

Complete Story.

The Romance of Yono-San.

By JOHN W. WOOD.

Yonder, across the beautiful valley, Fuji-san raised its head in majestic grandeur. Upon the winding paths and verdured slopes were perched picturesque little houses, and a toy-like bridge spanned the white foaming waters that were fed from the eternal snows that frosted Fuji-san's stately head. The waters sang merrily as they coursed down the ravines, and irrigated the verdure upon the parched plains below.

The picture was poetic and beautiful, and yet Jack Barnaby sat looking at it gloomily within the sliding screen that formed the side of his room. He wondered why he had come to Omiya, and having come, why he remained. The sweet scent of almond and cherry blossoms that was wafted in to him, the song of the robin and thrush, the chirping of Cicadas, the drone of the honey-bee were alike unnoted; while the hoarse cries of the jirikihsa men, trotting nimbly on their toilsome ways, across the little bridge and up the steep mountain ascents, irritated him more than usual. Jack had often, during the past week, fallen into the same line of reflection, and repeated to himself the same inward query. He had more than once resolved to pack his belongings and get him over to Yokohama or Tokio, where, in the bustling contact with many men, he could the easier forget his trouble and heartache. Yet such is the perversity of mankind, that Jack Barnaby had sought the quiet of this idyllic spot to escape the very thing which he now resolved to seek once more.

In brief retrospect, let us say, that a certain young lady of San Francisco had with deplorable inconsiderateness entangled poor Jack's heart. Reciprocating his affection, the two became engaged. Jack was rich; the young lady adorable, though gay and fickle. Coquetry did not suit Jack's ideas after he became engaged, half so well as before, and as the young lady's natural tendencies made it difficult for her to refrain, he became unreasonably jealous, perhaps, and she unnecessarily resentful. The result was that ere long the dream was over; and Jack, desiring to forget as soon as possible, set out for Japan. In Yokohama he met Milly's cousin, and being thus unpleasantly reminded of San Francisco, he went to Tokio. In Tokio he met her uncle, turned missionary, and in vexation he sought for a retired spot where relatives came not, and so it happened he went to Omiya, where, after having resided for a month, he found himself still un cured. A dull mouth it had been, as watching these adult children, as they seemed to him, making a pleasing job of life, and as this was contrary to his own uncheerful feelings he felt annoyed and irritated.

Presently, as he sat in darksome dependency, there fell upon his hearing the soft tumpety-tum-tum of a samisen, accompanied by a sweet little voice that drifted through the lattice into his room. At first, scarcely listening, he presently became fully attentive, for the voice was wonderfully sweet and melodious. He arose lazily and looked from his window to the pretty garden below. The words that were wafted up to him were distinct and pure, their burden an invocation to the god of love. This was interesting at all events, and the young man listened in admiration. It is true that as yet Jack knew little of the native tongue, but that little rendered by so sweet a voice was well worth hearing. The garden was neat and trim with its bordered walks and little beds of bright jonquils, hyacinths, and other pretty flowers, and in the centre a tiny fountain threw out a stream of sparkling water. In one corner, beneath a blossoming cherry tree, there was an arbour of wisteria, and from this cool refuge issued the sounds that had attracted Jack's attention. As he stood watching and listening, the music continued, now in light and merry cadence, then sinking low and soft, dying away and mingling with the murmuring of the splashing

fountain. Eager to miss no note, Jack leaned far out of the easement, resting his shoulder so heavily upon the sliding frame that, just at the finish of a fine diminuendo, it shot back and sent a potted oleander spinning to the garden walk below, where it fell with a loud crash.

The music came to an abrupt ending; there was a rustling within the arbour, and Jack caught a glimpse of a brightly-robed female hurrying up the pathway on the other side. With a quick turn of the head, the young lady cast a startled look upward, then disappeared with a half-smothered laugh amidst the umbrageous oleanders. "Well, she's a beauty," mentally commented Jack, and for the moment he forgot his late doleful humour. As he had no particular object in hurrying away from the place he postponed his packing, put away his valise and sat down by the window to smoke. Perhaps he expected a reappearance of the fair musician, but if he did it was not vouchsafed him that evening, although he sat there long after the sun had sunk below Fuji-san's snowy head. But he would inquire, and he had a plan already arranged, when old Naka-San, the woman who served his meals, came with his evening tea.

"Oh, Naka-San," he said, interrupting the humble prostration which anticipated her departure—"Naka-San, I love music much; I love sweet voices much, and yet you have their very possessor here and you send her not to me. Do you tire of pleasing the stranger, Naka-San?" Jack had intended to be diplomatic.

"Oh, noble Sir," and Naka-San courted to the floor, "you would have a geisha to sing and dance? Then it must be so, even this very night."

"No, no, Naka; I want no geisha. Is it a geisha who sings in the garden below of an afternoon?"

"What! a geisha sings in the garden there? Impossible, O Sir!" Ah, she would see about that—no geisha could be thus allowed to disturb his excellency.

The little angular eyes snapped, angrily perhaps. Jack surmised that she knew more than she cared to tell, and this piqued his curiosity the more of course. He would await developments.

The next afternoon he was on the watch, but intending to be more discreet. Presently, as he peeped through the closed screen, there was a flutter of a silken robe in the avenue of oleanders beyond, and a young girl came down softly and timorously, as if anticipating an inquisitor upon her retreat. She glanced curiously upward to Jack's closed window, and then, as if satisfied that it had no ruthless spy, sped into the vine-covered arbour, and soon the hum of the samisen and its sweet accompaniment silenced the shrill chatter of the cockatoo that was perched yonder upon the prune tree.

The wisteria hung low, yet but partially concealed a trim little figure, its soft flowing robes enhancing its rounding curves of beauty. Jack sat long behind the half drawn shoji (screen) listening and watching. After a time the music ceased, and the musician leaned back in her seat as if in contemplation of the clustering flowers above. Then, as if by the hypnotic power of Jack's steady gaze, her eyes were drawn toward the screen where he sat. Half unconsciously he had opened the sash, and as she looked she discovered him with a confusion that sent a thousand blushes across her face. A half coquettish smile broke forth, and then, as if conscious of her imprudence she leaped to her feet and was gone in a twinkling. Jack, impulsively and with grave lack of forethought, leaped through the low sash and quickly dashed after her, for what purpose he scarcely could have explained, then. He only succeeded in getting a final glimpse of her flowing robes as she disappeared behind the shoji of a cottage on the other side of the

grove. "It must be there she lives," thought Jack, as he returned to his room, considerably ashamed of his impulsive quest. Who could she be? Although he had been sojourning in the house of Naka-San for three weeks, never before had he encountered the maid of the samisen, and he determined to discover who she was. At all events he could try the persuasive power of gold upon old Naka, so, when that toothless dame came to serve his tea that evening as usual, he met her with an affable and friendly manner that surprised her.

He asked many questions concerning the neighbourhood and neighbours, which Naka answered cheerfully, but carefully. She was also diplomatic. Yes, she knew every one thereabouts, but mentioned no young lady that corresponded in description to the one in whom Jack was interested. As she was about to remove the little tray containing the tea-cup, she discovered a piece of gold therein. Naka started and looked interestedly about the room; her gaze rested upon the little pot of chrysanthemums, upon the bracket on the wall, upon the little wooden god that posed upon the stand in the corner, and finally settled upon Jack, who had patiently watched the workings of the charm upon the untutored Naka-San. Then, little by little, the piece of gold from the teacup, Naka, after gazing for some time upon the coin, slowly handed it to Jack. But Jack pushed her hand away.

"It is yours, Naka-San; yours for a keepsake. When I go away you will buy lots of pretty things with it."

Naka's face relaxed into a grim smile, and she made a courtesy to the very floor. "Oh, excellency," she broke in, "my memory so bad. Never can I remember some things. Let me think; yes, there is another—there is one more. She arrived day before yesterday; the little Yono-San, I mean. She and her aunt, who is a far off cousin of mine, lives there—in the little cottage. She has lived for two years at Tokio. There she went to school, and learned everything, everything." Naka-San's tongue was now loosened, and it ran as a mill race. Behold the power of gold!

Jack learned too that Yono-San was descended from an illustrious race; her grandfather was a daimio of the province of Yamashiro. She was even distantly connected with a Shogun. No, there was no plebeianism in pretty Yono's blood, no indeed! Another gold piece concluded the recital, and Naka even promised to effect a proper introduction to the granddaughter of the daimio.

The next day Yono-San failed to appear in the garden, whereas Jack was much cast down, but in the evening, he was gratified to learn from Naka-San that the fair Yono's Aunt Shorisha would be pleased to meet the young American stranger.

Two hours later found Jack comfortably seated in the pretty little drawing-room of Aunt Shorisha, a stiff and formal old lady who smiled at stated intervals and sipped tea continuously. But Jack did not mind this; his attention was chiefly devoted to the little Yono. "Yono is demure and beautiful, sweet and charming," thought he, as he noted her pretty dimples and graceful motions.

Her eyes glowed with interest as he described his country, its cities, and the thousand and one things heretofore considered by him so commonplace. The diffidence with which she at first met him wore off, and the English she had learned at the school at Tokio now proved useful to her. Then she played at his request upon her beloved samisen, and sang ever so many pretty little airs of her country in her own native tongue. The soft, spicy breeze that blew gently through the open casements came from tropical gardens like a sensuous caress. The half-lighted interior, with its grotesque bronzes and its old lacquer decorations, the striking, stately figure of Aunt Shorisha, and the pretty little figure that played upon the stringed instrument and sang those wild, quaint songs, seemed to Jack a dream of orientalism, and he thought long about it that night ere he fell asleep. And this was the beginning.

After that Jack came often; and often he and Yono sat in the garden in the cool summer-like afternoons and evenings, listening while Yono sang, or else bringing out his own favourite guitar, and playing thereon the old songs that had been silent to him for many years. And thus passed many weeks, weeks of listless pleasure to Jack; who had by this time ceased to remember the unpleasant past, or merely thought of it as a vexatious episode. He almost forgot San Francisco and every one there, and became inebriated to the soul with the soft and dreamy atmosphere of this lotus land, ever redolent with perfume—the land of never-care. And he welcomed its ensuaring sensuousness with eagerness, and delighted in a life that carried with it no trouble, no exertion, no pain. And Yono—who could tell? Jack himself could not analyse the changeful but always charming humours that animated her, as many and as pleasing as the prismatic colours that broke from the sunbeams falling upon the snowy summit of Fuji-San yonder. At one time playful, bubbling over with merry witfulness; again, sedate in her studied decorum and conventional staidness, and then melting into grave and changeful moods. Sometimes her dark eyes softened into a fascinating intimation of fondness that made Jack's heart beat with keen pleasure, only to change suddenly to pain and anxiety as he stood upon the future.

They took many walks together amidst the magnificent old groves of cryptomeria that abounded. They inspected parks and gardens and drank sake from tiny cups served by pretty damsels. They visited Kori shops and drank tea, and sometimes Yono herself officiated in the brewing of it. Jack declared it noectar—although he had ever hated tea before—and drank many cups. They visited the little shops and bazaars that beset his way, and he purchased all manner of pretty and interesting things for Yono.

On a certain day—the Feast of the Cherry Blossoms—they started with light hearts to a bower at the foot of Fuji, where some of the exercises of the day were to be held. Aunt Shorisha also went, but being fat and elderly elected to travel in a kimono, but Jack and Yono would travel afoot, albeit it

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