THE LIFE OF
AN AMOROUS MAN

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CHARLES E. TUTTLE COMPANY
Rutland, Vermont & Tokyo, Japan
1963
07725212
OF STARS A-WOOING

Even the moon sets all too soon, beyond the shadows of Mt. Sayama. The cherry blossoms were dead, suggesting to him the evanescence of human life and filling his heart with a vague sense of grief. There was the silver mine. It was his. But he was already a man of means, and wealth, as such, held no fascination for him. The drab empty life, here in the province of Tajima, left his irrepressible yearnings unfulfilled. Overwhelmed at last by all this bleakness but hopeful of the joys to be found in romantic old Kyoto, he set out for the imperial capital. Ah, he mused expectantly, there he would pursue the charms of beautiful women and the pleasures of wine!

Yumesuke, "the Man of Dreams," they called him in Kyoto. For his sober, hard-working neighbors never saw him otherwise than sleeping or just awaking. Nightly he frequented the gay quarters of Shimabara with such fashionable, if dissolute, men about town as Nagoya Sansa and Kaga-no-Hachi.

In the dead of night, as Yumesuke staggered homeward across the bridge on Ichijo-dori, his aspect was frightful to behold. Sometimes he disported himself in the manner of a young dandy, raucous and maudlin. At other times he wrapped himself in the black long-sleeved robe of a woebegone priest—a man transformed. Or he would wear a long tapering topknot upon his crown, looking for all the world like a foppish rascal. If ever a noisy ghost was seen prowling through the night, this was it!

But when the keepers of the Shimabara teahouses
tried to admonish him, Yumesuke would insist with a twisted grin that nothing on earth—not even if the devil himself were to tear his flesh to shreds—could deter him from pursuing his heart’s desires. Willy-nilly, being inately kind and business-minded to boot, they tolerated his excesses. They could not very well bar him from their establishments. Nor could they abandon the rambunctious scarecrow on the wayside.

Now, among the Shimabara courtesans there were, at the time, such particularly well-known women as Kazuraki and Kaoru, and Sanscki too. And soon, to each of these lovely women, each of the three cronies became amorously attached. With hearts all willing the men duly paid the ransom asked to secure the courtesans’ release from their contracts. Yumesuke took Kazuraki along with him. Each retired with his concubine to a house in Saga or led a secluded life in the shadows of Higashiyama or dwelt unknown in Fuji-no-Mori.

In time, insofar as Yumesuke and Kazuraki were concerned, the ties of domesticity became daily more pregnant with obligations, and a son was born from their union.

Yonosuke, “Man of the World,” the son was called. Really there should be no need to dwell so overtly on this, for everyone knows what such a name implies. The mother’s affections was pleasant to behold as, fondling the child on her lap, hand tapping hand, hand tapping lips, she mumbled sweet nothings and the child gurgled gleefully. And the days passed and the years too. And then came the month of the frost when the boy, now four years old, went through the customary head-shaving rites. In the spring he wore his first broad *izakama* trousers over his tiny robe. But then he had a touch of the deadly smallpox. The gods, however, answered prayers, and not a trace of the illness remained to mar his face. The fifth year passed and the sixth.

One summer night when he was seven years old, Yonosuke got up from his bed and left his pillow. He fumbled with the door catch, and the noise awoke a maid of the household sleeping in the adjoining room. She knew what the boy was bent on doing. Lighting a candle, she walked beside him down the corridor. The corridor squeaked loudly and eerily in the quiet night. Another maid followed them hurriedly.

Out in the yard, beyond the densely spreading mandin trees, the boy performed his pressing task on a pile of dry pine needles. Then, while he stepped back onto the porch to wash his hands at the basin, the first maid held the candle close lest the boy tread on the nailhead protruding from the bamboo flooring.

“Blow out the light,” the little boy commanded.

“But it’s dark here, at your feet,” the maid replied in a scolding voice not unmixed with concern.

“Don’t you know that love is made in the dark?”

This was a broad allusion to Tanabata-sama, a festival derived from an ancient legend depicting the tryst of two amorous stars, the one “male” and the other “female,” on the seventh night of the seventh month.

The second maid, who carried a short sword, blew out the light.

Yonosuke seized her sleeve. “Isn’t my nurse around?”

That sounded exceedingly funny. And it was then that the maids knew he was re-enacting the make-believe of stars a-wooing on the dark heavenly bridge. This seemed incredible in a child so young; he could hardly have comprehended the amorous doings of men and women. It showed nevertheless that the boy was precociously gifted, alas, for sensual things. Yet it was a gift, however singular, and the maids reported the incident to his mother as something rather to be complimented on than scorned.

Gradually, as the days went by, this preternatural tendency grew apace. Yonosuke developed a predilection
for amusing picture books of human figures that revealed more than they should. So much so, indeed, that most of the volumes he collected on his small bookshelf began to seem progressively repulsive to the adult eye. He must have known there was something detestable in all this, for he ordered the servants: "I forbid anyone whom I have not summoned to enter this chrysanthemum room."

At one time he fashioned a pair of birds with folded paper and gave these to them, saying: "This is the image of birds making love."

At another time he made a pair of paper flowers attached to stems, and this he also gave to them, saying: "Behold the twin trees of love."

It seems, moreover, that no matter what moved his fancy among the thousand and one things that stir young minds, little Yonosuke never overlooked sensual nuances or suggestions. Never would he permit the servants to help him with his underclothing. He tied his own waist sash over his robe, making the knot in front and swinging it to the back in dandyish fashion. There was perfume on his sleeves, absorbed from the smoke of an incense called hyobukyo. All these things he did with a fastidiousness which even a male adult would ordinarily shun but which nevertheless gave heartthrobs to women and girls.

Even while flying a kite with youngsters of his own age, he would give no thought to skies becalmed or rising clouds. He would muse, recalling that legend of the cloudland bridge: "I wonder if the heavenly beings of ancient times ever stole into the houses of others to see the women they loved."

Then he would sigh over these imagined doings in regions remote and celestial, and he would say regretfully: "The stars met but once a year. What if the rain hid the clouds on that one evening of love and they could not meet?"

SECRET LETTER

The seventh day of the seventh month came around again. It was time for merry festivities. Iron lanterns covered with a whole year's accumulation of dust were lovingly cleaned and filled with oil. Desk drawers were cleaned out and their contents rearranged and put meticulously in order. Ink slabs were washed and polished. It was time for verse writing too.

But then the rains came, as they always did. Streams limpid in the sun and cataracts white with foam turned overnight into muddy swirls. From the north the temple bells of the Konryu-ji broke the evening silence. They brought back acute memories of a love poem, "I Long for Thee," said to have been composed by the eight-year-old scion of the exiled Emperor Godaigo.

It was time, also, for Yonosuke to begin his formal education. Now it happened that he was staying with his aunt in Yamasaki, a few ri west of Kyoto. In that quiet village resided a Buddhist scholar who kept alive the traditions of the Takimoto school of poetry and learning and conducted class in the hermitage of an illustrious forebear—a place known as Ichiya-an. To this priest, then, the boy Yonosuke was attached, under a duly negotiated contract, as a disciple in the art of calligraphy and reading.

One day Yonosuke submitted writing paper to his tutor.

"Please, sensei, will you write a letter for me?"

Amazed that one so young should wish to dispatch a formal communication, the tutor asked tentatively: "And what, may I ask, do you wish me to say in the letter?"
ently, the contents of the letter were trivial, silly, and absurd. Ironically enough, the more he tried to absolve himself, the less he succeeded. He seemed almost ludicrous to Osaka’s mother, if not downright cowardly, to try to foist the guilt on her innocent little nephew.

“No one will believe you,” she said acidly.

Finally Yonosuke confessed to his aunt: “It is true. It is really I who am in love with Osaka-sama.”

His aunt stiffened. She thought to herself with some degree of alarm: “I was greatly mistaken to have regarded him as an innocent child. I must let my sister know about it tomorrow.” She shrugged inwardly: “They probably will have a big laugh over it in Kyoto.”

Aloud she calmly told Yonosuke: “My daughter is betrothed to another. She has average looks, and I might have thought of giving her to you as your future bride if only there wasn’t such a vast difference in age between the two of you.”

Thereafter she watched him carefully, keeping the boy’s strange proclivities in mind. The more she watched, the more convinced she became that the things he said or did—so witty, so conceited, so impertinent—could not possibly be the expression of a mere child. He was in every respect adult-minded. She was exasperatingly and unluckily sure of it.

THROUGH A SPYGLASS

Strange to relate, it was in music that little Yonosuke exhibited a spark of genius. Quite audibly he excelled in beating the elbow drum. And he sang with a great deal of emotion in his young voice. He sang—or rather intoned—in unison with the hollow throbbing of his drum. Wonderfully good it seemed, and good reason why. He liked the lyrics of a dramatic passage in Wind among the Pines that wailed “... tormented later by the pangs of love.”

He liked the sentiment so much that he kept repeating the line and pounding his drum night and day, savoring it with uncommon delight. Exasperatingly enough, his interest here was anything but aesthetic. Abruptly, therefore, his parents ordered him to give up altogether any further pursuits in “music.”

Yet they had to think about a manly career for the boy. Now it happened that his mother was related to the keeper of a moneylending shop called Kasugaya on Ryo-kai-machi in Kyoto. To that shop Yonosuke was sent as an apprentice, to be initiated in the technique of trading in gold and silver coins.

No sooner, however, had he started working than Yonosuke displayed superior gifts for this trade. He promptly secured for himself a silver loan of 300 "A. Interest on the loan was fixed at 100 percent, but the boy outdid his adult employers in shrewdness by signing a promissory note payable from his inheritance upon the death of his father. What if his father were to leave him nothing? Say what you wish about the cupidity of money-lenders, but there was something inordinately puerile about this transaction. And it wasn’t Yonosuke’s fault.

Yonosuke was then but nine years old. On the fourth day of the fifth month—the eve of Boys’ Festival Day when irises symbolizing the event would be in full bloom—a waitress living nearby prepared to take her bath in a wooden tub beneath the overhanging eaves of her home. Dusk was falling, and the drooping leaves of a willow tree gave the spot the appearance of a dark and hidden nook. A high bamboo screen-fence skirting it afforded the necessary privacy.

The waitress, taking off her linen robe and dainty
underwear, threw them upon this fence and slipped into the tub. She was quite sure that no one was about. If there should be any sound at all, it could be nothing but the sigh of evening breezes among the nearby pines. Only the walls would hear it. So thinking, at any rate, she started to rub herself vigorously with rice-bran soap and a towel. The water was pleasantly hot enough. Tomorrow would be the iris festival, and she needed a thorough cleaning of her plump warm torso. She took particular relish in removing the dirt from the lower parts of her body. Soon the water in the tub became thick with little bubbling balls of body oil and soap.

Suddenly, as though by instinct, she looked up. And there, on the tiled roof of the Azumaya teahouse next door, she saw the crouching figure of the boy Yonosuke leveling a long spyglass at her.

A mere boy watching her bathe—the idea seemed to her innocent enough and comical. The spyglass aimed at her was the sort used at country estates, summer houses, and pavilions overlooking a lake, undoubtedly an import brought in through Nagasaki by Dutch traders. Evidently he had been observing her for some time.

On second thought, since the boy seemed much too intent with his spyglass, a sense of feminine shame descended upon her. Now speechless with excitement, the waitress put her hands together in the attitude of praying, dumbly beseeching Yonosuke to go away and let her bathe in peace.

Yonosuke pointed at her naked figure, laughed, and frowned. “You’re clumsy!” he called down.

Embarrassed but resentful of the ridicule, the waitress stood up, fumbled with her wooden clogs, and was about to flee indoors without even drying her body when Yonosuke slid down the roof and called to her through a wide slit in the screen-fence.

“Come back here tonight through the fence gate,” he
said, "when the bell of the first watch rings and everyone goes to bed. I shall tell you something. You had better come."

"Absurd!" the waitress cried angrily.

"If you don’t, I shall tell the other waitresses all that has happened here."

For a moment the woman hesitated. She seemed to be in dire confusion. "What did I do?" she asked herself. "What did he see me doing to myself while bathing that I should be ashamed of its being reported to others? Oh, botheration!"

"Well, anyhow..." she answered back, and dragging her robe and underwear from the screen-fence, she fled into her house without finishing that sentence. Later that evening the waitress combed her hair as though she were expecting guests, yet not quite so smoothly as to suggest that it mattered to her how well she looked. Suddenly she sat listening with bated breath as wary footsteps sounded outside. And there, at her door, stood Yonosuke. After he came in, there was nothing she could do, the waitress thought, but to purchase his silence. Ransacking a box, she took out a "mustard" doll, a bamboo lark whistle, and a bouncing clay figure that had been so moulded as to recover its upright position when rolled on the mat.

"To me these are precious things," she told the boy, "but to you I shall give them as playthings without feeling any regret."

Yonosuke showed no sign of pleasure or of accepting them. "You will need them when you have babies," he replied dryly. "These toys will be handy in quieting little crying tots."

Then he picked up the bouncing clay figure and rolled it on the mat. It sat up facing her.

"See," he said with a tantalizing grin, "the doll greets you. It must be in love with you."

Quickly he pillowed his head on her lap and lay there quietly. The waitress reddened. "What would others think if they saw us in this position?" she thought.

But she steeled herself. Slyly she caressed his side, near the armpit, and said: "Last year, on the second day of the second month, when moxacautery was performed on you, I helped pour some salt on the burned spot. You did not behave amiable then. But tonight you seem very amiable indeed. Come here."

She picked him up, tucked his head into her bosom and held him there tightly for a moment. Then she dropped him roughly, ran out of the house, slammed open the door of the home of Yonosuke's parents, and called: "Oh, wet nurse! Wet nurse!"

When the boy's former wet nurse, now personal maid, came to the door, the laughing waitress shouted acidly: "Could I borrow some breast milk from you? Yonosuke-sama still needs to be wet-nursed!"

And when she told the maid what had happened, the two laughed and laughed until the tears came to their eyes.
Now this “New Pillow” was just a popular euphemism for the town of Fushimi, a few ri west of Kyoto. Apparently pseudo-romantic, the name was derived from matsura kotoba (“pillow” phrases), or clichés used by the poets of old. There must have been some amorous association here, an unblushing parody on the venerated versifier’s “pillow.” Well, anyhow, the thing that piqued Yonosuke’s curiosity was the town’s gay life in Shumoku-machi.

The evening temple bell of the Tofuku-ji was tolling away when the two visitors reached Shumoku-machi. Stepping out of their palanquins near the tearoom of Yariya-no-Magozaemon, they found the eastern gate closed.

“Why has this entrance been barred?” Yonosuke mumbled. “Irksome love lane, isn’t it?”

They hurried toward the south entrance. It was open. Walking along leisurely, Yonosuke peered into the interior of the gay houses. In one of them he observed some pleasure-bent guests wearing white turbans that looked like ghostly crowns. Possibly some noblemen from Kyoto plucking forbidden flowers here among the plebeians in poorly managed disguise. There was a distinguished-looking man in another house who, no doubt, was the agent of the famous tea master of Uji.

A pack-horse leader and a number of travelers were passing the time on this street while waiting for the ferryboat that would take them downstream on the River Yodo. It was a comical sight, these transients with furo-shiki bundles of carrots and rice dumplings slung over their shoulders. They were inspecting the prostitutes closely, evidently before making up their minds. At the same time they were lugubriously counting what remained of their silver and copper coins. Others tramped across the lane in search of cheaper amusement.

While he was gazing at this hectic spectacle of single-minded men, Yonosuke’s eyes fell upon a humble house on the western side. It had a latticed sliding-door entrance, looking like a proud but tumbledown shack. He could see portions of the interior, hung with a scroll painting of maples reddening on the banks of the River Tatsuta. But the picture had a miserably faded look, covered with what appeared like soot from tobacco smoke, as though there were no further space left that could be soiled. Or it was torn in places as if the maple leaves were being scattered helter-skelter in the river.

A quiet-seeming girl of startling beauty was seated beside the hanging scroll. With writing brush poised in her hand, she appeared to be in the midst of composing a poem. Apparently she found it difficult to complete the opening lines. It was as though that stanza should read:

The perfume on my sleeve,
Like fresh-bloomed chrysanthemum . . .

Curiously enough, there was nothing in her appearance that bore even a semblance of indication that she might be waiting for “trade.” Yonosuke was mystified. He asked his companion: “Why is this girl staying in such a wretched house?”

Sehei nodded gravely. “Well . . . you see, the oyakata, her employer, is noted on this street as a man of poverty. That accounts for her pitiful state. . . . On the whole, the prostitutes here need not be pretty, but they must wear attractive robes. Other girls are bedecking themselves with second-hand finery brought here from the first-class houses of courtesans in Shimabara, or old brocades and figured silk bought for them by their bosses. In that way they can at least put on an alluring front.”

The two sat down without ceremony on a bench outside the door of this decrepit-looking house. Yonosuke laid aside his short sword and watched the girl. And the girl, aware of his presence, turned gently in his direction.
and smiled. Her smile was wistful. She made no move to welcome him or his adult companion. And the more Yonosuke looked at her, the deeper was he impressed with some indefinable quality in her. Finally he addressed the girl in a sympathetic tone: "Why must you stay in an establishment like this? It seems to me this sort of trade is distressing enough as it is."

"I suppose," the girl replied readily, "people see through me because I loathe this profession. The truth is . . . I . . . I was driven to it." She looked away as though to hide the shame on her pretty face.

"Tell me more," Yonosuke urged.

"Well," she continued, "poverty has forced me to beg for favors from visitors. Not to clothe myself~ you understand, but to stop the cold winds from coming in through cracks in the walls of this house. I have to provide for my own needs, from Ono charcoal to Yoshino paper handkerchiefs and Hida-in sandals. No one comes here on rainy days or windy nights. There is no one that I can appeal to for something decent to wear when the imperial Go-Ko festival comes around, or the Tango festival, or even the Fujimori Shrine festival. The master is always grumbling . . . Somehow, under these conditions, I have passed two years here. But when I think of the future I am overwhelmed with fear."

Then, with tears in her eyes, she added: "I often think of my poor parents in the country, wondering how they are managing to eke out a living. I've had practically no news from them since I had to leave them, much less have they come to see me here. I . . . I'm worried."

"Where does your father live?" Yonosuke asked.

"In Yamashina. His name is Gempachi."

Yonosuke thought for a while. Then he said in all youthful sincerity: "I shall visit him there one of these days soon and let him know that at least you are well and somehow getting along."

Far from rejoicing over this proffered kindness, the girl protested excitedly. "Please don't. You mustn't. . . . He used to make a living somehow by digging madder roots for the dye market. But now . . . now he is old and weak, unable to work . . . a beggar. Worse than that, by some cruel turn of fate, he has become the victim of a loathsome disease."

Later, Yonosuke's desire to visit the girl's unfortunate father became stronger despite her pleas against it. One day he set out alone for Yamashina.

He found the latticed door of Gempachi's house covered tastefully with morning-glory vines and blossoms. Inside, neatly suspended over the vestibule, was a warrior's halberd. A saddle and other trappings of a warrior's mount were carefully preserved. Mute evidence, this, of a samurai who for some mysterious reason had become detached from his lord, losing his annuity and identity.

When Yonosuke bluntly explained the reason for his visit, Gempachi said tearfully: "This is really mortifying. My daughter has degenerated into a prostitute but . . . but however frivolous she may be, I did not expect her to stoop so low as to humiliate her father even more by revealing where he lived."

There was a great gulf of misunderstanding between father and daughter. Yonosuke saw it and told him so in a kindly manner.

"Your daughter has had no other means of making a living. She did not want to be a burden on you any longer."

"But why . . . why . . . why stoop so low?" Gempachi was in agony. "Of course, a father has responsibilities . . ."

The girl had never mentioned or boasted about the erstwhile splendor of her family, and Yonosuke admired that spirit. He decided to bring about their reconciliation.
Soon afterwards, with money obtained from his parents, he bought the girl out of bondage and sent her back to her ailing father. Yonosuke was then but eleven years old. He saw to it also that the family was provided for. He visited them often.

DISILLUSIONED

Moon viewing has been associated with the fame of many scenic spots. But nowhere does the thirteenth moon or even the waning moon appear so hauntingly beautiful as on the coast of Suma, along the Inland Sea. Here the sea is so calm that the waves are imperceptible. The bright moonbeams suggest the infinite, yet the illusory nearness too, of the harvest moon. So Yonosuke had heard.

One day, impelled by this thought, he hired a small rowboat and set out for that magic spot.

Rounding the Cape of Wada, his boatman rowed beyond Tsuno-no-Matsubara and approached the beach at Shioya. This was a place recorded in song and story. It was here that the illustrious warrior Kumagai cornered and speared Atsumori, the Heike general. Perhaps, thought Yonosuke, that was the penalty for overindulgence in the famous Heike wine. Laughing to himself over this choice bit of private historical invention, he went ashore at a spot that commanded a good view of the sea. There he secured lodgings in a penhouse atop a small inn on the sloping beach.

And here he elected to remain for a spell. Darkness overtook the land. The moon rose over the sea. Yonosuke took out the stoppers from the jugs of Maizuru and Hanatachibana wine that he had brought from Kyoto. Other guests at the inn joined him in the merrymaking. And while the night was young, everyone seemed hilarious. But as the night wore on, even the moon seemed ghastly. Then the lonely cry of a sea bird suggested to Yonosuke that perhaps the creature had lost its mate. This provoked the further thought that traveling alone was much too solitary.

"Isn't there a young fisher wench around?" he asked.

The innkeeper fetched a girl to entertain him. She was a common-looking creature. She wore no comb to keep her disheveled hair together. Nor did she seem aware of the art of improving the looks of her face with liquid powder. The sleeves of her robe were much too narrow. The hem was too short. She actually smelt of the fishing hamlet, so much so that Yonosuke felt he might become ill in her presence. He swallowed a few pills of eneiitan to overcome an impending nausea, at the same time massaging his chest. Then he decided to wriggle out of his predicament by finishing off the meeting with a funny story.

"Once upon a time," he told the girl, by way of a broad hint, "a man called Narihira was banished to a lonely island. There he hired a fisher wench to massage his legs. That, you understand, was by way of banishing his own boredom. When the time came for him to depart, however, he decided to rid himself of his perfume container, his bird cage, his ladle, his earthenware mortar, and all the rest of the household effects that he had assembled for his three-year exile. They smell too much like fish. 'You can have them,' Narihira told the fisher wench. 'No one deserves them more than you do.'"

The girl refused to take the hint, so Yonosuke cut short his visit the next day and set out for the port of Hyogo. Here, he found, there was a noticeable difference between the harlots who worked as waitresses at popular inns during the day and those who plied their trade at night.
brought tears to Yonosuke’s eyes. Contrite now, he bent
down and cried to the corpse: “This... this must be
heaven’s retribution—to meet again in this terrible way.
It was all my fault. If I had not taken you with me from
the jail, this would never have happened to you. Oh,
forgive me, forgive me.”
And in the fullness of his grief he flung himself down
on the open coffin and wept. Strangely enough, he
thought he saw the body open its eyes for a moment,
smile, and return to the stillness of death.
Overcome by emotions brought on by self-reproach,
he sobbed: “I... I have lived to be twenty-nine. I have
nothing else to live for.”
Deadly pale, he turned his drawn sword upon
himself. Quick as a flash, however, the two grave robbers
snatched it away from him. He was too overwrought to
offer any resistance. They returned the coffin to its grave
and covered it up reverently. Then they took the grief-
stricken Yonosuke home to their hut.

TORTURED SOUL

THE HUMAN body is a borrowed article composed of
elements drawn from five basic things: earth, water, fire,
wind, and air. We simply return it to Emma-dai-o when
that Prince of Hell comes to fetch it back. That is all
there is to life. Or so, at least, Yonosuke mused. “For
thirty years,” he thought, “I have inhabited this borrowed
thing, and it has all been hardly more than a dream. Let
the future be what it may.”

But this made Yonosuke more restless than ever, with-
out roots, without a serious aim. Then, casually enough,
he thought of his old-time schoolmate who, he now re-
membered, was reported to be living at a place called
Sagae, in Mogami Province. Weary of heart, he felt the
need of a good man’s companionship. He turned his steps
toward that distant village.

They had parted nineteen years ago, but his friend
remembered him distinctly. Genuinely happy to meet
again—so happy that they wept together—the two im-
mEDIATELY talked of old times. It may be that their friend-
ship remained pure because it was untouched by the
sordid experiences that had marked Yonosuke’s own life.
As proof of the man’s purity of thought, he showed Yono-
suke a talisman of the goddess of mercy—said to have
been the work of the Abbot Jikaku—which Yonosuke
himself had given to him at the temple in Nakazawa as
a pledge of friendship. The man had kept it firmly on his
person, with undying faith, and Yonosuke was deeply
affected.

This man was a samurai, but his ties with his former
lord were no longer effective. His income had ceased.
For all practical purposes he was a ronin, an unemployed
warrior. He was so poor that he had no one to take care
of his home. All he had was a portable cooking stove
and a teakettle. For firewood he waited for the morrow’s
dead leaves to fall. Aside from some brown taros scattered
on the floor of the kitchen, there was not even a bean-curd
strainer. A broken fan held together with a piece of paper
string, a paste spreader, a sprig of red pepper, and a piece
of straw rope hung on the wall.

Yonosuke asked: “How did you manage to live during
these many years?”

“I dealt in spiders to catch flies with. They are quite
the thing in Edo nowadays, you know. I also carve toy
halberds for children. They sell for one mon each. Ah,
well, you have been so good as to come all the way here
to see me. We must drink together... .”

Hiding an empty jug in the folds of his robe, the samu-
rai was about to set out for the village wineshop when Yonosuke stopped him. Yonosuke knew that there could be no money in the house to buy sake with and that sake was a luxury his friend and host could ill afford.

"I have traveled a great distance without stopping, and I am tired tonight," Yonosuke said by way of dissuading him. "Let's go to bed early. Tomorrow we shall resume our talk of old times."

He lay down on the mat, using a whetstone for pillow. The samurai, embarrassed but taking the hint, fetched a wooden clapper and a bow from an old wicker basket. "There are badgers running wild in the hills here. I shall go and catch some. They will make a fine feast for us."

So saying, the samurai went out into the night.

Yonosuke began to doze. But the night was chilly, even under a blanket, and he could not get warmed up. He was still tossing around, on the fringe of sleep, when a strange figure came crawling down the steps from the upper floor. The apparition had a woman's head, the legs and claws of a huge bird, and the scaly body of a fish. In a weird voice that sounded like waves crashing against rocks, the apparition said: "Have you forgotten me, Yonosuke-sama? How could you? I, Koman, the woman who kept shop in Ishigaki-cho selling carp, will take revenge upon you now for what you did to me."

Yonosuke sprang to his feet, seized the sword lying beside his pillow, and ran it through the apparition. The apparition vanished.

The next instant another woman, with the body and beak of a huge bird of prey, attacked him from behind. "I am the spirit of Ohatsu, daughter of Kichisuke of Kobiki-cho. You deceived me after pledging me your eternal love, so I chose death. Now you shall die!"

Yonosuke swung around and ran his sword through this apparition too.
A third monster, elongated, with the face of a woman and hands and feet resembling a maple tree, sprang upon him from a corner, and her words came to Yonosuke like the whine of a whirlwind: “I am the wife of Jirokichi. You lured me to Mt. Takao to see the maples, pledging me your love. For you I gave up the man to whom I had been devoted all my life. When you left me it was, to me, like swallowing poison. My husband refused to take me back. So I did take poison. You do remember me. Oh, yes, you do!”

The monster bit into Yonosuke’s flesh. Desperately he grappled with it and threw it to the floor in a furious heave. But by this time he felt groggy, exhausted, and bewildered. He thought his end was coming.

Turning, he saw still another vision. This one swooped down upon him from the ceiling: the head of a woman and a body in the shape of a huge twisted straw rope. Yonosuke had barely enough time to snatch up his sword. “I, a nun preparing for heavenly duties in a temple in Daigo,” shrieked the vision, “was hoodwinked by you into renouncing my vows, and you shall pay for it now. I won’t let you get away from here alive. I am going to kill you!”

With that the vision flew straight for Yonosuke’s throat. But in the nick of time he stepped aside and stabbed the twisting menace.

“This is the end,” thought Yonosuke. He went down on his knees, gasping, trembling, and penitent. Renouncing all evil thoughts, he began to pray to the Lord Buddha for deliverance.

Some hours later his samurai friend and host returned from the hills. He found the matted floor spattered with blood and Yonosuke lying unconscious in the middle of it. “Oh, how horrible!” he shouted.

He spoke into Yonosuke’s ears and shook him back to consciousness.

When Yonosuke had regained enough of his senses to think and speak coherently, he told his friend about the ghosts that had assailed and tormented him.

“Impossible!” cried the samurai.

But for all its obvious incredibility the samurai felt awakening suspicion. Could it be that the badgers he had chased in the hills had crawled into his house to perform those tricks? For badgers were known to have the power to bewitch human beings. But then he’d had a talisman of the goddess of mercy with him. And that led him on to consider another possibility. It must be spontaneous black magic, he decided.

He crept upstairs to where Yonosuke had left his few belongings. And there, sure enough, littered on the floor were the four amatory pledges which Yonosuke had induced those women to write and sign when he seduced them. They were torn to bits except for those portions that bore their seals.

Verily, thought the samurai grimly, one should never trifle with seeming trifles. One should never persuade women to swear to their love in writing. There is no fury like a woman deceived—especially after she is driven to suicide.

**PRICE OF CHIVALRY**

Once again Yonosuke was in Edo, the shogun’s capital. Refreshed but aimless, he found security at last—and a new preoccupation—as the protégé of a wealthy, chivalrous man about town called Token Gombei. How he did it must be laid down to similarity of interests, tastes, and habits, and Yonosuke was never known to have passed up an opportunity.
A HAIKU poet once described the most admired courtesan that ever graced the entertainment halls of Kyoto in this fashion:

Lo, our flowery capital
Will never bloom again
If death takes Yoshino away.

Yoshino had indeed earned the reputation of being an admirable woman because she was gentle and courteous and big of heart. No one could point the finger of scorn at her or complain that she was wanting in conduct or behavior. She was a good woman, liked by all who knew her.

Yonosuke had heard of her—her goodness, her refinement. And then one day he saw her on the street with his own eyes, and he felt great torment. This wasn't a case of casual infatuation with a common harlot or a woman of easy virtue. She was a first-class hostess, a woman of quality presiding in giddily high circles. It saddened Yonosuke to think that with all his newly acquired wealth she was inaccessible to him. He fell actually in love for the first time in his life.

Frustration begets humility, and Yonosuke started to earn money with his own hands—just fifty-three me, the price of admission to her presence for one brief hour of glorious entertainment. It was to be an expression of sincerity, unadulterated by any sordid urge. Daily he worked at the anvil of a smithy in Lord Kintsuna's studio. Every day he forged one small knife blade, earning one
me for his labor. In fifty-three days he had amassed the needed fifty-three me.

And every day thereafter he waited for a chance to be admitted to Yoshino's table. But the keeper of the tea-house in the Shimabara district would not let him see her. She was barred to anyone unknown to the keeper as a man of wealth, position, and probity. Yonosuke refused to reveal his true identity, and those who had heard of his past misdeeds shunned him. His sincerity proved to be of no avail.

So then one night when the festival of the forge came around, he went secretly to the same establishment to pour out his woes to a woman attendant. "I'm mortified," he told her. "I can well understand it," the woman said sympathetically. "I shall let Yoshino-sama know secretly anything that you are here."

When Yoshino heard about Yonosuke's plight and lament, she said without hesitation: "Of course he can see me if he wants to. Bring him into my room, please."

Unable to believe his ears, Yonosuke crept through the dark hallway into her dazzling presence. He felt humble and ashamed. "But at least I am sincere," he said pensively. "I have come to you with love in my heart, knowing you will reject me."

Yoshino was greatly surprised and excited. No one had ever spoken to her of sincere love. "Tell me all about it," she invited.

Yonosuke made a clean breast of everything. "That is all," he concluded. "I must thank you for letting me come here to see you. Now I am satisfied. I shall always carry the thought of your generosity in my heart." He rose to go.

"Wait!" Yoshino cried, seizing his sleeve. "Don't go yet."

But the secret could not be kept. When the keeper of the establishment on the following morning heard what Yoshino had done on her own initiative, he complained sternly and bitterly. Yoshino protested: "But I have not done anything that would ruin the reputation of this house or anyone else here. I have nothing to hide. You may not know the man who came to see me because he came as a poor and humble man, without displaying the privilege of wealth. He is Yonosuke-sama. He impressed me greatly with his simple, unadorned sincerity."

Nevertheless it seemed as if Yoshino had committed an indiscretion that could not be excused. "It is against the rules of the house," the master insisted.

While her career thus hung in the balance, Yonosuke himself dropped in, now through the front door. When the master told him pointblank that he would not tolerate such clandestine defiance of rules and that in any event Yoshino's future was as good as ruined thereby, Yonosuke said: "Very well, I shall hold myself responsible for her conduct. She has done no more than what a generous-hearted courtesan would do. I will never let her suffer for it. In fact ... I will pay ransom to secure her release from your contract. As of today she shall be a free woman."

And with Yoshino's glad consent he paid the ransom and took her home as his wife.

Pride and prejudice hurt the establishment, and sincerity was richly rewarded. For Yoshino proved herself to be a model wife. Wise and gentle in her ways and speech, she quickly familiarized herself with the affairs of her new environment and adapted herself to its manners and peculiarities without a trace of condescension. She joined the Buddhist church to prepare herself for the future world, the same as Yonosuke. She gave up
smoking her long-stemmed pipe when Yonosuke confessed aversion for the ill-smelling weed. Yonosuke was pleased in every respect.

But his family and clan of relatives came forth to voice objections. Whatever she might be now, Yoshino was once a courtesan, a dishonorable profession in their eyes. She could not be entered in the family registry. “Get rid of her,” they demanded of Yonosuke.

Yoshino was heartbroken. Yonosuke stood resolutely by her, but the clan council refused to budge too. Relations became strained all around. Finally, after discussing the matter sorrowfully with Yonosuke, Yoshino asked for separation.

“I shall be content to be your mistress,” she said. “Please let me stay in a separate house for servants, and you can come to see me whenever you like.”

“That won’t do at all,” Yonosuke replied. “I will not consent to any such arrangement.”

“Then I shall make a final appeal to your clan council. I shall try to persuade your relatives to change their attitude toward us.”

“How can you convince them when even Buddhist and Shinto priests have tried in vain to intercede for us?”

“Well then,” Yoshino was persistent, “I have a scheme. Please write an invitation to all of your relatives. Tell them you are sending me away tomorrow, so please come to renew the former pleasant relationship. It is to be a feast of reconciliation, between yourself and them. The cherries in the garden are just about to bloom. Tell them to bring along their servants too and enjoy the day together here—the whole clan. And leave the rest to me.”

“Whatever you wish,” Yonosuke agreed pleasantly enough, and the letters were duly dispatched by messenger.

The clan members came, all of them—children, servants and all—in palanquin after palanquin, for they bore no ill will toward Yonosuke. There was feasting and drinking in the great family hall overlooking the garden and in the pavilions overlooking hillocks, ponds, and flower beds.

At the height of the festivities Yoshino went before the revelers and bowed low with both hands on the mat. She wore a pale blue robe, a red apron denoting the status of a servant, and a kerchief on her head. She addressed the older members of the clan: “My name is Yoshino, and I was once a courtesan on Misuji-machi. I feel I am unworthy to appear before this family gathering. Today, however, I am to be sent away from this household as an unwanted wife. I should like, if you will let me, to serve and entertain you as my last act here.”

Thereupon she began to sing a song of olden times. Next she entertained the guests by playing a haunting musical piece on the koto. Then she brewed ceremonial tea, serving it to the guests in a charming, well-bred way. And she recited poems. She arranged flowers in trays to brighten up the hall.

She did all these things serenely in a way that suggested they were not something merely to be enjoyed by men at first-class teahouses. She showed that they were accomplishments that any wife, in any home, might freely and profitably exercise for the enjoyment of her family.

After that she mixed easily with the guests as a hostess should, looking after the children’s disheveled hair, making up a twosome for the game of go, going back and forth from the kitchen for more drinks and delicacies. She looked after the guests’ every need, far into the night. And the guests unconsciously accepted her as the hostess herself. They forgot that the time to leave was long past due.

In the small hours of the morning the many clan members finally left for their homes. The womenfolk said: “We must never let Yonosuke get rid of such a fine wife. Even we women have never felt so pleasant as in her
company. No one need feel ashamed with a bride so gentle and wise and capable.” Then they told the menfolk: “Please forgive her for her past and let her become Yonosuke’s legitimate wife.”

The menfolk nodded their heads vigorously in affirmation. “She is a fine and lovable woman,” they agreed emphatically. “Who said they must part?”

THE SPIRIT IS RESTLESS

But a wife is one thing, a man’s prerogative quite another. Or so ran the thought to which the forever footloose Yonosuke instinctively fell heir. Before a year had passed, he felt no compunction whatever in straying from the home-fire kibachi. Domestic bliss is at best routine. The spirit is restless, lured by recurrent visions of fresh adventure.

Now it came to pass that Yonosuke acquired a like-minded friend and companion called Kanroku. This adventurer said: “With all the money in the world to spend, I have never yet gone to see the famous Shibaya-machi. Have you?”

“No,” replied Yonosuke. “The more the pity, no matter how you look at it.”

“It must be a strange place. They say that in ancient times the sweet potatoes along the banks of the nearby River Nagara turned into eels. Some kind of magic there.”

They laughed together over that.

“Well,” said Kanroku, “There is no reason why we should not go now.”

“Let’s go!”

And so two palanquins squeaked their way rhythmically toward the town of Otsu, along the highway thick with travelers. Soon they entered the town from Hatcho Street.

A woman’s teasing voice rang out: “Are you not looking for lodgings?”

Promptly the two men yielded to her invitation and got out of their palanquins. They were given a large clean room at her inn.

“Tell us, girls,” Kanroku addressed the smiling maidservants, “who is the most popular attraction here?”

The maids snickered. “The goddess of mercy,” was the sardonic reply. “You will find the goddess at the Ishiyama Buddhist Temple.”

Kanroku made a wry face. “You think you are witty, don’t you?”

Later he repeated the same question to the innkeeper. The innkeeper deprecated the thought. “You had better get the idea out of your mind,” he said. “You cannot visit harlots here for a mere six or seven me as you do elsewhere. And high-class courtiers... well, they are out of the question for yabo like you.”

Kanroku gnashed his teeth in suppressed rage. “If we look like tramps,” he said acidly, “it is because we are looking for secret adventure. Why should we travel in style, with manservants and all, and attract attention? We are not yabo; we are only disguised as such.”

Yonosuke thought it was all very funny. “Show him your gold coin,” he said laughingly.

From the kitchen came more voices of teasing ridicule: “Ah, Kanroku-sama is going to visit the prostitutes tonight! Oh, yes, he won’t!” And fingers of loud laughter were pointed at him.

Yonosuke, bored by this mysterious taunt, went casually out into the street. There, beneath the eaves of shops row on row, a curious jabbering crowd had assembled.

“Here comes the splendid troupe of pilgrims,” someone yelled.
And surprised indeed was Yonosuke when he discovered their extraordinary versatility. Themselves planning, supervising, and erecting the Noh stage precisely according to pattern, the courtesans chanted, handled the percussion instruments, acted, and danced all the parts of three of Zeami's celebrated two-act plays, Sada-ie, Makaze, and Midora.

"You did very well," he praised the courtesans after the performance. "Properly cadenced, beautiful and graceful. A happy talent indeed."

"Just for that, Yonosuke-sama, we shall honor you with a grand party. We'll show you that, though some of us have drifted away from Kyoto, for one reason and another, to this exotic southern port city, we have not forgotten the true art of entertaining. You shall see!"

And what he saw was a thing of sheer sumptuous delight. Great golden plates filled with strange delicacies were placed before him, and thirty-seven courtesans robed in varying shades of reddening autumn leaves put on a show based on the ancient Chinese wine-and-drinking poem called "Chiu Koa-sun." They wore scarlet net aprons, their sleeves girded up with golden sashes, sprigs of flowers in hand. They danced in wild abandon:

Under the shade of pines ever green,
Shall flow the wines of Iwai
For ages eternal.

The food was luxurious. "I once paid 300 ryo for quail broiled over a charcoal fire, just to please a Kyoto courtesan," Yonosuke reminisced, very apropos. "But here... these foreign-looking delicacies cooked or baked in wonderful tasting condiments... everything is so... so amazing. And so delicious."

Some of the native Nagasaki courtesans said: "Speaking of Kyoto courtesans, we wish we could see how they look today. We are curious, and we may have a lot to learn."

"You shall," Yonosuke replied. "I knew you would, so I brought with me the very things which will satisfy you... at least from this great distance."

He ordered the 12 boxes he had brought with him as extra luggage from Kyoto be brought into the room. Opening them one by one, he produced 44 huge full-robed dolls: 17 likenesses of noted Kyoto courtesans, 8 of Edo, and 19 of Osaka. These he arranged on the Noh stage, attaching the names of the courtesans on whom each was painstakingly and accurately modeled. Each face, each posture, each colorful robe was different from the other. Collectively they gave the impression of the height of female grandeur and beauty. There was not a single hint or suggestion of vulgarity.

"Oh... oh! This is too beautiful for us alone to see!" was the general exclamation.

And so the huge dolls were placed on public view, and almost everyone in Nagasaki came to see and sigh over these wondrous things of beauty. They satisfied, even if vicariously, the secret yearning of every normal man.

NO RETURN

At last the time of reckoning came for Yonosuke. For twenty-seven years, with his patrimony, he had ceaselessly devoted his mind and body to adventures among the gay quarters of the country, playing the part of the amoret for all it was worth. Now he was a gaunt figure, emaciated and fast deteriorating.

Yet he had no regrets. He had seen everything and done everything he wanted to do with the 25,000 gold kan bequeathed to him by his mother to spend as he pleased. Both of his parents were dead. He had no wife,
no heir, no legitimate children of his own, no family cares or obligations whatsoever. But how much longer, he wondered, could he continue wandering and losing himself in this mundane hell of the flesh, to be finally burned out by its all-consuming flames?

Ah, but he would soon, next year perhaps, enter into a state of second childhood. He was already hard of hearing. His legs were weak and wobbly, and he leaned heavily on a mulberry staff as he walked.

His once handsome face had gradually become withered and ugly. But he was not alone in this creeping decrepitude. All the women he had known intimately were now crowned with snow-white hair. Their once lovely faces were shrunken and wrinkled with age. Young girls whom he had gallantly helped into palanquins, parasol in hand on rainy nights, had turned into prosaic housewives—the sort that hold the affection of unexciting men.

Verily the times had changed irretrievably since his youth. That, perhaps was to be expected. “Even so, how could the world have changed so radically?” he mused.

He had never prayed consistently for salvation in the next world, accepting resignedly the incontestable belief that, after death, he would willy-nilly be torn by the punishing demons of hell. Even if he were to embark on a change of heart now, it would not be easy, he knew, to be saved by Buddha’s mercy. Yes . . . yes he would have to accept whatever punishment awaited him for his ignoble life upon this earth. He gave away most of his remaining property.

Then, in a final ineluctable flight of fancy, he buried 6,000 ryo of gold coins deep in the woods of Higashiyama, with the following epitaph engraved on a small stone monument:

Here lies the glitter of 6,000 ryo,
Hidden under morning-glories
That bloom in the shade of the setting sun.

And he planted morning-glories over the “grave.”

Quickly the story of this strange, whimsical burial symbolizing his own life spread through the city of Kyoto. But no one has ever been able to discover its location.

Later Yonosuke gathered together six of his cronies who had from time to time shared his unbridled life of pleasure. Then he had a ship built on a tiny delta island near Osaka. He named it Yoshiiro-maru and hoisted a white sail made from the silken inner garments that had once been those of Yoshino, the courtesan who had at one time been his lawful mate.

Curtains for the ship’s cabins and decks were fashioned from the robes given to him as keepsakes by other courtesans with whom he had dallied and whom he had abandoned. Sitting rooms were papered with the written mementos of still other courtesans. And the great ropes for the ship were braided from the thick strands of hair that had been presented to him by yet other women, in years past, as pledges of undying love.

Tubs filled with fresh-water fish were placed in the ship’s kitchen. Fresh supplies of burdock, yam, and eggs were buried in boxed soil. Into the hold went other foods, household drugs including rejuvenating stimulants and painkillers, bedside pictures, copies of The Tale of Ise, paper handkerchiefs, loincloths, and numerous other articles that gratified men’s needs and desires, such as leather strips, tin plates, clove oil, and pepper. Even swaddling clothes—signifying second childhood—were taken on board.

“We may never return,” said Yonosuke, “so let us drink to our departure.”
“Not coming back here?” His six bosom friends were amazed, baffled. “To what distant land, then, are we to accompany you on this ship?”

Yonosuke replied in an even tone: “All of you pleasure-seeking men have spent your lives in seeing and experiencing all there was to see and experience among dancing girls and wanton women. There is nothing else for you, or for me, to get excited about here. We shall leave with no regrets. From now on, we are going to cross the sea, in search of the isle of Nyogo, an isolated body of land inhabited solely by women. There I shall introduce you to a different type of female: the aggressive sort who will come to seize you and sweep you off your feet.”

“Well, that’s different!” his cronies responded gladly. “Even if we might turn to ashes there, we should feel content, for are we not destined for the amorous life forever?”

And so, with fanciful sighs, Yonosuke and his six companions lifted anchor and set sail, first for the Izu Peninsula. Then, on a clear day at the end of the tenth month in the year Tenwa 2 (1682), the ship with its human cargo of forever gay adventurers embarked on an ocean voyage, steadily toward the limitless horizon, from which there was to be no return.