

American Geisha

Marion Taylor

AMERICAN GEISHA

'Come and be my geisha'. Responding to her solidier husband's invitation, an American woman arrives in 1950's Japan and encounters something very different to the world of Madame Butterfly and Lafcadio Hearn she is expecting. Entertaining and insightful, this memoir captures the challenge and mutual incomprehension she experiences as she strives to learn about another culture and people, while they struggle to understand her. Written with tremendous zest and good humour, *American Geisha* is a timeless example of how to live abroad successfully in an increasingly global world, as well as a fascinating account of everyday life in Japan in the immediate post-war years.



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AMERICAN GEISHA

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Preface

This book is not intended to be anything more than a series of impressions, honestly told, about a land of delicate beauty and charm. While perhaps only a fool would rush in where Lafcadio Hearn has so faultlessly trod, this fool, like the Ancient Mariner pinning down the helpless Wedding Guest, must needs tell her tale and spoil white paper.

And the books she has consulted to help spoil the white paper? Some that were recommended by her friend, the scholarly Muragishi-san of the American Cultural Center in Sapporo—Oreste and Enko Vaccari's *English-Japanese Conversation Dictionary*, Seiji Miyazaki's *The Japanese Dictionary*, the Japan Travel Bureau's *Japan, the Pocket Guide*, Atsuharu Sakai's *Japan in a Nutshell* (which the little old author sold her himself in the lobby of the Fujiya Hotel), Frank B. Fisher's *Fact, Fables, Fiction of Hokkaido, Japan*, the article on Japan in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1946 Edition), the various guide-books sold in such places as Nikko, Kyoto and Tokyo; the rest of the volumes put out by the Japan Travel Bureau, such as Issōtei Nishikawa's *Floral Art of Japan*, Tourist Library 3; Matsunosuke Tatsui, *Japanese Gardens*, Tourist Library 5; Shūtarō Miyake, *Kabuki Drama*, Tourist Library 7; Aya Kagawa, *Japanese Cookbook*, Tourist Library 11; to name only a few.

But mostly she has tried to use her eyes, her ears and her feelings to help you enjoy Japan as much as she did.

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For Muragishi-san, Ikeda-san and Kimura-san, the
three little matrons of Japan who helped me to love
their lovely land and were my friends.

CHAPTER I

Flowers and Welcome

THE Chinese have a saying that the longest journey in the world begins with the first step. But my longest journey began with the first letter. "Survey for army completed. Am being transferred to Japan. How would you and Johnny like to come over and be my Geishas?" wrote my soldier husband, air mail, special delivery, six cents due.

"Johnny is a funny sex for a Geisha, but when can we start?" I air-mailed back, no cents due. "And don't be picking up any other Geishas until we get there."

"Am spending all my time trying to finish up my findings on Korea and other points east and west, so how can I be spending my time picking up Geishas? But as soon as I arrive in the land of the Rising Sun, I'll send for you," my husband air-mailed back, three cents due.

And now, after many letters, and many steps, my son Johnny and I were standing on the battleship-grey deck of an army transport, looking out across steel-grey waters into the yarn-grey mists that were knitting a scarf that completely muffled Yokohama. Tears of frustration stung my eyes. That view of the superb harbour of Japan, that first precious glimpse of Fujiyama I had dreamed of for so long—were they all to be swallowed up by fog?

But at our feet lay a sight not even the clouds could destroy. Three small fishing boats pirouetted toward us in water that was suddenly incredibly blue. Oriental sampans with matting sails, their decks swarming with small, yellow-skinned men wearing sacks for coats and towels for hats. Then ships began sliding through the banks of fog—the *Haugoland* of Sweden, the *Chester* of England, ships with names ending in *Maru* flying the flag of Japan.

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But the fog rang down again like a curtain and began to wring out drops of rain.

Then suddenly docks appeared and a band played "The Star Spangled Banner." Far-off blurs of khaki waited in the April rain, loaded with flowers. Much closer, yellow faces studied us curiously, under toadstool hats, above rows and rows of sheaves of straw.

"Japanese dock hands in their raincoats," explained a voice near me at the rail. "They use rice straw for everything."

I gazed at the dark, slanting eyes, the yellow skins, and thought these are the faces of Asia I signed up to live with for at least a year. I shivered with the strangeness of it all.

"Mommy, mommy, there's daddy," shrieked Johnny. Then I forgot the faces of Asia in another face beaming up at Johnny and me from the end of the dock, even though the words it shouted were torn away by the wind and rain.

"Caesar," I shrieked. And shortly after, a boy in a blue Cub Scout uniform and a sweater girl in an oilskin slicker were embracing an American officer in the rain.

The yarn-grey mists still muffled Yokohama and the silver, slanting rain that could have been something out of a Japanese print still splashed down three hours later, as we said goodbye to our shipmates, gathered up our baggage and exchanged our ship for a bus loaded with women, children, officers, cats and dogs. I kept my eyes fastened to the water-spangled windows. More mushroom hats and thatch-roof raincoats. Gay kimonos under bobbing oiled-silk parasols. Bare feet in clogs like wooden cradles that clack-clacked along the sidewalks like horses' hooves. Crooked streets. Tippy warehouses. And now with the coming of night, swaying lanterns amid neon signs bearing strange hieroglyphics. Small open-air shops full of more bobbing oiled-silk umbrellas, more gay kimonos, more bare feet in clogs.

Then suddenly we stood in a station full of diminutive chairs and benches, from which we hurried on to a train headed for Hokkaido, the northernmost island of Japan.

The rain that had splattered the windows of the bus raced

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across the windows of the small, narrow train. But a scene began unfolding like a strange, beautiful movie travelogue. More crooked narrow streets of Yokohama, with lanterns steaming in the mist. Then the crooked, narrow streets of Tokyo, with open-air stalls bursting with cabbages, carrots, brooms, pots, pans, rice, kimonos, tea cups. Markets, Caesar told me. Three sets of dishes and you were in business.

More crooked, narrow streets. Then wide streets and boulevards, teeming with cars and buses, and men and women in slickers, tweeds, sweaters and skirts blent with the clogs and kimonos.

The boulevards were followed by clusters of dark houses, with sudden peeps into lighted Japanese rooms where kimonoed people knelt on the floor. Under the lashing, April rain, I sat dreaming of *Madame Butterfly* and Lafcadio Hearn.

But I didn't dream long of *Butterfly* and Hearn. For the creaking train we rode north to Sapporo bore a startling resemblance to the coaches I used to ride in in the United States thirty years ago. Even though this was first class, here were the same moth-eaten green and red plush seats upholstered in concrete, the same creak, creak, crack of the rails, the same desperate choice between having the window shut and breathing air beside which the atmosphere of the catacombs would be a zestful zephyr, or having the window open and being assailed by dive bombers of cinders and smoke. Either way your hands became black and your face looked like Al Jolson made up to sing "Mammy," and your feet crunched cinders and gum and candy bar wrappers and cigarette stubs on the eroded concrete floor.

Then a Japanese porter, so small he looked like a fifth-grader, let down our faded red seats to form a compartment which reminded me of Wordsworth's "Nuns fret not at their narrow convent room," if the rooms were made for nuns of especially dainty size. The beds hovered one over the other, bunk style, and the mattresses, which in the United States of my childhood seemed to be stuffed with wood shavings or pine cones, were on this train stuffed with rice straw, producing the same lumpy

effects. The sheets had long ago yielded their white to the cinders and had lapsed, not into a tattle-tale grey, but a gossip black, with blankets to match. The pillows, too, were stuffed with the eiderdown of the Orient—rice husks, which bunched and massed under our heads like sacks of grapefruit.

The path left beside the hovering bunks in the nun-cell hardly accommodated our feet, much less our baggage. And just as in my youth, we opened up a steel cabinet painted to look like a cross between pine with knots in it and mahogany with grains in it, and found we had a dented tin wash-bowl with taps above it, which irresolutely gave forth water. When we wished to dump the water, we had to tip the tin bowl so that the contents rushed down to sprinkle the tracks. Likewise our cigarette butts rushed down to sprinkle the tracks through a brass, cuspidor-like hole in the floor.

One difference between the trains of my youth and this one I quickly noted, however. Whereas the trains of my youth had been built to accommodate cowboys and six-footers from Texas, this one was made to take care of the Japanese. That meant that I, who am something like five foot six, just made the grade into my bunk, while Caesar, who is six feet two, had to curl up like a corkscrew in his.

Also the small room which the porter described as “*Benjo*—mean water-closet—him at end of car” yielded a startling contrivance. An elevated platform containing an elongated bowl was fitted with a wooden frame, which could be taken on or off, much like the toidy seats we hook onto our Stateside toilets for our children. This Oriental bathroom architecture, I soon learned, was designed to give comfort to both Westerners, who sit to relieve themselves, and Orientals, who squat. And why should an Occidental fuss and fume and say the Oriental is abnormal in this? I asked myself. After all what does a hunter do in the woods?

Dipping into the army booklet given me in Chicago, the one entitled *So You're Going to Japan*, I found out why this creaking train resembled the trains of my youth. “Shortly after

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Commodore Perry entered Uraga Harbour with four ships and 560 men, on July 8, 1853, to open up Japan, things American became popular with the Japanese," said the booklet. "They copied our trains, our street cars, even our bustles."

While my youth doesn't date back to 1853, and I never wore a bustle, I began to see why this train and the trains of my youth looked like first cousins.

The next morning I was back at my soot-grimed window. The rain had stopped, but the skies were still full of grey-yarn clouds. The April countryside was green with bamboo and in all the valleys swarmed the never-ending terraces of rice. Brown velvet roads looped past low, unpainted houses with sliding doors and windows. Here a woman with a face like an English walnut under her mushroom hat hoed her garden, her black bloomer pants flopping in the wind like twin ravens. There men in more mushroom hats, their kimonos girt about their loins, stood knee-deep in the water, planting pale green spears of rice.

Everywhere villages with huddles of tiny unpainted houses, streets bulging with markets, bicycles and thronging women in bright kimonos and those short, wide-sleeved coats my army booklet told me were *haori*, which over obi sashes tied in big bows in the back made all the women look a little like the Hunchback of Notre Dame.

Everywhere the well-pruned, the manicured look of a countryside where crops were grown wherever it was possible and many places we Occidentals would think it was not. Rice paddies so clogging the valleys, they looked like rivers of green in flood. More rice paddies, never-ending bath-tubs of muddy water, and rows and rows of tea marching straight up the mountainsides to crowd out the pines.

The green and gold of Honshu began to be burnished with spring sunlight, which etched the powdery white, the pink of plum and cherry blossoms, the ivory of magnolias. Here a scarlet *torii* wrote the letter H against the sky, there, amid the green corduroys of rice in the never-ending bath-tubs, was the rune of a crimson, many-roofed pagoda.

I began to have the feeling of being projected into a world of Japanese prints. Here were the same crumpled mountains that looked like huge layer cakes squeezed by giant hands. There, where the rice paddies left off and the trees took over, were the same tortuous waterfalls, the same twisted black pines, the same soaring ravens. It was the majesty of mountains caught and held in a daintiness that could only be Japanese. A world of Hokusai and Hiroshige, so strange, so totally unreal I kept pinching myself to be sure I was really riding through it.

It was noon when we arrived at a town called Aomori and exchanged our train for a ferry that was to take us from the island of Honshu to Hokkaido. Once again I felt projected backward in time. This small boat with its grimed smokestack and the park benches on its deck, surely I had seen it before? Ah, yes, once long ago when my aunt had taken me from Chicago to Michigan City on a Great Lakes ferry. Inside the cabin were the same wooden benches, where you could gaze out of the same small portholes. Here too was the same low, cramped dining-room with its small booths. The nautical lunch might have come out of that trip of my childhood, too, the same fried shrimp, the same fried oysters.

But standing on the windy deck, watching the snow-clad mountains of Honshu slip away and the snow-clad mountains of Hokkaido come toward us was like nothing out of my Middle-Western childhood. For porpoises leaped and flipped and played tag with our boat all the way to Hokkaido. Little dancing sampans were everywhere, even in the rain which started falling again. And the yellow-skinned fishermen hauling in lines here, casting out nets there. Might not some of them be Russian? For there were whispers that the Commies were slipping in and out of the Tsugaru Straits, the strip of water between Honshu and Hokkaido, almost at will.

Hakodate was a bleak, windy, unpainted town in the grey April light, full of fish drying on fences, roofs and back yards. We exchanged our ferry for our train, which had crossed the straits in the hold with us. But once again my eyes welled with

tears of frustration. Just as we had crossed most of Honshu in the dark, so we were now to travel through most of the island of Hokkaido in the dark.

We woke up in Sapporo, the biggest city on the northernmost island. The grey light of the raw April glimmered across modern-looking buildings of brick, stone and steel.

“Sapporo! Sapporo-no-eki!” As Johnny and I followed Caesar’s broad back into the Sapporo railroad station, I felt as though I had been hurtled out of my world of Japanese prints into a World War II movie. Jostling the crowd of kimonos and *haori* that seemed to invent new colours for the rainbow, elbowed a thin little man with flashing white teeth and shiny eye-glasses, who could have been Hakagawa, the dangerous Japanese spy in “Tokyo Intrigue.” Behind him strode a pompous sofa cushion of a man who could have been the enemy general in “Sands of Okinawa.”

But pathos was in my World War II movie too. Clusters of women with babies on their backs squatted near the door, wearing such dirty, torn kimonos and padded coats, the wind whistled through them like sieves. More raggy, baggy kimonos over flopping raggy, baggy pants appeared on the men at their sides, along with the strangest shoes I have ever seen. Rubber boots with a space between the big toe and the rest of the foot, giving the wearer a devilish cloven hoof. “Workmen’s boots,” whispered Caesar.

The parade of Japanese babies strapped to their mothers’ backs now going by me, surely this must have been added to my movie for the tender touch. Not like Indian papooses so that the little black eyes could look backward as their mothers walked. These yellow-skinned babies, wearing tiny kimonos that were replicas of their mothers’, rode astride their mothers’ spines, like small pony riders, so that they looked constantly at their mothers’ hair. But mostly they slept, with little hooded heads bobbing, and little legs dangling like those of fat rubber dolls.

I looked curiously at the harnesses that bound these plump

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little riders. Strips of cloth, which fitted under their small buttocks like hammocks, crossed in front of their mothers' breasts, like the ribbons that held a woman's gown back in old Athens.

Then my eyes veered over to something else in the pale April sunlight that slanted through the high-vaulted windows. A huddle of men and women in fur-lined caps, capes and boots, who looked like Russian Cossacks brought in for a sub-plot.

But squatting next to them sat three strange-looking people I



couldn't fit into my World War II movie. A man with a great bush of brown whiskers and a white skin wore a gunny-sack coat and pants decorated with what looked like American Indian eagles and bears. Beside him perched a woman and a child also in gunny-sack coats and pants decorated with bears, their necks roped about with kindergarten beads. But what was most arresting was that the woman sported a pair of bright blue moustaches.

"Ainus," whispered Caesar. "Descendants of the white men who once occupied all of Japan, but are now only found on the island of Hokkaido. The woman wears a tattooed blue moustache to show she is married."

But I was pulled away from my contemplation of things

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Japanese by something very American. An army major was coming over to greet us, with an enormous bouquet of jonquils. "Welcome to Japan," he said, handing me the flowers with a smile so broad it seemed to warm the whole station.

We rode the bumpy miles from Sapporo to Camp Grey in the major's Chevrolet, following a meandering river through a gentle valley flanked by fir-clad mountains. As in Honshu, it seemed as though a giant had squeezed cosmic pieces of layer cake in his Titan hands and tossed them idly aside. And like the mountains in the old Japanese prints, these peaks were still scalloped with snow, while Moiwa, the shaggy mountain we followed the most persistently, had a three-storied pagoda pricking into the sky.

Huddled in the valley were the myriads of open-air stalls, the cluster of brown velvet houses that made up residential Sapporo. "Some say the Japanese don't use paint because they think spirits live in the wood, while others say the Japanese believe exposing wood to the weather preserves it better than paint," explained our American major. "Anyhow, paint manufacturers would starve over here except for the lacquer on Buddhist temples."

More clusters of houses, more shops that even in the raw cold of a Hokkaido April were open on the front and sides, unheated except for the small charcoal fires in clay pots I learned were *hibachis*. More dishes, pots, brooms, cabbages, potatoes, rice and fish. Also bolts of cloth, sweaters, pants, kimonos, dresses and coats hanging on hangers, grotesquely swaying in the sharp breeze like the decapitated criminals of medieval Europe.

Then more rice paddies. More truck farms.

At last we stood in an army camp that could have been any army camp in the United States. Across the patches of snow I began mounting concrete steps into a wooden duplex that could have been any duplex back home.

Inside, I was greeted by blonde furniture upholstered in blue plush over rice husks, and Broadloom rugs that might have been ordered from Sears, Roebuck. "But these are genuine Orientals,

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having been made in the Orient," wisecracked our American major.

Everywhere stood vases and bowls with graceful arrangements of tulips, lilies and ferns. A slender Japanese girl, wearing a blue sweater and skirt, emerged from the kitchen.

"This is Kinu-san, your new maid," said Caesar.

"Hal-lo." The girl's ivory face flushed scarlet with pleasure and embarrassment. Then she waved a slim yellow hand in the direction of the bowls and vases. "For you, *Okusan*. Flowers mean—how you say—wal-come."

CHAPTER II

The Japanese Workman

The next morning I made my acquaintance with that great topic of Americans in the land of the Rising Sun—the Japanese workman. Please don't think I am about to malign him. He is diligent as a bumble bee, he is patient as a stone, and he is as polite as a French hotel manager seeking your business. But——

It was right after I had showered and gone down to the kitchen to get breakfast that I found water splashing from the ceiling. All at once the water spattering down on to the kitchen floor began to have a current and swirl out the back door. Also the region over my head began to be full of thumps and bumps that meant Caesar was taking a shower.

“Call on *den-wa*,” said Kinu-san, gesturing at the telephone. Then she brought out a printed card that said, among other things, “For Repairs and Utilities, Phone 3344.”

When I dialled Repairs and Utilities, I was greeted by a highly accented Japanese voice. “Troubles? Ah, *so desu ka*. Workman send-u right-u out. House-u number-u please?”

I gave the house-u number-u, and sure enough the workman came right out. Only it was workmen, and they came charging along on bicycles as though they had just entered the six-day bike races. Only they weren't all stripped down for the races; they were all loaded up. Pipes, wrenches, saws and hammers stuck out of canvas bags strapped to their backs, to say nothing of wooden boxes strapped to their backs, and cardboard boxes strapped to the fore and aft of their bicycles. In fact, they were loaded down like six-day campers, even though they rode like six-day racers.

When all eight plumbers got into our house, it was like a meeting of the Japanese Diet. Naturally, having landed in Japan only four days before, I couldn't speak a word of their

language, and they, because they had been in Japan all their lives, couldn't speak a word of mine. So I just smiled, gestured and called the housegirl.

Kinu-san went into a deluge of Japanese and a spasm of pointing upward in the kitchen and downward in the bathroom. And the little men got to work with hammers and saws and tore up the bathroom floor. Not near the tub, where the water was leaking, but in the bathroom closet, where it was not.

I tried to point out that fact in English to the housegirl, who was supposed to pass it on in Japanese. But nothing came of it. The closet floor continued to be torn up. In fact, not only torn up, but torn out.

Partly this began to make sense, when our eight good men and true began to grope for pipes imbedded near the wall. I watched in fascination, while they wrenched and pounded like a bevy of Swiss bell-ringers, drawing tunes from the iron cylinders.

Do, re, me, fa, sol. Sol, fa, me, re, do. Over and over the notes sounded on my pipes, which might have been musical to listen to, but which I couldn't for the life of me see enhanced our plumbing. When the eight men had practised the partial scale eight times, they laid the floor-boards back down in the closet.

But the little men were by no means through. Two went down to the back yard, hauled out a work-box from the back of one of the bicycles and brought out sand, cement, and powder, with which they mixed up a tan-pink sauce, the shade of catsup blent with mayonnaise. This they slapped around the edge of the bath-tub, where it touched the floor and walls. Then just for good measure they continued to patty-cake their mixture around where the floor met the walls in the rest of the bathroom.

"Aren't they going to try out the shower to see whether it still leaks?" I asked Kinu-san.

I am sure she passed the good word on in Japanese. But nothing happened. No turning on of water, no going down into the kitchen to see if the ceiling leaked thereafter.

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However, the eight little men did tell my girl to tell me not to use the bath tub until the cement was dry, which might not be for a day or two.

For two days we all showered in the gymnasium of Camp Grey to give our bathroom plenty of time to dry. But we might as well have splashed at home. Because when we turned on our shower we relayed more water than ever from the bathroom to the kitchen.

Naturally I called 3344 again. And this time nine workmen came out, loaded up on bicycles. Once again they swarmed into the house, tore up the bathroom closet floor and played do, re, me, fa, sol on our pipes. But this time I was more suspicious. Even, I am afraid, sceptical.

“Why don’t you tell them to put hinges on the closet floor, so they can raise it up and down, handier when they have to come back?” I asked Kinu-san to ask the nine little men.

But I don’t think she bothered to translate that gem, which is undoubtedly just as well.

I will skip the eight more times the nine little men came out to our house to take care of the leak in the kitchen ceiling and then the leak in the living-room ceiling. Patient little men in glasses and khaki-coloured pants left over from the last Japanese war, and khaki-coloured shirts, which could have been left over from any war, and the split-toed rubber boots I had seen in the Sapporo station.

They were always smiling and they were always polite. And the water always leaked just as bad as before. But I finally stopped calling 3344 and took to wearing a raincoat when I got breakfast. After all, I wanted to see a little more of Japan than plumbers.

But don’t get the idea that I consider the Japanese workman a stupid creature. For every little man who do, re, me, fa, sol-ed on our pipes and still left the water flowing down through the kitchen ceiling, I found a workman or woman who showed ingenuity and skill.

Take Kinu-san, my housegirl. When our household goods

finally arrived, they included a first-rate vacuum cleaner (Sears, Roebuck can type: not an advertisement), a decrepit, tenth-rate sewing machine, which had been an experimental chain-stitch model put out by the Singer Company thirty years before and quickly abandoned (not an advertisement), a first-rate typewriter and a first-rate radio record-player that not only self-changed records, but played both ordinary and long-playing ones.

Kinu-san, brought up on brooms and *tatami* mats, took to our vacuum cleaner as though she had cut her baby teeth on it. Within an hour, she was skilfully manipulating all the extra sweeper, brush, duster and broom attachments, although she remarked, "I never see before."

Then there was the case of my baulky sewing machine. Back home, I used to spend hours re-threading it, trying to coax the old machine into rheumatic action. Even when I first bought it, not second-hand, but fourth-hand, it reminded me of a cranky old lady who wouldn't work unless she jolly well felt like it, and there were few times when she jolly well did. Furthermore, I never found a sewing-machine doctor who could restore her health.

But within a matter of minutes, Kinu-san had the old dame purring. First she washed her rusty face in kerosene, then gave her a good, square meal of lubricating grease, topped off with a machine-oil cocktail. The old lady stopped her tantrums. She smiled and stitched as though it were the gayest thing life had to offer. Not only thin materials, but Johnny's jeans and corduroys, which the old iron lady used to chew up and swallow and then just moan and die on.

Then take our complicated record-player. It was a child's toy in the hands of our capable Kinu-san, who played it constantly. For Kinu-san loved good music. We had opera with our meals, string quartets with our dish-washing, symphonies with our vacuum cleaning, and piano duets with our ironing. Over and over she played our phonograph records, and to her eternal credit, let it be said she eroded our classical records but our jazz not at all.

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And my typewriter? Ha, thought I. Here is a gadget she won't touch.

But, "Me study typewriter night school. No have, missus mind I practise hers sometime?" she asked me timidly when I first began to type.

What could missus do? You like to see a girl get ahead, even if it is on your own typewriter you spent a whole winter paying for with your substitute teaching money and you need for writing novels. So I told Kinu-san I didn't mind she practise mine sometime. The click of my typewriter, being clacked by her, echoed as rapidly through the house as when I clacked it.

Then came the day when Kinu-san tried to sew up a hole in Johnny's pup tent, and my cranky old iron lady wouldn't even growl and spit when Kinu fed her a machine-oil cocktail.

"What shall we do?" I gasped.

"Take her Mitsukoshi Department Store," advised Kinu-san.

So I took her Mitsukoshi Department Store.

Department stores in Sapporo are just about like department stores anywhere else in the world. Which is to say, they are among the tallest buildings in town, the most crowded, and the most full of the most miscellaneous objects for sale, dry goods and wet.

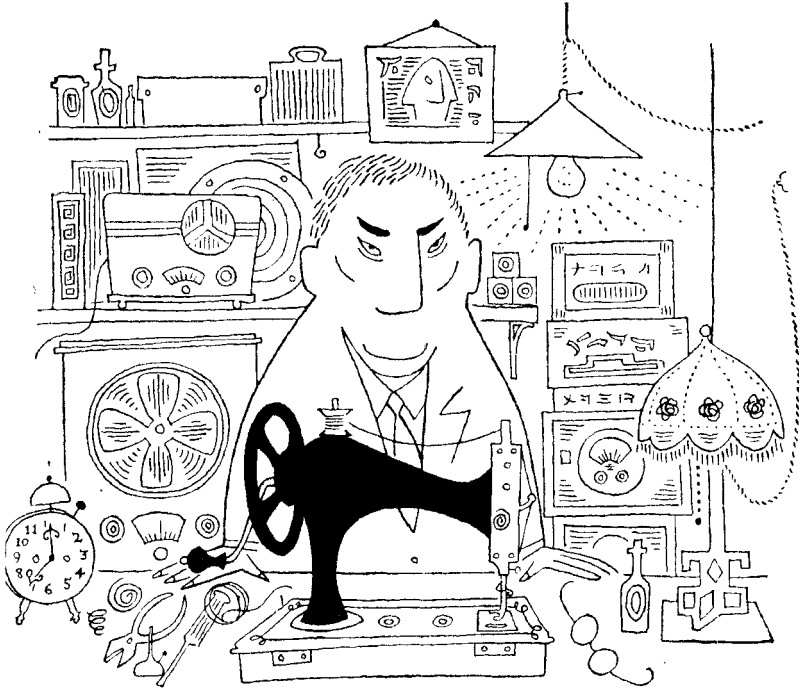
The Mitsukoshi Department Store was no exception. Except that it had its own Mitsukoshi flags flying all over outside. And more kimonos for sale inside than back in the States. Also more wooden clogs or *geta* and more paper fans. And more insistent fish aromas in the food department. Also the cash customers made more of a click-clack on the cement floors than the leather-shod customers back home.

It was just opposite the trays of redolent salmon (un-iced and un-refrigerated and therefore very strong-minded) that I found the repair department. But the smiling young man who waited on me didn't smell like fish. He was wearing a neat, black business suit and a heliotrope-scented hair oil that not only out-rivalled the fish, but reduced his hair to the consistency of raven lacquer.

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Also he understood English. "Come back seven day. Me fix. Good as when you buy."

No idle boast, that. For when I went back, seven day, for the baulky old iron lady who had given up the ghost, she purred over the silk and galloped over the hills and valleys of the sail



cloth the young man handed me as though she were a steeplechase jumper.

"A miracle," I burred. "I bought her when she was middle-aged. But you have restored her youth."

"You like?" grinned the smiling young man.

"I certainly do," I beamed back enthusiastically. "How much do I owe you?"

At this his eyes grew very sad. "Seven hundred and twenty yen." Then he ducked his head as though I were going to shoot him.

"Really?" I was the one that looked dazed now. Two dollars for a job that cost me ten back in the States, and then the old

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iron lady still coughed and baulked. But now she sounded as though she were going to run forever.

To make a long story short, she did. At least from that day to this, when she is still stitching pup tents.

I was so pleased with this experience, I decided to do something about Mr. Electric Pop-up. When we first purchased Mr. Electric Pop-up, as Johnny called our toaster, he used to draw two slabs of bread down to the fiery depths of his stomach and then belch them up again as bronzed as a pair of Florida tourists. But two months later he grew recalcitrant and refused to disgorge anything until we pried out the Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego pieces of bread, burnt to a black and brittle crisp. Three times I sent Mr. Electric Pop-up to a repair factory in downtown Chicago, where "They fix anything, missus, and this'll come back good as new."

Only Mr. Electric Pop-up never got over burning bread. So when I packed our furniture to go to Japan, I threw him away. Only he sneaked into our household goods and joined us at Camp Grey. And there, after I had such good luck with my sewing machine, I took him to the young Japanese who ran the electric department of the Army Post Exchange.

"Do you want to try to repair this old toaster?"

"*Hai* (meaning yes). No throw away. See what can do." The earnest young man sucked air in through his teeth with the whistling sound I had already noticed so many Japanese make when they were in earnest about something. "Come back, maybe ten days."

So in ten days, no maybe, I went back to the barricade of radios and phonographs that was the workshop corner of the earnest young man.

This time his round face was not only earnest, but smiling. "See what can do. And fix." He brought out Mr. Electric Pop-up, so shiny I hardly recognized him. "*Chotto matte kudasai*. Madame, please to wait."

And before I could imagine where he was going he hurried away.

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He returned with a small paper sack, his face grave and the whistling sound once more whirring through his teeth. Soberly he opened the sack and drew forth two white slabs, which he inserted into the flat stomach of my wiry friend.

“Show you how work,” the earnest young man told me. And there in the Army Post Exchange with soldiers clustering around, asking when breakfast was going to be served, and did we have coffee to go with our toast, Mr. Electric Pop-up converted two pieces of white bread to luscious ovals as tanned as Florida visitors, and then disgorged them in my face, the way he had not done for eight months and three trips to one of the finest repair shops in Illinois.

“Bravo!” I shouted. “You’ve beat Chicago. You’ve repaired Mr. Electric Pop-up.”

The sucking sound once more came through the teeth of the round-faced young man. But this time he was smiling “*Hai*. Thank-u you, yes. So proud.”

CHAPTER III

Good Samaritans

The little men of Japan were not only smiling when they came into our house to repair our plumbing, but they were smiling when we met them on the country highways and in the streets of the towns.

On a rainy afternoon three weeks after I arrived, Caesar and I were hurrying home over the pot-hole road from Sapporo, when we heard that familiar who-o-o-sh, whi-i-ish which meant a tyre was going down at a rapid rate. In fact, it was going down at such a rapid rate that by the time Caesar got out of our car, it was flat.

With the raindrops splashing over his brows and his neatly pressed winter uniform, Caesar smiled his most grimly sardonic smile and dusted off the ancient joke he always uses on such occasions. "It's only flat on one side."

"Can I do anything?" I asked in a voice I hoped wouldn't be heard above the patter of the rain.

But it was heard. "No, never mind. But what did you do with the jack the last time you had the car greased?"

The words Caesar uttered could have passed any chivalry test in the world. But I knew what they really meant. "Get out here and help me hunt up that jack I haven't been able to find since you drove the car last Thursday. I don't care if you are a lady and you'll get wet."

I had on my well-pressed winter uniform, too, a sweater and skirt I was still wearing late in the spring because our household goods hadn't yet come and these were all I had.

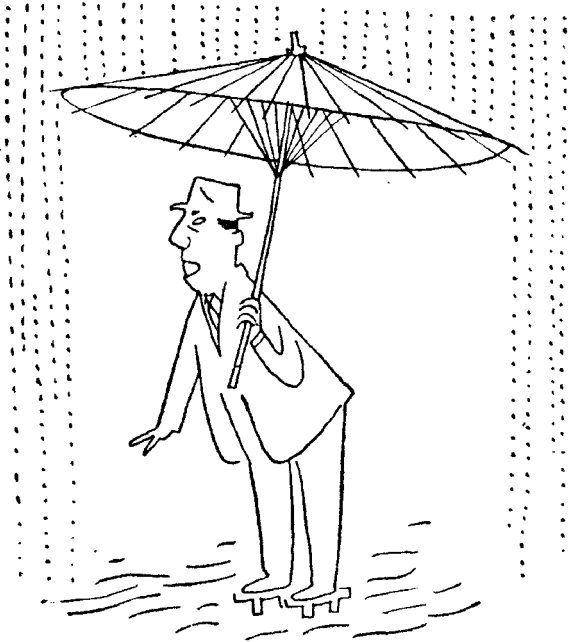
But even so I got out and hunted up the jack.

After that, just for good measure, I started to help Caesar use the jack, too. Only for a minute, however. Because although several Americans in jeeps splashed by us in the deluge, never

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offering to help, a Japanese trudging along in the mud with an oiled-paper umbrella over his head, stopped at Caesar's side.

He was in his well-pressed winter uniform, too. A neat tweed business suit, above his wooden *geta*, that because of the high price of suits in Japan would probably have to continue to serve him for quite a number of years.



The well-pressed tweed business suit didn't daunt him however. He stooped down to examine the tyre as quickly as if he had been wearing blue jeans and a T shirt.

"*Takusan* trouble? Help-u."

Yes, we had *takusan* trouble, but he also had on a *takusan* good suit. So we said, "Thanks a lot. But you'll get all dirty."

"*Jōtō*. Make no matter. Need help-u. I give."

Tweed Suit not only gave, but he made me go back into the shelter of the car. Which I did reluctantly not only because I was already wet, but I kept thinking how scarce a good tweed suit was in Japan.

Tweed Suit worked just as hard helping Caesar jack up the

car, take off the flat tyre and put on the unflat one from the trunk compartment, as if he owned the car.

Maybe that doesn't seem like a long procedure, but on a rainy, blowy afternoon in Hokkaido it can seem endless. Especially if you are wearing a good uniform or a good tweed suit.

At last the dirty job was done. Caesar wrung Tweed Suit's hand. "I don't know what I'd have done without you."

"Don't mention. Glad-u help." Tweed Suit gave him the flashy, gold-teeth smile so prevalent among his countrymen. He went over and re-raised his folded oilskin umbrella.

Caesar ransacked his pockets and brought out a wallet. "Here. Let me give you something."

"Thanks, but is nothing. I glad-u help."

Caesar tried to fold a bill into his hand. "Please take this five hundred yen. You pulled me out of a bad spot."

"No *o-kane*. Glad help."

"At least let me drive you home."

"No. Is nothing. Just live down road *sukoshi* ways."

Then with Caesar's profuse thanks still ringing in the rainy air, Tweed Suit pattered on down the road through the puddles, swinging his yellow and red oiled-paper umbrella.

Nor was that the only example of anonymous Japanese kindness we experienced while driving our Oldsmobile.

One week-end, a month later, Caesar and I decided to drive to Daisetzusan National Park, to see the sights and tramp in the mountains. But the park was over a hundred and thirty miles away through Japanese countryside equipped with far more Japanese road signs than English, and we had along no housegirl Kinu-san to help us read them.

Things went well, however, and we didn't get off the right gravelled road on to the wrong gravelled road more than three or four times, out in the country.

But when we got to the city of Asahigawa, all the English-marked signs got us nicely into the business district and then didn't tell us how to get out again, on to our destination of Sōunkyō.

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Now Asahigawa isn't a city the size of New York or London, or Tokyo, or even Kyoto or Yokohama. But if you have never seen it before and you can't read a single Japanese sign, it's big enough to get lost in. And that's just what we did. Hopelessly. In spite of the English-titled road map we carried.

"We cross the bridge and then take a jog to the right," said Caesar, looking long and hard at the large-scale map of Asahigawa at the side of our large Anglicized road map of Hokkaido.

But when we crossed the bridge and went to the right, we seemed to have to cross the bridge again and then go to the left. After which we should cross another bridge, then go to the right again, in order to get on the road to Sōunkyō.

After twisting and turning and crossing bridges about a dozen times, we were rats in a maze. There was nothing left to do, but pull out our English to Japanese dictionary and our Japanese to English dictionary and get to work on some of the citizens of Asahigawa.

I spent five whole minutes phrasing the question in as good Nipponese as I could muster, although I found out later it was none too good. "*Dōzo, doko ni Sōunkyō-no dōro-wa desu ka?*" I asked of the very next man standing on a corner watching us flounder around.

It's all very well to ask, "Please, where is the road to Sōunkyō?" in the best Japanese you can compose. But you feel perfectly helpless in the flood of Japanese you get as a reply. Somehow whenever I asked a question in the best Japanese I could muster, I always expected to get an answer back in the best English they could muster. And of course that just never happened. Furthermore the Japanese replies were always too rapid and too complicated for me to look them up properly in the Japanese to English Dictionary, even though by now I had taken three weeks of Japanese in the army night school.

Asahigawa was a long way from any major American army camp, and therefore, unlike Sapporo, very few of its citizens knew English. The smiling little man we addressed on the street corner seemed to know only the words, "Not know English,"

and in a few moments he saw we knew hardly any more Japanese. Certainly not enough for him to give us directions.

Therefore the shabby little man in khaki knickers motioned that he wanted to get into our car. Sitting down beside Caesar, he used the point to the right, point to the left, point ahead, point behind system, and led us to a police station.

One of the men in the police station spoke more English than "Not know English." But not enough to give us the complicated directions we needed to get out of town and on up the road. For Asahigawa, it seemed, was the local Rome, to which not only all the roads led, but out of which likewise all the roads led, to the utter confusion of the uninitiated.

It was the Japanese police, however, who solved the dilemma in an entirely practical way. After seeing that none of their Japanese was to any avail, the head man, or whatever he is called in a Japanese police station, got out a truck. And then, despite the fact that petrol was around fifty cents a gallon in Japan, he and his companions led us out of town.

Over bridges, around side roads, through fields, we wound through the countryside after them. Even if we had spoken perfect Japanese, we still would have had difficulty finding this route.

But at last the truck pulled up beside a sign that said, "Sōunkyō. 58 Km.," with arrows pointing in the right direction.

And how many yens did we owe the kind police for all their trouble? No, no, please, no *o-kane*—no money. How about a package of cigarettes apiece? No, no, is nothing. Then, how about some candy bars and chewing gum? Surely there must be something. No, no, is nothing. Well, maybe *hai*, yes, candy bars, chewing gum, *jōtō*. Chewing gum, specially, *ichi ban*.

Four chocolate bars and seven packages of chewing gum changed hands and then with a flurry of waves and "Sayōnaras" we were off.

Sōunkyō proved to be a primeval canyon of boulders and trees, boxed in by sheer walls of granite fluted like giant organ pipes. Pines swarmed along the river at the bottom treading the

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toes of willows, beeches and maples, which lifted gaunt heads to watch other rivers of silver and diamonds fling themselves to destruction over the precipitous cliffs. A canyon seemingly untouched by man yet containing a Japanese style hotel, the Sōunkaku, as big and elegant as anything we had yet seen. It also contained customers, all of them Japanese, who arrived in American Buicks, Lincolns, and Cadillacs, shiny, new and invariably black. Nor did these affluent Japanese merely bring their American cars. They also brought their Japanese servants, their own dishes, their own *futons* or Japanese mattress beds, and their own rice straw mats to lay them on, most of which their servants were busily loading and unloading from their cars most of the time we were there. All this in spite of the fact that the hotel supplied its customers with excellent servants, fine dishes, soft *futons* and clean rice straw floors, or *tatami*, to roll the *futons* out on.

Caesar and I enjoyed our weekend at the Sōunkaku, where even though we were the only Americans and the manager had to loan us one of the cooks out of his kitchen to serve us in our room because the cook seemed to be the only person in the valley who could speak English, we probably had less money than the rest of the clients in this fabulous hotel in the wilds of a thoroughly out of the way canyon in one of Japan's most unpopulated islands.

And where did these rich customers come from? When we laboriously put the question to Kitagawa, our English-speaking cook, he laboriously answered, "Asahigawa, Obihiro, Abashiri. Many, many places can come from on Hokkaido to stay Sōunkaku Hoteru. Even—" and here he inserted an elaborate and most Occidental wink—"even can come from Sapporo."

"No, Kitagawa," laughed Caesar. "We may have a pretty good car. But we certainly aren't rich customers."

"Many, many people in Japan very poor now," said Kitagawa soberly. "Especially since war. But still a few have *takusan o-kane*—mean much money."

On the way home, our pretty good car had trouble again in