view of the whole harbor. The black, stagnant waters reflect innumerable distant fires, and the ships--tiny, immovable objects, which, seen from our point of view, take the shape of fish, seem also to slumber,--little objects which serve to bear us elsewhere, to go far away, and to forget.

The three ladies are about to turn back home, for the night is already far advanced and, farther down, the cosmopolitan quarters near the quays are not safe at this unusual hour.

The moment has therefore come for Yves--who will not land again--to make his last tragic farewells to his friends the little mousmes.

I am very curious to see the parting between Yves and Chrysantheme; I listen with all my ears, I look with all my eyes, but it takes place in the simplest and quietest fashion: none of that heartbreaking which will be inevitable between Madame Prune and myself; I even notice in my mousme an indifference, an unconcern which puzzles me; I positively am at a loss to understand what it all means.

And I muse as I continue to descend toward the sea. "Her appearance of sadness was not, therefore, on Yves's account. On whose, then?" and the phrase runs through my head:

"Come back to-morrow before setting sail, to bid me goodbye; I shall not return to my mother until evening; you will find me still up there."

Japan is indeed most delightful this evening, so fresh and so sweet; and little Chrysantheme was very charming just now, as she silently walked beside me through the darkness of the lane.

It is about two o'clock when we reach the 'Triomphante' in a hired sampan, where I have heaped up all my cases till there is danger of sinking. The "very tall friend" gives over to me the watch that I must keep till four o'clock; and the sailors on duty, but half awake, make a chain in the darkness, to haul on board all my fragile luggage.

"FAREWELL!"

September 18th.

I intended to sleep late this morning, in order to make up for my lost sleep of last night.

But at eight o'clock three persons of the most extraordinary appearance, led by M. Kangourou, present themselves with profound bows at the door of my cabin. They are arrayed in long robes bedizened with dark patterns; they have the flowing locks, high foreheads, and pallid countenances of persons too exclusively devoted to the fine arts; and, perched on the top of their coiffures, they wear sailor hats of English shape tipped jauntily on one side. Tucked under their arms, they carry portfolios filled with sketches; in their hands are boxes of water-colors, pencils, and, bound together like fasces, a bundle of fine stylets with the sharp and glittering points.

At the first glance, even in the bewilderment of waking up, I gather from their appearance what their errand is, and guessing with what visitors I have to deal, I say: "Come in, Messieurs the tattooers!"

These are the specialists most in renown in Nagasaki; I had engaged them two days ago, not knowing that we were about to leave, and since they are here I will not turn them away.

My friendly and intimate relations with primitive man, in Oceania and elsewhere, have imbued me with a deplorable taste for tattoo-work; and I had wished to carry away on my own person, as a curiosity, an ornament, a specimen of the work of the Japanese tattooers, who have a delicacy of finish which is unequalled.

From their albums spread out upon my table I make my choice. There are some remarkably odd designs among them, appropriate to the different parts of the human body: emblems for the arms and legs, sprays of roses for the shoulders, great grinning faces for the middle of the back. There are even, to suit the taste of their clients who belong to foreign navies, trophies of arms, American and French flags entwined, a "God Save the Queen" amid encircling stars, and figures of women taken from Grevin's sketches in the Journal Amusant.

My choice rests upon a singular blue and pink dragon two inches long, which will have a fine effect upon my chest on the side opposite the heart.

Then follows an hour and a half of irritation and positive pain. Stretched out on my bunk and delivered over to the tender mercies of these personages, I stiffen myself and submit to the million imperceptible pricks they inflict. When by chance a little blood flows, confusing the outline by a stream of red, one of the artists hastens to stanch it with his lips, and I make no objections, knowing that this is the Japanese manner, the method used by their doctors for the wounds of both man and beast.

A piece of work, as minute and fine as that of an engraver upon stone, is slowly executed on my person; and their lean hands harrow and worry me with automatic precision.

Finally it is finished, and the tattooers, falling back with an air of satisfaction to contemplate their work, declare it to be lovely.

I dress myself quickly to go on shore, to take advantage of my last hours in Japan.

The heat is fearful to-day: the powerful September sun falls with a certain melancholy upon the yellowing leaves; it is a day of clear burning heat after an almost chilly morning.

As I did yesterday, I ascend to my lofty suburb, during the drowsy noontime, by deserted pathways filled only with light and silence.

I noiselessly open the door of my dwelling, and enter cautiously on tiptoe, for fear of Madame Prune.

At the foot of the staircase, upon the white mats, beside the little sabots and tiny sandals which are always lying about in the vestibule, a great array of luggage is ready for departure, which I recognize at a glance--pretty, dark robes, familiar to my sight, carefully folded and wrapped in blue towels tied at the four corners. I even fancy I feel a little sad when I catch sight of a corner of the famous box of letters and souvenirs peeping out of one of these bundles, in which my portrait by Ureno now reposes among divers photographs of mousmes. A sort of long-necked mandolin, also ready for departure, lies on the top of the pile in its case of figured silk. It resembles the flitting of some gipsy, or rather it reminds me of an engraving in a book of fables I owned in my childhood: the whole thing is exactly like the slender wardrobe and the long guitar which the cicala who had sung all the summer, carried upon her back when she knocked at the door of her neighbor the ant.

Poor little gipsy!

I mount the steps on tiptoe, and stop at the sound of singing that I hear in my room.

It is undoubtedly Chrysantheme's voice, and the song is quite cheerful! This chills me and changes the current of my thoughts. I am almost sorry I have taken the trouble to come.

Mingled with the song is a noise I can not understand: Chink! chink! a clear metallic ring as of coins flung vigorously on the floor. I am well aware that this vibrating house exaggerates every sound during the silence of night; but all the same, I am puzzled to know what my mousme can be doing. Chink! chink! is she amusing herself with quoits, or the 'jeu du crapaud', or pitch-and-toss?

Nothing of the kind! I fancy I have guessed, and I continue my upward progress still more gently, on all fours, with the precautions of a red Indian, to give myself for the last time the pleasure of surprising her.

She has not heard me come in. In our great white room, emptied and swept out, where the clear sunshine pours in, and the soft wind, and the yellowed leaves of the garden, she is sitting all alone, her back turned to the door; she is dressed for walking, ready to go to her mother's, her rose-colored parasol beside her.

On the floor are spread out all the fine silver dollars which, according to our agreement, I had given her the evening before. With the competent dexterity of an old money-changer she fingers them, turns them over, throws them on the floor, and, armed with a little mallet ad hoc, rings them vigorously against her ear, singing the while I know not what little pensive bird-like song which I daresay she improvises as she goes along.

Well, after all, it is even more completely Japanese than I could possibly have imagined it--this last scene of my married life! I feel inclined to laugh. How simple I have been, to allow myself to be taken in by the few clever words she whispered yesterday, as she walked beside me, by a tolerably pretty little phrase embellished as it was by the silence of two o'clock in the morning, and all the wonderful enchantments of night.

Ah! not more for Yves than for me, not more for me than for Yves, has any feeling passed through that little brain, that little heart.

When I have looked at her long enough, I call:

"Hi! Chrysantheme!"

She turns confused, and reddening even to her ears at having been caught at this work.

She is quite wrong, however, to be so much troubled, for I am, on the contrary, delighted. The fear that I might be leaving her in some sadness had almost given me a pang, and I infinitely prefer that this marriage should end as it had begun, in a joke.

"That is a good idea of yours," I say; "a precaution which should always be taken in this country of yours, where so many evil-minded people are clever in forging money. Make haste and get through it before I start, and if any false pieces have found their way into the number, I will willingly replace them."

However, she refuses to continue before me, and I expected as much; to do so would have been contrary to all her notions of politeness, hereditary and acquired, all her conventionality, all her Japanesery. With a disdainful little foot, clothed as usual in exquisite socks, with a special hood for the great toe, she pushes away the piles of white dollars and scatters them on the mats.

"We have hired a large, covered sampan," she says to change the conversation, "and we are all going together--Campanule, Jonquille, Touki, all your mousmes--to watch your vessel set sail. Pray sit down and stay a few minutes."

"No, I really can not stay. I have several things to do in the town, you see, and the order was given for every one to be on board by three o'clock in time for muster before starting. Moreover, I would prefer to escape, as you can imagine, while Madame Prune is still enjoying her siesta; I should be afraid of being drawn into some corner, or of provoking some heartrending parting scene."

Chrysantheme bows her head and says no more, but seeing that I am really going, rises to escort me.

Without speaking, without the slightest noise, she follows me as we descend the staircase and cross the garden full of sunshine, where the dwarf shrubs and the deformed flowers seem, like the rest of the household, plunged in warm somnolence.

At the outer gate I stop for the last adieu: the little sad pout has reappeared, more accentuated than ever, on Chrysantheme's face; it is the right thing, it is correct, and I should feel offended now were it absent.

Well, little mousme, let us part good friends; one last kiss even, if you like. I took you to amuse me; you have not perhaps succeeded very well, but after all you have done what you could: given me your little face, your little curtseys, your little music; in short, you have been pleasant enough in your Japanese way. And who knows, perchance I may yet think of you sometimes when I recall this glorious summer, these pretty, quaint gardens, and the ceaseless concert of the cicalas.

She prostrates herself on the threshold of the door, her forehead against the ground, and remains in this attitude of superlatively polite salute as long as I am in sight, while I go down the pathway by which I am to disappear for ever.

As the distance between us increases, I turn once or twice to look at her again; but it is a mere civility, and meant to return as it deserves her grand final salutation.

CHAPTER LIII

OFF FOR CHINA

When I entered the town, at the turn of the principal street, I had the good luck to meet Number 415, my poor relative. I was just at that moment in want of a speedy djin, and I at once got into his vehicle; besides, it was an alleviation to my feelings, in this hour of departure,

to take my last drive in company with a member of my family.

Unaccustomed as I was to be out of doors during the hours of siesta, I had never yet seen the streets of the town thus overwhelmed by the sunshine, thus deserted in the silence and solitary brilliancy peculiar to all hot countries.

In front of all the shops hang white shades, adorned here and there with slight designs in black, in the quaintness of which lurks I know not what--something mysterious: dragons, emblems, symbolical figures.

The sky is too glaring; the light crude, implacable; never has this old town of Nagasaki appeared to me so old, so worm-eaten, so bald, notwithstanding all its veneer of new papers and gaudy paintings.

These little wooden houses, of such marvellous cleanly whiteness inside, are black outside, timeworn, disjointed and grimacing. When one looks closely, this grimace is to be found everywhere: in the hideous masks laughing in the shop-fronts of the innumerable curio-shops; in the grotesque figures, the playthings, the idols, cruel, suspicious, mad; it is even found in the buildings: in the friezes of the religious porticoes, in the roofs of the thousand pagodas, of which the angles and cable-ends writhe and twist like the yet dangerous remains of ancient and malignant beasts.

And the disturbing intensity of expression reigning over inanimate nature, contrasts with the almost absolute blank of the human countenance, with the smiling foolishness of the simple little folk who meet one's gaze, as they patiently carry on their minute trades in the gloom of their tiny open-fronted houses. Workmen squatted on their heels, carving with their imperceptible tools the droll or odiously obscene ivory ornaments, marvellous cabinet curiosities which have made Japan so famous with the European amateurs who have never seen it. Unconscious artists tracing with steady hand on a background of lacquer or of porcelain traditional designs learned by heart, or transmitted to their brains by a process of heredity through thousands of years; automatic painters, whose storks are similar to those of M. Sucre, with the inevitable little rocks, or little butterflies eternally the same. The least of these illuminators, with his insignificant, eyeless face, possesses at his fingers' ends the maximum of dexterity in this art of decoration, light and wittily incongruous, which threatens to invade us in France, in this epoch of imitative decadence, and which has become the great resource of our manufacturers of cheap "objects of art."

Is it because I am about to leave this country, because I have no longer any link to bind me to it, any resting-place on its soil, that my spirit is ready on the wing? I know not, but it seems to me I have never as clearly seen and comprehended it as to-day. And more even than ever do I find it little, aged, with worn-out blood and worn-out sap; I feel more fully its antediluvian antiquity, its centuries of mummification, which will soon degenerate into hopeless and grotesque buffoonery, as it comes into contact with Western novelties.

It is getting late; little by little, the siestas are everywhere coming to an end; the queer little streets brighten up and begin to swarm in the

sunshine with many-colored parasols. Now begins the procession of ugliness of the most impossible description--a procession of long-robed, grotesque figures capped with pot-hats or sailors' headgear. Business transactions begin again, and the struggle for existence, close and bitter here as in one of our own artisan quarters, but meaner and smaller.

At the moment of my departure, I find within myself only a smile of careless mockery for the swarming crowd of this Lilliputian curtseying people--laborious, industrious, greedy of gain, tainted with a constitutional affectation, hereditary insignificance, and incurable monkeyishness.

Poor cousin Number 415! how right I was to have held him in good esteem! He was by far the best and most disinterested of my Japanese family. When all my commissions are finished, he puts up his little vehicle under a tree, and, much touched by my departure, insists upon escorting me on board the 'Triomphante', to watch over my final purchases in the sampan which conveys me to the ship, and to see them himself safely into my cabin.

His, indeed, is the only hand I clasp with a really friendly feeling, without a suppressed smile, on quitting Japan.

No doubt in this country, as in many others, there is more honest friendship and less ugliness among the simple beings devoted to purely physical work.

At five o'clock in the afternoon we set sail.

Along the line of the shore are two or three sampans; in them the mousmes, shut up in the narrow cabins, peep at us through the tiny windows, half hiding their faces on account of the sailors; these are our wives, who have wished, out of politeness, to look upon us once more.

There are other sampans as well, in which other Japanese women are also watching our departure. These stand upright, under great parasols decorated with big black letters and daubed over with clouds of varied and startling colors.

CHAPTER LIV

A FADING PICTURE

We move slowly out of the wide green bay. The groups of women grow smaller in the distance. The country of round umbrellas with a thousand ribs fades gradually from our sight.

Now the vast ocean opens before us, immense, colorless, solitary; a solemn repose after so much that is too ingenious and too small.

The wooded mountains, the flowery capes disappear. And Japan remains faithful to itself, with its picturesque rocks, its quaint islands on which the trees tastefully arrange themselves in groups--studied, perhaps, but charmingly pretty.

CHAPTER LV

A WITHERED LOTUS-FLOWER

One evening, in my cabin, in the midst of the Yellow Sea, my eyes fall upon the lotus-blossoms brought from Diou-djen-dji; they had lasted several days; but now they are withered, and strew my carpet pathetically with their pale pink petals.

I, who have carefully kept so many faded flowers, fallen, alas! into dust, stolen here and there, at moments of parting in different parts of the world; I, who have kept so many that the collection is now an absurd, an indistinguishable herbarium--I try hard, but without success, to awaken some sentiment for these lotus--and yet they are the last living souvenirs of my summer at Nagasaki.

I pick them up, however, with a certain amount of consideration, and I open my port-hole.

From the gray misty sky a strange light falls upon the waters; a dim and gloomy twilight descends, yellowish upon this Yellow Sea. We feel that we are moving northward, that autumn is approaching.

I throw the poor lotus into the boundless waste of waters, making them my best excuses for consigning them, natives of Japan, to a grave so solemn and so vast.

An Appeal to the Gods

Oama-Terace-Omi-Kami, wash me clean
from this little marriage of mine,
in the waters of the river of Kamo!

ETEXT EDITORS BOOKMARKS:

Japanese habit of expressing myself with excessive politeness
Contemptuous pity, both for my suspicions and the cause of them

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