

# KIMONO

JOHN PARIS

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*by*

JOHN PARIS



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**TO MY WIFE**  
**WITH LOVE AND GRATITUDE**

*Utsutsu wo mo  
Utsutsu to sara ni  
Omowaneba,  
Yume wo mo yume to  
Nani ka omowamu ?*

Since I am convinced  
That Reality is in no way  
Real,  
How am I to admit  
That dreams are dreams?

*The verses and translation above are taken from A.  
Waley's 'JAPANESE POETRY: THE UTA' (Clarendon Press),  
as are many of the classical poems placed at the head  
of the chapters.*

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## CHAPTER I

### AN ANGLO-JAPANESE MARRIAGE

*Shibukaro ka*  
*Shiranedo kaki no*  
*Hatsu-chigiri.*

Whether the fruit be bitter,  
Or whether it be sweet,  
The first bite tells.

THE marriage of Captain the Honourable Geoffrey Barrington and Miss Asako Fujinami was an outstanding event in the season of 1913. It was bizarre, it was picturesque, it was charming, it was socially and politically important, it was everything that could appeal to the taste of London Society, which, as the season advances, is apt to become jaded by the monotonous process of Hymen in High Life and by the continual demand for costly wedding presents.

Once again Society paid for its seat at St George's and for its glass of champagne and crumb of cake with gifts of gold and silver and precious stones enough to smother the tiny bride; but for once in a way it paid with a good heart, not merely in obedience to convention, but for the sake of participating in a unique and delightful scene, a touching ceremony, the plighting of East and West.

Would the Japanese heiress be married in a kimono with flowers and fans fixed in an elaborate *coiffure*? Thus the ladies were wondering as they craned their necks to catch a glimpse of the bride's procession up the aisle; but, though some even stood on hassocks and pew seats, few were able to distinguish for certain. She was so very tiny. At any rate, her six tall bridesmaids were arrayed in Japanese

dress, lovely white creations embroidered with birds and foliage.

It is hard to distinguish anything in the perennial twilight of St George's; a twilight symbolic of the new lives which emerge from its Corinthian portico into that married world about which so much has been guessed and so little is known.

One thing, however, was visible to all as the pair moved together up to the altar rails, and that was the size of the bridegroom as contrasted with the smallness of his bride. He looked like a great rough bear and she like a silver fairy. There was something intensely pathetic in the curve of his broad shoulders as he bent over the little hand to place in its proud position the diminutive golden circlet which was to unite their two lives.

As they left the church, the organ was playing *Kimi-ga-yo*, the Japanese national hymn. Nobody recognised it, except the few Japanese who were present; but Lady Everington, with that exaggeration of the suitable which is so typical of her, had insisted on its choice as a voluntary. Those who had heard the tune before and half remembered it decided that it must come from the 'Mikado'; and one stern dowager went so far as to protest to the rector for permitting such a tune to desecrate the sacred edifice.

Outside the church stood the bridegroom's brother-officers. Through the gleaming passage of sword-blades, smiling and happy, the strangely assorted couple entered upon the way of wedlock, as Mr and Mrs Geoffrey Barrington—the shoot of the Fujinami grafted on to one of the oldest of our noble families.

'Are her parents here?' One lady was asking her neighbour.

'Oh no, they are both dead, I believe.'

'What kind of people are they, do you know? Do

the Japs have an aristocracy and society and all that kind of thing?’

‘I’m sure I don’t know. I shouldn’t think so. they don’t look real enough.’

‘She is very rich, anyhow,’ a third lady intervened; ‘I’ve heard they are big landowners in Tokyo, and cousins of Admiral Togo’s.’

The opportunity for closer inspection of this curiosity was afforded by the reception given at Lady Everington’s mansion in Carlton House Terrace. Of course, everybody was there. The great ballroom was draped with hangings of red and white, the national colours of Japan. Favours of the same bright hues were distributed among the guests. Trophies of Union Jacks and Rising Suns were grouped in corners and festooned above windows and doorways.

Lady Everington was bent upon giving an international importance to her protégée’s marriage. Her original plan had been to invite the whole Japanese community in London, and so to promote the popularity of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance by making the most of this opportunity for social fraternising. But where was the Japanese community in London? Nobody knew. Perhaps there was not one. There was the Embassy, of course, which arrived smiling, fluent, and almost too well-mannered. But Lady Everington had been unable to push very far her programme for international amenities. There were strange little yellow men from the City, who had charge of ships and banking interests; there were strange little yellow men from beyond the West End, who studied the Fine Arts, and lived, it appeared, on nothing. But the hostess could find no ladies at all, except Countess Saito and the Embassy dames.

Monsieur and Madame Murata from Paris, the bride's guardians, were also present. But the Orient was submerged beneath the flood of our rank and fashion, which, as one lady put it, had to take care how it stepped for fear of crushing the little creatures.

'Why *did* you let him do it?' said Mrs Markham to her sister.

'It was a mistake, my dear,' whispered Lady Everington, 'I meant her for somebody quite different.'

'And you're sorry now?'

'No, I have no time to be sorry—ever,' replied that eternally graceful and youthful Egeria, who is one of London's most powerful social influences. 'It will be interesting to see what becomes of them.'

Lady Everington has been criticised for stony heartedness, for opportunism, and for selfish abuse of her husband's vast wealth. She has been likened to an experimental chemist, who mixes discordant elements together in order to watch the results, chilling them in ice or heating them over the fire, until the lives burst in fragments or the colour slowly fades out of them. She had been called an artist in *mésalliances*, a mismatchmaker of dangerous cunning, a dangler of picturesque beggar-maids before romantic-eyed Cophetuas, a daring promoter of ambitious American girls and a champion of musical comedy peeresses. Her house has been named the Junior Bachelors Club. The charming young men who seem to be bound to its hospitable board by invisible chains are the material for her dashing improvisations and the *dramatis personæ* of the scores of little domestic comedies which she likes to keep floating around her in different stages of development.

Geoffrey Barrington had been the secretary of this club, and a favourite with the divinity who presided over it. We had all supposed that he would remain

a bachelor; and the advent of Asako Fujinami into London society gave us at first no reason to change our opinion. But she was certainly attractive.

She ought to have been married in a kimono. There was no doubt about it now, when there was more liberty to inspect her, as she stood there shaking hands with hundreds of guests and murmuring her 'Thank you very much' to the reiterated congratulations.

The white gown was perfectly cut and of a shade to give its full value to her complexion, a waxen complexion like old ivory or like a magnolia petal, in which the Mongolian yellow was ever so faintly discernible. It was a sweet little face, oval and smooth; but it might have been called expressionless if it had not been for a dimple which peeped and vanished round a corner of the small compressed mouth, and for the great deep brown eyes, like the eyes of deer or like pools of forest water, eyes full of warmth and affection. This was the feature which struck most of us as we took the opportunity to watch her in European dress with the glamour of her kimono stripped from her. They were the eyes of the Oriental girl, a creature closer to the animals than we are, lit by instinct more often than by reason, and hiding a soul in its infancy, a repressed, timorous, uncertain thing, spasmodically violent and habitually secretive and aloof.

Sir Ralph Cairns, the famous diplomat, was talking on this subject to Professor Ironside.

'The Japanese are extraordinarily quick,' he was saying, 'the most adaptable people since the ancient Greeks, whom they resemble in some ways. But they are more superficial. The intellect races on ahead, but the heart lingers in the Dark Ages.'

'Perhaps intermarriage is the solution of the great racial problem,' suggested the Professor.

'Never,' said the old administrator. 'Keep the breed pure, be it white, black, or yellow. Bastard races cannot flourish. They are waste of Nature.'

The Professor glanced towards the bridal pair.

'And these also?' he asked.

'Perhaps,' said Sir Ralph, 'but in her case her education has been so entirely European.'

Hereupon, Lady Everington approaching, Sir Ralph turned to her and said,—

'Dear lady, let me congratulate you: this is your masterpiece.'

'Sir Ralph,' said the hostess, already looking to see which of her guests she should next pounce upon, 'you know the East so well. Give me one little piece of advice to hand over to the children before they start on their honeymoon.'

Sir Ralph smiled benignly.

'Where are they going?' he asked.

'Everywhere,' replied Lady Everington, 'they are going to travel.'

'Then let them travel all over the world,' he answered, 'only not to Japan. That is their Bluebeard's cupboard; and into that they must not look.'

There was more discussion of bridegroom and bride than is usual at Society weddings, which are apt to become mere reunions of fashionable people, only vaguely conscious of the identity of those in whose honour they have been gathered together.

'Geoffrey Barrington is such a healthy barbarian,' said a pale young man with a monocle; 'if it had been a high-browed child of culture like you, Reggie, with a taste for exotic sensations, I should hardly have been surprised.'

'And if it had been you, Arthur,' replied Reggie

Forsyth of the Foreign Office, who was Barrington's best man, 'I should have known at once that it was the twenty thousand a year which was the supreme attraction.'

There was a certain amount of Anglo-Indian sentiment afloat among the company, which condemned the marriage entirely as an outrage on decency.

'What was Brandan dreaming of,' snorted General Haslam, 'to allow his son to marry a yellow native?'

'Dreaming of the mortgage on the Brandan property, I expect, General,' answered Lady Rushworth.

'It's scandalous,' foamed the General, 'a fine young fellow, a fine young officer, too! His career ruined for an undersized *geisha*!'

'But think of the millions of *yens* or *sens* or whatever they are, with which she is going to re-gild the Brandan coronet!'

'That wouldn't console me for a yellow baby with slit eyes,' continued the General, his voice rising in debate as his custom was at the Senior.

'Hush, General!' said his interlocutor, 'we don't discuss such possibilities.'

'But everybody here must be thinking of them, except that unfortunate young man.'

'We never say what we are thinking, General; it would be too upsetting.'

'And we are to have a Japanese Lord Brandan, sitting in the House of Lords?' the General went on.

'Yes, among the Jews, Turks, and Armenians who are there already,' Lady Rushworth answered. 'An extra Oriental will never be noticed. It will only be another instance of the course of Empire taking its way Eastward.'

In the Everington dining-room the wedding presents



were displayed. It looked more like the interior of a Bond Street shop where every kind of *article de luxe*, useful and useless, was heaped in plenty.

Perhaps the only gift which had cost less than twenty pounds was Lady Everington's own offering, a photograph of herself in a plain silver frame, her customary present when one of her protégées was married under her immediate auspices.

'My dear,' she would say, 'I have enriched you by several thousands of pounds. I have introduced you to the right people for present-giving at precisely the right moment previous to your wedding, when they know you neither too little nor too much. By long experience I have learnt to fix it to a day. But I am not going to compete with this undistinguished lavishness. I give you my picture to stand in your drawing-room as an artist puts his signature to a completed masterpiece, so that when you look round upon the furniture, the silver, the cut glass, the clocks, the engagement tablets, and the tantalus stands, the offerings of the rich whose names you have long ago forgotten, then you will confess to yourself in a burst of thankfulness to your fairy godmother that all this would never have been yours if it had not been for her!'

In a corner of the room and apart from the more ostentatious homage, stood on a small table a large market-basket, in which was lying a huge red fish, a roguish, rollicking mullet with a roving eye, all made out of a soft crinkly silk. In the basket beneath it were rolls and rolls of plain silk, red and white. This was an offering from the Japanese community in London, the conventional wedding present of every Japanese home from the richest to the poorest, varying only in size and splendour. On another small table lay a bundle of brown objects like prehistoric axe heads, bound round with red and white string, and vaguely odorous of