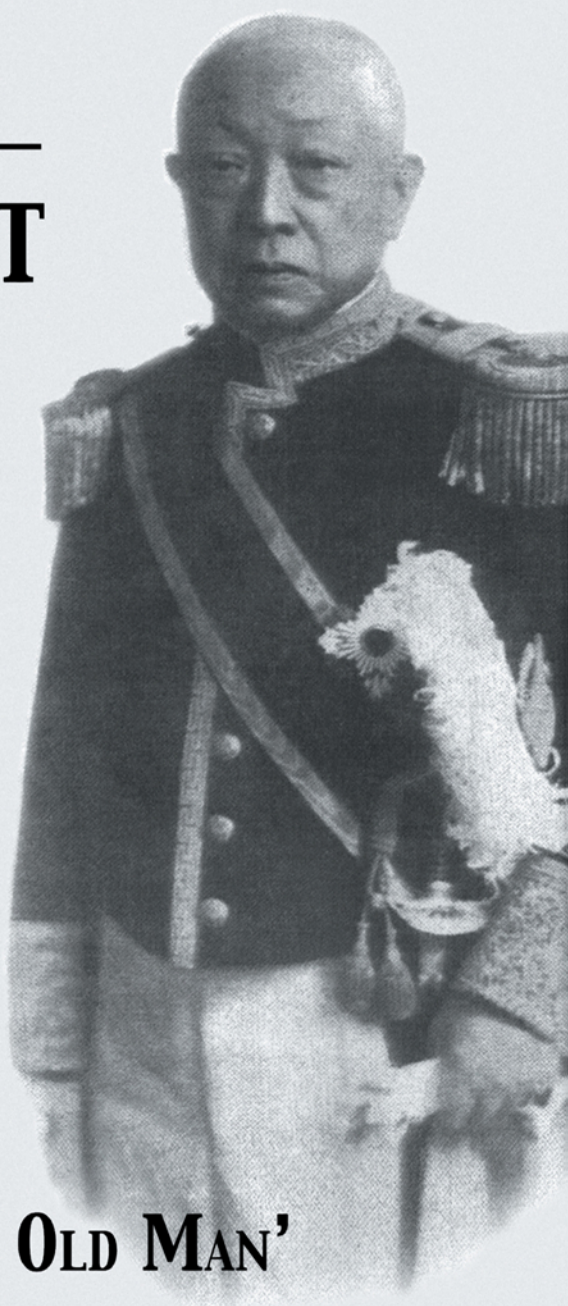


**BUNJI OMURA**

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# **THE LAST GENRO**

**PRINCE SAIONJI,  
JAPAN'S 'GRAND OLD MAN'**



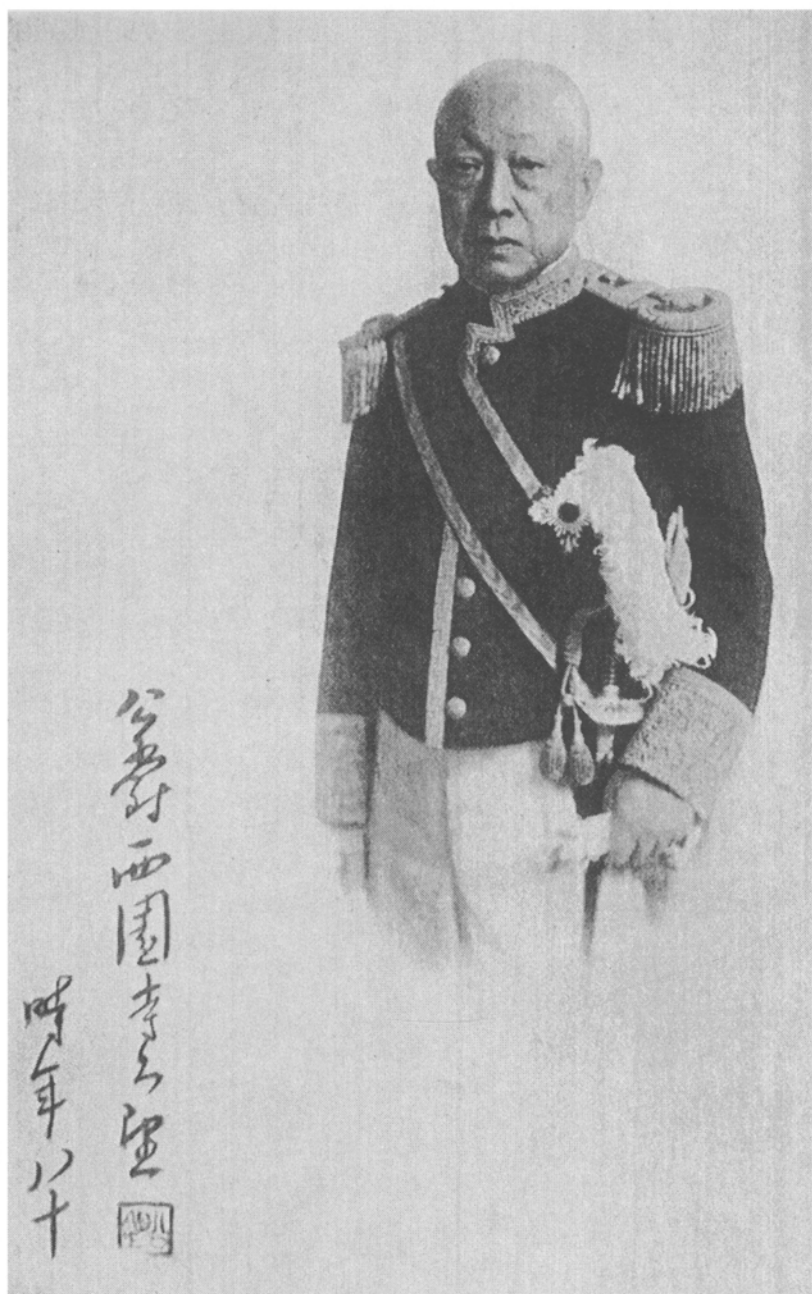
# THE LAST GENRO

Published originally in 1938 on the eve of the Second World War, this work focuses on the last member of a distinguished group of genros, or elder statesmen, who participated in the wars of the Meiji restoration and, in 1889 under the Emperor Meiji, drew up the Imperial Constitution on which the Japanese political system was based. Prince Saionji was the president of the Privy Council, the second president of the Seyukai party, twice Prime Minister, and Japan's Chief Delegate to the Paris Peace Conference

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PRINCE KIMMOCHI SAIONJI

# THE LAST GENRO

PRINCE SAIONJI, JAPAN'S "GRAND OLD MAN"

BUNJI OMURA

 **Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group  
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published in 2004 by  
Kegan Paul International

This edition first published in 2011 by  
Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada  
by Routledge  
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 10: 0-7103-0917-1 (hbk)

ISBN 13: 978-0-7103-0917-4 (hbk)

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TO  
PRINCE KIMMOCHI SAIONJI





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## FOREWORD

WHEN A NIPPONESE SPEAKS OF THE 'FATHERS' OF HIS country, he refers to them as Genros, elder statesmen. They participated in the wars of the Meiji Restoration, and in 1889 under Emperor Meiji they drew up the Imperial Constitution upon which the present political system is based. The Genros continued to serve as guardians of that document and as advisers to the Emperor. Their most important duty was to recommend a choice of Premiers to His Majesty.

In 1916 death had so thinned their ranks that the survivors recommended for their body a man who had fought with them in 1868 when he was a young courtier. They had sought his counsel before. This man, the President of the Privy Council, the second President of the Seiyukai Party, twice a Premier, and Nippon's Chief Delegate to the Paris Peace Conference, was Kimmochi Saionji, or as the Nipponese say, Saionji Kimmochi.

All the other elder statesmen have died. Since the Constitution makes no mention of this office, Prince Saionji, now eighty-eight years old, will be the last Genro.

The story of Saionji's long years embraces the history of New Nippon, which the West has chosen to call Japan. In 1849, when he was born, the government had been in the hands of the Tokugawa Shoguns for over two and a half centuries. Saionji was eighteen when Emperor Meiji ascended the throne. Under him a united nation began her progress.

That progress had been given an impetus by the arrival of Commodore Perry in 1854. Western commerce and civilization roused the Island Empire. Liberal ideas of the nineteenth century crossed the seas.

Following the Franco-Prussian War, Saionji spent some time in France where among other leaders he met Clemenceau.

He returned home ready to put his new ideas into practice in his brief editorship of a radical newspaper. His convictions became less arbitrary when he entered political life, but throughout his public career he was known as a liberal.

In his childhood he had been a favorite of Emperor Komei and was appointed the Emperor's Child-Chamberlain and Middle General; under Emperor Meiji, whose close personal friend he was, he served twice as Premier. It was under Emperor Taisho that he was sent to the Paris

## FOREWORD

Peace Conference, and at present he acts as the sole Councillor to His Majesty. In these various capacities his influence resulted in the appointment of thirteen Premiers, among them the latest, Prince Konoe Fumimaro.

During Saionji's lifetime, up to this writing in June 1937, Nippon engaged in four major conflicts: the Sino-Nipponese War in 1894-1895, the Russo-Nipponese War in 1904-1905, the World War in 1914-1918 and the 1931-1932 Manchurian Expedition.

Industrially, some small undertakings have grown into vast monopolies, notably, the Mitsui, Mitsubishi and Sumitomo Houses, the last headed by Saionji's younger brother Kichizayemon who was adopted into the Sumitomo family. Socially, the Nipponese have turned from their centuries-old customs to a widespread adaptation of Western ways.

Through the maze of readjustment, Nippon looks to Saionji as her guide. When too much modernization threatens her national integrity, she values his leadership, for he has seen the old order and the new, and whatever the 'Grand Old Man of the Empire' thinks suitable for the nation is acceptable to the man in the street. Reactionary political factions have not always agreed: there have been threats against his life when the extreme nationalists resented his opposition to their demands. Moralists at home and abroad did not approve when the seventy-year-old statesman brought his third young common-law wife with him to the Paris Peace Conference. Nor has the legend about his theoretical bachelorhood condoned in their eyes the fact that he has not troubled to marry any of his successive mistresses, although he had children by them. But these are the trivia of small souls. Throughout Nippon there is a vast awe for the man who lives alone in his Okitsu home, one hundred miles south of Tokyo.

Basing this romance on authentic historical facts, I have with all sincerity attempted to reproduce the life of Prince Saionji Kimmochi, the *Last Genro* of Nippon.

BUNJI OMURA

NEW YORK CITY  
June 1937

I



*COURTIER*



## CHAPTER I

### COURTIER

IT WAS IN KYOTO IN 1862.

In his home within the enclosure of the Imperial Palace, a twelve-year-old boy sat on the matted floor, reading. Beside him lay a *biwa*.

He heard the whinny of a horse. The book slid to the mat, and his hands reached hastily for the musical instrument.

"Kimmochi, we are going to ride."

Tokudaiji Kinzumi stood looking at his son who had been adopted ten years ago by the house of Saionji. Tokudaiji was wearing a simple courtier garb, a riding *bakama* and a short sword. The small upright headgear was tied under his chin. A black mustache with twisted ends heightened his dignity. Both father and son had round brown eyes, an aristocratic nose and an oval face. Severity marked the man's features.

"The steward has brought out your horse. Come, come!" Tokudaiji's eyes went from the book to the silent *biwa*. Kimmochi nodded, fastened a few stray hairs into his black topknot and placed the short sword at his hip. He followed his father.

Wordless, the two riders dodged the pine branches and blossoming cherry trees of the palace grounds and came into the street. Buddhist temple bells rang out in the spring dawn and the sun's rays spread above the tip of the Higashiyama.

Tokudaiji gave a signal; both tightened the reins, and set spur to their horses.

After a while they were sitting on the bank of the Kamo River. The cloud of dust had settled behind them and the horses nibbled at the grass. Some distance away, scores of women, their kimono skirts tucked up, were singing as they bleached their homespun clothes in the fast-running, crystal water.

"We rode early this morning, Father," the boy said as he wiped his high forehead.

Tokudaiji spoke in formal courtier fashion: "I have received discouraging reports about you from every source. Since the death of your foster father you are the head of the Saionji house, so that I, even though you are by birth my son, have no jurisdiction over you. But when the very members of the Saionji family complain to me



about your conduct, I feel obliged to speak." He touched his eyebrows and mustache with a small, printed towel.

"Did Sagami complain about me?"

Tokudaiji smiled in spite of himself. "Sagami, who taught you to drink and smoke, and all the other so-called social graces when you were only ten years old, who adores the ground you walk on—did Sagami bring any tales? You know better. No, she did not. But your new uncles—do you know what they say about you?"

A mischievous light played in the boy's dark eyes. He mimicked the precise accents of the uncles: "They say to their small sons: 'Don't imitate Kimmochi's ways. He is a disgrace to the family and will come to no good end. Be like his elder brother, Sanenori, who will succeed his father as the head of the Tokudaiji house. But stay away from Kimmochi.' They are afraid of me," Kimmochi concluded with boyish pride.

Tokudaiji's lips twitched. His favorite son had already aroused jealousy because of his fast promotions at court. At the age of two, he had been adopted by the important but childless Saionji family. When he was past three years old, he had acted as child-chamberlain to the Emperor. Now at twelve he had been relieved of the menial services and appointed Middle-General of the Right Imperial Guard. Gossips said that Emperor Komei regarded him as dearly as his own son, who was later to be called Emperor Meiji. It made Tokudaiji's heart swell with gratitude and pride. But there were also grave charges against Kimmochi.

"I previously thought that your major vice was this idle reading of books, but I have discovered that you also act in open defiance of the rules which the Tokugawas at Edo have laid down for us who live in the court circles. Our duties here are to serve His Majesty and nothing more. We must leave the management of the country's affairs to the Tokugawa Shogun. You know, furthermore, that we courtiers are not permitted to consort with people from out of the district. Yet you have received on these palace grounds visitors from outside. I hear that men from Satsuma and Choshu, the 'Sat-cho,' have frequently been invited to your house. You know how severely the Shogun punishes such transgressions. You think it is yourself whom these Sat-cho seek out, but did it ever occur to you that they want your popularity with the Mikado for their own advancement? How do you know that they are not mere sycophants?"

Kimmochi was throwing pebbles into the water. He said nothing.

"Thirdly, you practice the forbidden art of fencing. If you persist, I fear that you will be drastically punished. It is not only that you yourself are involved, but your adopted family, the long illustrious Saionji and their immediate relatives, may also be disgraced.

"These counts would be severe against a grown man. But neither your youth nor your privileged relationship with the Emperor, which does not add to the Shogun's liking for you, will long protect you if the Tokugawa men find out about your behavior. As I suspected, your constant book-reading is making a rebel of you. The rebel's way leads to destruction. Follow the example of the patriot and reap prosperity as a reward. And appreciate a little more your family heritage of *biwa* music. I fear you neglect it altogether."

Tokudaiji sighed after this long speech. Kimmochi looked up, a pebble in his hand.

"But, Father, why can't I read the nation's history books, especially those which tell of our Fujiwara ancestors, the Tokudaiji and the Saionji, many centuries ago when they in the name of the Imperial House actually governed the people? And as for the Sat-cho men, what if they are really honest? If the Sat-cho do conquer the Tokugawas for the Emperor, will they still be rebels? It will be they who are the patriots and the saviors of the country." His long smooth face was radiant against the sun. After a moment he began again. "Father, is it not the duty of every noble to defend the Mikado and himself against the enemy?"

"Yes."

"Then why does the Shogun forbid fencing?"

"Because he will have it so."

"Is it not the duty of every loyal Nipponese to unite his strength with that of every other countryman for the Emperor's greater glory?"

"Nominally, yes, but our Government does not wish us court nobles to mingle freely with outsiders, particularly with the Satsuma and Choshu *samurai* who are plotting its overthrow."

"They are the true patriots and the friends of the Divine Ruler of our country," the boy declared stubbornly. "The Tokugawas are impostors. Great Nippon does not need a Shogun. We owe allegiance only to the Emperor. His Majesty must make the decisions, not the Shogun—for instance, on whether the 'Red-hairs' may trade with us—"

"You are merely repeating what the Sat-cho men advocate—"

"But by what right can the Tokugawa Shogun, who does not even live in Kyoto, dictate to us? How does he dare to keep the Emperor's

friends from him? Isn't it as I said—the Sat-cho are the real patriots? I believe you think so, too.”

His round eyes flamed.

Tokudaiji looked sharply at his son.

“I will be frank with you, although I think you have divined my thoughts. For two hundred and sixty years, off in Yedo, the Tokugawa house has, as you say, held the reins of Government. They have run things to suit themselves. They have kept the Emperor in poverty and seclusion here in Kyoto, so that he has become almost legendary in the minds of the Nipponese. Your friends the Choshu and Satsuma men especially are dissatisfied with this state of affairs. They say it is a disgrace that the Tokugawas receive eight million koku a year from the nation's income, while the Imperial House has only an annual allowance of a hundred thousand koku, from which we all draw our meagre share. They say it is shameful that all His Majesty's powers have gone into the hands of the Shogun.” Tokudaiji spoke with concern, but doubt crept into his voice. “I do not know how sincere these two clans are. They have strength and courage and ingenuity on their side. They say that we can oppose the inroads of the Dutch, English, French and American traders by union under His Majesty. But perhaps the Sat-cho wish to usurp permanently these powers for themselves when they are temporarily entrusted with them. I may be unjust to them, but it is human to take advantage of such a situation. However, while the Shogun still rules, it is the better policy to conform to his laws. You are too young to accomplish good by disobedience. I would have you remain a child a little while longer. You will have a long life in which to prove your devotion to the Imperial House, as did many of the Tokudaiji and the Saionji forefathers about whom you have been reading.”

“Some were generals and many were premiers, according to the book,” the boy interrupted.

“I am particularly obliged to your adopted parents. When they were alive, they were very proud of you and entertained great hopes for your future.”

“My foster father was very handsome I was told.”

“When he adopted you he said that the Saionji family would once more be able to offer His Majesty a premier. Don't fail him.”

They rode home side by side, each with his own thoughts. From temple bells in every section of the ancient city, the morning hour of eight rang out.

At parting, the boy's father gave one more piece of advice.

"I hear that you admire antiques. I hear that you spent several hundred yen on a teapot. That is extravagance."

Saionji nodded.

At the time of Saionji's birth, which occurred on October 23, 1849, Kyoto had been a quiet city for a long time. This town, the seat of the Imperial Court, was the nominal capital of Nippon, and the Mecca of art, literature and learning, but for two and a half centuries, government and commerce had flourished in Edo, now Tokyo. A contemporary journalist described Kyoto as a center of pretty women, nobles and priests. 'Things abundant are: temples, women and makers of clogs. Things scarce are: *samurai*, half-drunkards, bars and crows. People walking in the streets do not pick quarrels. In their homes they do not swear at each other. The atmosphere is peaceful and elegant.' It was said that *samurai* were so rarely seen that when one did visit Kyoto, the common people made sport of him, because the two swords at his side had a ridiculous resemblance to fried bean curd on its bamboo sticks.

During Saionji's childhood this haven of peace was overrun by strangers, and savagery was rife. The long plotting of the Satsuma and Choshu insurgents was having its effect. The tide of political change came in. When the Emperor, who had kept within the royal gates for many generations, appeared in the streets with his guards to pay tribute at the various national shrines, people rubbed their eyes in amazement. His Majesty was actually a human being.

Discontented *samurai* and masterless warriors called *ronin* secretly trooped to Kyoto. Every year brought in more, from sections so remote that even their names were unknown. Some were in sympathy with the rebellious clans and others with the Shogun at Edo, but all looked for satisfactory employment. They came on foot, on horseback, hungry and in rags, sometimes in disguise.

Various dialects from the north and the south grated suddenly on the air; peddlers hawked their wares, and peculiar costumes mingled in the streets. Hold-ups, robberies, shootings and slayings occurred every hour. Skirmishes and fighting between the two contending groups of the *samurai* occurred, first under cover and later in the open, scores on each side, high and low, old and young, losing their lives. Lawlessness took the place of order in the once peaceful city. People were irritable and fearful by day, and cried out in their sleep at night. Even

the ordinary explosion of bamboo burned as firewood sounded like a deadly shot.

Meanwhile the nation had its troubles with the 'foreign invasion,' particularly in Satsuma and Choshu where, independently, the foreigners were challenged. Until several years before only the Dutch had been tolerated and that only in their special quarter at Nagasaki, the sole port through which they had been allowed to conduct their traffic with the natives. Then the Nipponese were forced to open trading posts, one by one, to others, beginning with the Americans. Now the British, French and Russians were anchored in their harbors, sailing off with Nipponese silk and gold and leaving behind a great wanderlust.

The Shogun increased his arms to ward off the threat to his power. Every measure which could possibly save him was tried.

Those were exciting days in Kyoto, when Saionji was a boy. He lived in sunlight and shadow. There were hours spent on penmanship, writing poetry, reading, the tedious pursuit of *biwa* music, and attendance on His Majesty. Then Choshu and Satsuma visitors would burst in upon him with another 'restoration plan,' and it would seem that the quiet of the palace was to yield to the clamor of battle.

Once when the Choshu *samurai*, several hundred strong, were attacking the Tokugawa men at Hamaguri Gate of the Imperial Palace, Saionji almost forsook his court duties to join his friends. But Governess Sagami was stern.

"It is not your affair. Your duty is to protect His Majesty. Later, if the Emperor acknowledges this cause as his own, you may go to war, my master. Keep your head cool."

So he went by a rear path to the Palace, and guarded the Mikado there until the Choshu, defeated, had to give up the fight. Saionji chafed at his bonds. But the time was approaching when he would distinguish himself in a real battle, the only bloody encounter in his career.

The quarrels between the two forces reached a crisis. Emperor Komei died and was succeeded by his son, fourteen-year-old Mutsuhito, later Emperor Meiji. His advisers decided to give the Sat-cho cause the Imperial blessing.

The Shogun was forced to surrender his title, and tried to save the remnants of his power. Fifteen thousand men were sent to Kyoto, on the pretext of carrying a petition to His Majesty. Opposed at every step of the way, they finally reached Toba and Fushimi, the southern gateway to the capital.

On January 4, 1868, from the palace one could see the sky red with the burning of the Toba-Fushimi towns. And yet the Imperial forces had not begun their concerted action. For in the government office there were still those who advised waiting or flight, since the Mikado's soldiers, mostly from the Satsuma and Choshu clans, numbered only sixty-five hundred men. And against the advice of the older courtiers, these rough men would consent to march under only two leaders. One was Prince Komatsu and the other was Saionji Kimmochi, now eighteen years old.

At home, Sagami, Saionji's governess, laid down her sewing. The wind rattled the paper screens. Outside was the roar of cannon.

She listened intently. Then she took up her sewing again, her face feverish with haste.

A roundish woman burst in, fear distorting her eyes.

"Oh! That booming sound frightens me to death, Sagami-sama. It shakes the house, doors and trees, and it scares all my thoughts away. I came to tell you something, but I can't remember what. Oh, that noise stops my heart-beats and makes my knees shake. You know, the picture of hell at the Buddhist temple came to my mind when my man and I were on the hill watching the skies over the towns where the fight is.

"My man said if the loyalists—I don't know who they are, and I don't care to know who they are—lose their battle, the Toku'wa *samurai*—I don't know them either—would storm the city in no time. And he says that invaders kill men and women and aged and young; they snatch things away from anybody and anywhere, homes or temples or shrines; they carry away pretty women for their own pleasure. You see, I don't think I am good-looking, but my man says they will take even me; I'd rather stay with him than to go with someone I don't know. Oh, dear, oh, dear! He thinks they will even burn this beautiful ancient city to the ground. I wouldn't believe it if I hadn't seen the burning towns last night." The gatekeeper's wife wagged her head. "Do you think they will come? You think so? Or don't you? Why don't you do something? It's no time to be sitting in the house and mending things; everybody is running around.—D-d-d-d-o-n! Oh, dear, dear, there it goes again!"

"Where is your husband, Miyo?" Sagami did not look up as she spoke. "He has not reported for gate duty this morning. What is he doing? It is unusual for him to be late."

"Oh, him. That's what I was going to tell you. I forgot it entirely. The noise put it out of my mind with thinking how the *samurai* might run off with me. Oh, he? My man?"

"Miyo, answer me. Where is your husband?"

"He is hiding our belongings underground for fear if the Toku'wa people come they'll take them. The neighbors are doing it, too. Oh, do you think the Toku'was would want our poor little cracked dishes and things? He said he's coming soon, my man is. That's what I meant to tell you."

Sagami tried to stop the flow of words, but Miyo went on:

"Sagami-sama! What is all this terrible killing and burning about? Who makes the trouble?"

"The trouble is between the Satsuma and Choshu men on one side and the Tokugawa *samurai* on the other—"

"Why don't somebody put the trouble-makers out? Where do they come from?"

"The Tokugawa, mostly from the northwest, are fighting against the Imperial House. We call them rebels; the Satsuma and Choshu men, from the southwestern section of the country, are the loyalists who are defending His Majesty. Years ago we called the Satsuma and Choshu men rebels and the Tokugawa loyalists. Can you understand that?"

"But who makes the trouble?"

"The Tokugawa, by insisting that they want to come to the capital to present a petition to the Emperor, so the loyalists are trying to stop them at those towns before they enter this city."

"Do you think they can?"

"We don't know yet. There are over fifteen thousand rebels and only about sixty-five hundred of the Emperor's men. But the loyalists have the Emperor's blessing."

"If there aren't enough men there, why don't they send more? Not a single *samurai* did I see marching, nothing but *ashigaru* in rags."

"I'm busy, Miyo. I have no time to lose. Will you do this?" She showed her the princely martial robe of woven hemp which had been patterned after the one worn by a great ancestor, General Saionji, six hundred years before. Sagami had cut and sewn the new robe herself; she hoped to finish embroidering the coat-of-arms, but the time was growing short. Soon both women were busy with their needles, and Miyo's tongue rattled on.

"All the ladies in the court ask me about our lord every time I meet them, you know," she went on, unabashed. "What is 'Commander-

General' and 'Councillor'? Such long words. The ladies say they never heard of 'Councillor' before, even in books. What do those words mean?"

Sagami sighed. "Well, our lord was taken into a group of wise men, that's where he has been these days. And he may be ordered to lead the big army for the Mikado. Then he would be the Commander-General. Now do you understand?"

"Will he really lead the army?"

"I hope so, Miyo. I very much hope so." For a moment Sagami rested her hands and stared into space.

Someone came up the road. Sagami dropped her needle, and the scissors clattered to the floor.

One of the two high stewards of the Saionji house ran into the room. "Sagami!"

"Well, Sir Steward?"

"There isn't a horse on the market. Not even the ghost of an animal is there! What is our lord going to do? He can't ride our old nag."

"I suppose they are all bought up for the war. And Saionji, of all people, to be without one! Let me think awhile. You'd better get your things ready for tomorrow."

"Are the Prince's robe and other belongings ready?"

"Yes, we can finish them before evening. I am expecting his sword and armor from the repair shops at any minute."

"Sagami"—he turned at the door—"do you think I have to accompany our lord to the palace tomorrow when he receives the sword and the Imperial Banner of Golden Brocade from the hands of His Majesty?"

"In the first place, we don't know that he will be Commander-General. There are many who think he is too young."

The head steward persisted. "But if he does, do I have to go with him? Those formalities—"

"If you don't, who would? It's your job. Anyway, I thought you were an authority on that subject."

"Yes, yes, but for centuries the ceremony never actually took place. And now I, the chief steward of the new Commander-General, am to accompany him into the Audience Hall of the Palace. *Bow before stepping over the sill, head parallel with the knees*—" He enumerated the old ceremonial forms on his knobby fingers.

"How often you've bored us with your recitation of the court etiquette! Now let's see you put it into practice."



"But that's different! All I know is what I read in books. I never saw it done or did it myself before. What if I forget something or my knees shake as they're doing right now at the very thought of it? Couldn't someone else go?"

Sagami was not listening. There was the sound of hurrying footsteps on the road.

"Steward, I beg your pardon, but I think this is the messenger from the Shrine with the talisman."

The governess laid a packet in the alcove.

"Miyo," she said, "make a little bag. See, this is from the National Shrine at Ise; this one is from the Hachiman Shrine of the god of war; that is from Narita Temple at Sakura to keep him healthy and invulnerable to bullets and sword-blades; the last one is from the Shirakumo Shrine, the Saionji family altar. This bit of goods left from the robe is just big enough to hold all the amulets."

"Is the lord going to wear this?"

"Yes, very close to his heart."

The cold, gloomy day came to an end. The Buddhist and Shinto buildings on the hills surrounding the city were lighted with large paper lanterns. Guns from the Toba-Fushimi front were still audible and occasionally a loud explosion shook the air.

The household awaited Saionji's return from the government office. Three days he had been away. Surely he would come home tonight with good news. Good news, if Saionji were made Commander-General! Such an honor would distinguish the family from all others.

But the night came on, and still there was no sign of him. The stewards took turns at walking down the road. Fingering their sword-hilts, they looked anxiously towards Toba-Fushimi.

Sagami, alone in the garden, thinking of the rider for whom no horse was provided, prayed to *Kwannon*, Goddess of Mercy.

There was no sound but her breathing.

She called one of the stewards to her. A few words and he was running down the road, Sagami watching him. Much later she entered the house and went to the family altar where stood a replica of the Shirakumo Shrine. She pulled up the wick in the dish filled with vegetable oil and lighted it. Then she knelt.

All night the distant cannon roared. All night the vain waiting for Saionji. As the first cock crowed the stewards put on their field attire.

Then in the uneasy dawn there came a war-cry that rang through the neighborhood. The head steward standing on the veranda saw a

paper lantern in the distance. Gradually he made out the approaching attendant, the emblems on the lantern, Saionji on foot, and a steward behind him.

The crowd in the yard was motionless.

Saionji came closer. He glanced at the household and they followed him inside. He smiled at the sight of the robe with the coat of arms, the talisman bag, the green armor, the headgear, and the long sword lying in the recess.

After he had changed to formal dress, he called the household to form a semi-circle around him in the guest hall.

The steward asked: "What is the final decision on the government's plan, my lord?"

Saionji's voice was clear. "To fight to the end! Many conservative people advise a truce, but we must strike down the enemies!"

"Your part, sir?"

"As we hoped! Yes, I shall lead the army into Tamba Province to pave the way to the southwest. Should our side lose at Toba-Fushimi and the enemies march into the city, we must remove the Imperial Train to safety. In past centuries when the Imperial Throne was threatened, it took refuge in the Hiyei Mountains and other places near the capital, but this time we may accompany His Majesty to Choshu and even as far as Kyushu.

"Sagami!" His eyes rested on the governess.

"Yes, my master?"

"I must take all the stewards and vassals with me; so I leave everything to you here. You have been my dearest mother and teacher all these years. I thank you for that! And for your faithful services, too, my stewards and vassals, I thank you," he said, turning to the others.

All bowed low.

"And now let us depart. It is the fate of *samurai* to die in combat. Let none of us show the coward's heel. Remember, we must give the others a good example of knighthood. Let us not disgrace the glorious names of our ancestors!"

Cold sake was poured into shallow earthen saucers. Saionji was served first and then each in turn, according to the order of his rank in service, drank the rice wine.

At that moment there was shouting at the gate. "A horse! A horse!" A strong steed, in full trappings, led by a Satsuma man, cantered to the gate. Sagami breathed a prayer of relief. The Satsuma camp had granted her request.

Saionji mounted his horse while the beating of drums came nearer on the chill morning wind.

"Follow me." He tightened the reins in his hands, and gave a backwards glance at the members of the household standing along the fence.

The gatekeeper dug his knuckles into his eyes. His father, and his father's father, had served the family, but never had they beheld such horsemanship.

"Farewell," Saionji's voice cried from a distance. "And now to headquarters and to the Imperial Palace!"

The next hour passed like a dream. Whether he and the chief steward stumbled into His Majesty's presence, or whether they observed every measure of the ceremony, Saionji did not remember. He only knew that after a while the steel was in his trembling hands, and the beloved Emperor was murmuring:

"With this sword we empower thee to conquer our enemies and this Imperial Banner shall lead our forces." The voice broke: "Return to us in safety, Kimmochi, and help us with the more arduous tasks of state."

Then they were marching behind the Golden Brocade. Crowds cheered the flying Banner. War drums and gongs, echoing against the mountains, led the formation. The Commander-General saw his father, Tokudaiji. Like the others, he was squatting on the ground. He took off the headgear, and touched the earth with his brow as the Banner passed before him. When he raised his face, Saionji saw in it pride and approval.

The victorious tide of the Imperial expeditionary forces was still sweeping northeastward through Honshu, the largest island of Nippon. The fifteenth Tokugawa Shogun had long since yielded his Edo castle, the feudal headquarters, to the Emperor's men, and retired into seclusion. Most of his relatives and their supporters had surrendered, forgetting their oath to stand together in loyalty to the hereditary overlord until the last 'bow and arrow' was broken. Only a few small contingents in the north were still battling for the lost cause in the early spring of 1869.

Edo, now renamed Tokyo by an Imperial decree, was plunged into confusion. The streets were deserted, the people who had not joined the daily exodus from the city grew apprehensive. All business and social activities were paralyzed, except for the bustle of the Sat-cho and their commandants who had marched in as conquerors.

One of them, his ebony-black hair drawn into a courtier's topknot

above his aristocratic face, his arms folded in the sleeves of his silk kimono, a pair of swords on his hip, had passed Ryogoku bridge and was coming towards the Koto, the lower east bank of the Sumida River. Above him hung heavy clouds that oppressed even the gay temper of the natives of Tokyo. His clogged footsteps sounded dull.

A flock of black crows flew over his head.

His eyes and footsteps followed their flight and soon the teahouses of the once prosperous gay quarters loomed before him. These long two-storied buildings with their balconies and verandas under black-tiled roofs were already, after a few days' stay, familiar to him. His choice had been the Nakamura-ro, which, like some of the others, had a building in the rear, parallel to it. The two houses were joined by passages at both ends, forming an inner garden, where twin ponds reflected the cold, gray sky.

Saionji proceeded to the shallower of the ponds which held fantailed goldfish in the summer. The water was still. Rocks and miniature promontories lined the shore of the deeper pond. The black and red carp were in hiding and he saw only weathered stalks of Nipponese iris and lotus. A series of single boards reached from the shore to the largest of several islands. Saionji walked gingerly along the dilapidated bridge to the shrine with its red *tori-i* dedicated to the 'Fox' deity.

He retraced his steps and curiously studied the arbor fashioned like the Golden Pavilion, with its background of artificial hills, weeping willows, shrubs, dwarfed pines, cherry and plum trees. A few white plum blossoms that had clung through the winter added to the bleakness of the scene. The balconies, which opened out onto this garden so that all the rooms except those facing the front had access to it, were empty now, and the colored paper lanterns hung limp and tattered. Saionji leaned against a pillar. With his eyes closed he could imagine how festive it would all be later, with the lighted lamps and lanterns reflected in the water, the tinkling of wind-bells, and the gaily-dressed geisha flitting in and out.

He started at the sound of a voice.

"Oh, *Okuge-sama*, I'm sorry to disturb your peace." A woman in her forties was carrying a basket of fish-food.

"Huh, *Josho*, don't treat me so courteously. Please don't say, '*Okuge-sama*.'"

"How modest you are, Prince Saionji! Until a few years ago, the name of your family sounded to us people of Edo like the name of an angel. I never even dreamed of having such a high personage in my

humble quarters." The operator of the Nakamura-ro came a few steps towards him and continued: "When we think of the Sat-cho—even the lowest footmen—how boastful and rude they are—we appreciate your friendliness and unassuming attitude. My household, employees, and acquaintances are deeply impressed by the contrast." She went to the ponds and emptied the basket. "You have many callers these days, Prince Saionji—"

"Huh, how did you find out my real name? I registered here as 'Boto Ichiro' when you consented to lodge me. I didn't want you to address me formally."

Dimples showed in her face. She said: "When I saw you for the first time with your merrymaking friends, I guessed your origin—I was not mistaken. Your callers nowadays ask for Prince or Saionji *Okuge-sama* or the Commander-General or the Governor of Echigo. Do they come to—"

"To get me back into the government office I held last—and my military mentor, General Omura Masujiro, is coming after me this evening, too."

"Then the rumor is correct that you and General Omura are very close friends?"

"Huh, he taught me his military tricks." Pointing to the garden, Saionji inquired: "Why have you neglected its care?"

"Because I can't make any money these days."

"But don't you have many men and young girls in good kimonos here?"

"I have all classes, *Okuge-sama*, although they may look alike to you. There are geisha of different ranks, and the men are *hokan*, male entertainers. Besides them there are servants—"

"My governess used to tell me about the *hokan* and the geisha—"

Saionji strolled over to her side. "I thought all the girls were geisha. The *hokan* and geisha are supposed to live somewhere else, are they not?" He looked at her inquisitively.

"Yes."

"You have young girls, too?"

"The small ones are the *maiko* who dance to the accompaniment of the geisha's music. They become *osbaku* when they have learned the art of entertaining. They must spend a little while as *osbaku* and wait on the guests and learn everything connected with this profession. They frequently dance and play instruments too. The geisha are the

highest class and when they get too old for that they teach the *maiko*, if they are good at instruments or singing."

"How do you get the little girls—"

"Poor parents bring their little one to be trained in this calling. But often the charge turns out to be hopeless, and then we put her into the kitchen or at other menial tasks. I have one girl now. She is very tender-hearted and obedient, but she has neither musical talent nor a pleasing appearance—"

"Huh, the girl running around with the broom, the button-nose one?"

"Ho, ho, yes, Prince."

"So geisha must be pretty?"

"Well, yes, now; but in the past when they were introduced as a branch of the Yoshiwara prostitutes, the brothel operators barred pretty girls from entering the geisha profession, because they were afraid they might outshine and perhaps snatch away the courtesans' guests. Since the brothels and the teahouses became independent of each other, the competition is very keen, and if a geisha has natural beauty and talents, she will become a star. There is a girl in my—"

"That takes a long time, I suppose?"

"It differs according to the individual. We keep her as a *maiko* until she is ten or twelve. Then she is an *oshaku* for two or three years. Then with great ceremony we introduce her as a full-fledged geisha. But you see, *Okuge-sama*, these days we get girls from another class. The young daughters of the poor and defeated *samurai* come to us. They are usually well-mannered, besides knowing the principles of music, singing, dancing and the like, so that it takes only a short time for them to learn our ways.—As I was going to say, in my house there is a young girl named Okiku, who is of *samurai* origin. Everybody expects her to be the most popular geisha in Tokyo. She is pretty, too."

"Do they make money any other way?" He grinned self-consciously.

"They are not supposed to, but most of them do, selling their charms." She smiled too, and added: "See, Prince, in former days, when times were good in the geisha occupation, everything was controlled under the co-operative system through registry houses called the *kemban*, where the *maiko* used to be trained, too. They regulated the geisha wearing apparel, individual conduct in the presence of guests and in off-duty hours, and the handling of her earnings. For instance, she could not wear *tabi* on her feet, no matter how cold it was, and she was not allowed to wear any but a cheap, plain kimono. She could not

sit close to the guest, and she was not permitted to receive her pay from him directly—that went to her *kemban*, from which she got a monthly return, minus her dues to the organization.”

“Huh.”

“If the *kemban* discovered that a girl had misbehaved, she would, after an investigation, be thrown out at once. Her kimono and other belongings would be exhibited in front of that house to warn would-be violators to obey the rules. The ousted girl could not get any connection with other *kemban*.”

“And now?”

“Now, with the prosperity of the brothels and teahouses, geisha discipline has gone to the winds. As a matter of fact, our business is at the verge of ruin. Countless *kemban* and teahouses have already been dissolved.”

“So the geisha have degenerated?”

“Well, *Okuge-sama*, they must live somehow. They don’t know any other trade and there aren’t any jobs. They try anything—rather than die of starvation like grasshoppers in a barren field.”

“And so they all come to you?”

“My business is not a *kemban*, but a teahouse. In the past I rented rooms for parties and furnished feasts. However, as I explained, many *kemban* went out of business and promising entertainers were stranded. I couldn’t stand to watch them go shelterless and hungry, so I decided to keep them as long as I could, provided they retained their professional standard and morals. I’ve built up my business this far; I’m willing to die fighting for its recovery, Prince Saionji.”

“Huh.”

There was a stir in the pond.

“I think it will snow this evening, *Okuge-sama*, the fish are restless.”

“So this is where the young hero hides himself.” General Omura Masujiro looked up and down the walls, scrutinized the elaborate folding screen, and glanced briefly at the scroll. He thrust out his lower lip. The puffy cheeks which had won him the title *Dharma*, the name of the ‘god who blows on the fire,’ swelled out. “A fine place, an excellent place for our prodigy.”

Saionji kept silent. His hands rested in the folds of his simple kimono.

Omura’s vast kettle-body creaked as he squatted beside a charcoal

brazier on the straw mat. He had laid his big sword in the holder in the alcove.

Saionji was lighting a candle on the stand.

"It's really true, then. The hero of Tamba and Echigo has nothing better to do than to settle himself in Edo.

"Wait a minute. Edo—we call it Tokyo the Eastern Capital, now.

"And he can't find a better occupation than to spend his days and nights here at the Nakamura-ro in this Koto gay quarter? The usual decline and fall of the hero."

A faint smile drifted across Saionji's face.

"General Omura, if I did not know you so well, I would think you were jealous!"

"Jealous! Jealous? You little 'priestling'! Jealous? What would I be jealous of?" His thick black brows came close together.

"Do you think because your name is on every lip, that I don't know where the credit is due? Listen! I was the brains of all the military campaigns. I, *Dharma* Omura. For years I studied European fighting methods. Do the Europeans put their best generals out to be massacred the first thing? They do not! They keep them behind the front lines. What good are a thousand soldiers if they've lost their leader? We with our notions of bravery—bah! For years our stupid gray-heads wouldn't listen to me. They exiled me for my foreign heresy. Only Kido Koin had sense enough to bring me back where I belonged. Kido gave me my chance and I took it.

"I planned the whole scheme against the Tokugawas. I applied the military tactics of the Westerners, and kept myself, the brains, and those handsome, brave generals and that darling Saionji where it was safe for us to be. And that's why the Shogun is gone and the Imperial cause is victorious. That's why Nippon is united now, and that's why the innocent *Okuge-sama* was made governor of Echigo province.

"And now, after all my work, that same darling *Okuge-sama* of the people has nothing better to do than to rest his elbow on a geisha-house brazier. For nothing at all I'd apply the *moxa* on that slender backside. At least he couldn't be sitting then."

Saionji bowed, nettled by the *Dharma's* vehemence.

"And what does General Omura wish me to do?"

"What does General wish? Doesn't your own common sense tell you that? I want you to go back to Echigo Province, where you were appointed governor, and pick up more knowledge of my profession in your spare time."



"But why must I, if I don't want to?—if I have something better in mind?"

"Better in mind! A geisha, I suppose. Listen—there was a time when I had nothing to do. I admit that I spent months with the females of such quarters as this and in the Yoshiwara. I had to wait until the tide turned. And I certainly understand how a young man wants to have his day. But right now you have to learn. You are needed. You did a good job on the battle front. I won't underestimate it. Not many could have kept those Sat-cho hot-heads united. That's why I looked you up. You think I run after just anybody? You've had a lifetime of experience in a year. You're headed for real statesmanship. It's your heritage, but that alone is not enough from now on. I want someone to take my place when I go. Is Nippon to writhe under the heel of the foreigner, or of another Tokugawa, just because one fat, ugly Omura gets a shot in the back one of these days? You are my successor, and I want you to stick to business."

"Perhaps General Omura is ignorant of my own humble plans. I want to ask Councillor Kido when he comes—"

"May we interrupt, masters?" A gentle voice came from behind the paper screens separating the room from the veranda. "Tea time, sir."

"Yes." Saionji looked relieved.

Near the screens knelt two girls, one with a tea set on her tray, and the other with a bowl of pickled plums. They placed the trays on the mat and touched the floor with their foreheads. Then they served the green tea.

Saionji whispered to one of the servants.

"Well, you certainly are at home, Saionji-san. Those girls have you under their thumbs all right. It is one of those two? Well, it wouldn't be so bad to have a little feminine touch for a change. Brings back the past, as it were."

When the general beamed, his eyes almost disappeared in the folds of flesh.

Between the room in which they were sitting and the house entrance were many matted guest-chambers. All were separated from each other by paper screens which could be slid together and taken out of their sills to make one large room where several smaller ones had been.

Outside it was already dark. The paper lanterns were lit. The February snow fell on the branches of the trees and withered grasses in the garden. Beyond the wooden fence, everything was quiet, for after sun-

down no one dared venture out. The discharged *samurai* still made the streets unsafe.

The *joshi*, following her usual custom of greeting her guests, was asking permission to be allowed in for a few moments.

"It is our great pleasure to have you with us." She bowed low a few times. "Please be at ease and enjoy the evening. Though humble and incapable, we shall be at your service," she said, addressing General Omura.

"I am of—"

"From Choshu. You know—" Saionji began.

"You are General Omura! We heard much about you from the Prince, and your name is on every lip, sir, since you commanded the Imperial troops against the Shogi-tai on our Uyeno Hills—"

"Ha, so he did mention me!"

She bowed low again: "It is our unusual honor, sir, to have you, the person whom the Prince respects most!"

With many bows she left the room.

"I was saying that I want to ask Councillor Kido a favor. What is he doing now?"

"Many things, Saionji-san. He has most ambitious plans." The General lowered his voice and continued: "You see, the Tokugawa Shogun and his supporters are gone, but the country is actually still divided into hundreds of provinces under the local *daimyos* who, as you know, rule their domains like independent countries. Kido wants to wipe out that system to make Nippon a united nation, a nation solid like a ball. He will try to persuade them to return their fiefs to the Mikado. But if they don't"—the General swung his right arm—"there again my service will come in handy."

"Huh."

"That's the beginning. The Government will be brought here to rehabilitate this city. A system of national currency is being considered. There will be many reforms in the political system and industry on European models. For instance, Kido favors the creation of a parliament on a small scale to give the people some idea of governing themselves as the Westerners do, and he advocates the building of a steam railroad." Omura shook his black mane. "And soon we'll have a national army. All the armed forces in the country will belong to His Majesty. That was *my* suggestion. But Kido has a greater plan. He confided to me his idea of the colonization of Korea—at first on a small scale. We agree that we must protect our people with troops. He

thinks that mobilization will help unify the nation and open the way for the country's expansion. That's what Kido and I are going to discuss tonight. I shall map out the actual campaign."

His eyes shone.

"See, to carry out all these ideas—it may take many years—everybody must get busy: sacrifice, hard work, European training for our future leaders. Kido wants to send our most promising youths abroad to study modern methods—"

"General Omura!"

"What?"

"Do you think I might be able to join them?" Saionji's face flushed.

"Is *that* what you are thinking about?"

"Par—don!" The troop of maids on the veranda came into the room, each holding, almost level with her eyes, a square lacquer tray with neatly arranged plates. Crane-necked porcelain sake bottles and 'thimble' cups, some of which were in a bowl filled with water, and many lighted candles were brought.

"What's this formality? And on such a big scale! However, not bad, not bad, eh, Prince? Frankly, I love things on a big scale. Do you really live here?"

"Yes, you see, the operator is willing to let me have this room cheap as her business is dull—my relatives and friends of course urged me not to stay here—"

"I sympathize with them. But the new Government is penniless. Did you get your salaries?"

The young man smiled.

"Ah, you are a noble soul. If your relatives object to these accommodations, why don't you buy a mansion? I know some property for sale at 500 yen; it was formerly owned by one of the daimyos. It will be worth a fortune when times get better."

The General's eyes were travelling over the trays. As the *oshaku* sat down—the signal that the party was ready to begin—he said: "For many moons I haven't been near a magnificent feast like this or did I smell such fragrant sake, not to speak of having the intimate company of the fair sex. Saionji-san, why this big celebration?"

"General, this is a humble token of my appreciation of you. With your permission, I'll start."

As the host, Saionji spoke formally, and bowed. He picked up a small *sakazuki* from the water bowl.

An *oshaku* with a warm sake jar slid over to him and poured liquor.

The host bowed again before he drank. He rinsed his cup in the bowl and offered it to the General whose bony fingers seized the tiny cup like an octopus attacking its food: "Well, this was certainly unexpected!" He beamed, and gulping the liquor, licked the fragrant sake from his lips. His eyes twinkled. "Well, Saionji-san, I guess you have learned to drink by this time. 'Sake is the king of all medicines,' we say. Say, if you don't mind my frankness, this formality is rather irksome. How about our using the larger cups on our trays?" The General held up his own and glanced at the extra tray. "I wish Kido were here too."

Saionji merely smiled.

"Well, here's a toast to my protégé!" Omura shouted.

One after another, plates kept coming in for them. There was clear shrimp soup in lacquer-ware; then deftly their chopsticks flew from servings of sliced raw fish or nicely grated radishes and horse-radish, to a bowl of chopped chicken, cooked with vegetables. General Omura continued to drain his larger sake cup, and still the meal went on. The pink roasted *tai*, lying on its decorations of bamboo, pine, and plum twigs, its mouth and eyes bulging, its fins spread, was brought in. Innumerable times, the *sakazukis* exchanged hands, until the porcelain jars were empty of the warm wine. Then they heard a noise on the veranda.

The folding screen was taken away and the paper screens separating the next room were removed. The geisha, *hokan*, *maiko*, and the carriers of drums, tabors, and samisen boxes entered with mincing steps. The girls holding up their sweeping kimono skirts, and the *hokan* with fans in their hands, bowed and greeted their patrons with artificial smiles. Then they tuned the three-stringed samisens.

The geisha took the instruments on their laps and cleared their throats. The dainty *maiko* were ready for the first formal dance. Rather slowly, almost in a monotone, the geisha began to sing, touching the taut silken strings. The dancers rose from their knees, holding their right kimono sleeves with their left hands and their heavy dance fans with their right hands.

Everyone clapped at the end of the first performance, and the ice was broken; the newcomers were given sake, and the jars were refilled; the exchange of the cups began again. Another samisen solo and the little girls as well as the *oshaku* and geisha danced; the tabors and drums came into play. The *hokan* recited their jests and presented nude dances, the masculine bodies reflecting the candle-light.

It had been a long time since the Nakamura-ro had seen such merriment.

"Guest in!" came a call from the counter.

A tall *samurai*, led by the maid, appeared on the veranda. He was about thirty-five years old, with broad shoulders and a high forehead, a dignified, yet gentle expression on his face.

His black *haori* with the white crests cloaked a kimono of the same material and the striped hakama. His swords on the hip were heavier and longer than usual. The top-knot was carefully combed. One hand rested on the side and in the other he held his *ogi*, the folding fan.

The entertainers placed their sake cups and instruments on the tray and mats as Saionji, somewhat befuddled, attempted to sit back properly. General Omura became sober enough to recognize the newcomer. He waved his right hand and struggled to his feet.

"Glad, glad to see you. Very glad. Very, very glad."

The guest smiled: "Oh, Saionji-san, it has been many seasons since I met you last in Kyoto. That was before you left for the scene of your famous victories."

"Cut that short, my friend! Don't make it too formal. You—you—"

"I see the party has progressed. It is rare to see General Omura so relaxed."

All present laughed at the remark, including the General, who was still pursuing some elusive fancy.

Although she was drunk, one of the geisha managed to kneel formally and receive the new guest's sword. She laid it in the alcove.

Omura had a moment of clarity.

"You'd all better get acquainted with this man, this great man in the new Imperial Government! Satsuma people are proud of Saigo and Okubo, but we Choshu clansmen are still prouder of him my good friend. Courtier Iwakura, the two Satsuma men and this one, these four men, are the b-b-BUILDERS of the new Nippon. And he is the most liberal, best-informed though he is younger than I'm—"

"Well, now, Omura, isn't that enough?"

"Say, *Dharma-san*, you didn't tell us his name," the youngest and prettiest of the geisha said. The whole company laughed.

"Didn't you hear me? I, I said he is Councillor Kido Koin, yes, yes, Kido, get it?" His eyes shut tightly and he rubbed his round, reddish chin. "Bring a big red lacquer sake cup for him. He is a whale. You can't make him drunk with a *sakazuki* like this, smaller than the tip of a thumb."

"*Okuge-sama*, on which side did you fight?" The young geisha handed her cup to Saionji. "My, m-my— I mean my geisha name is Tama, if you want to know." She went on: "My real name is Okiku—"

Her eyes were bloodshot, her hair and dress disarranged. While the clamor was going on, Saionji studied this Tama.

She seemed to be fourteen or fifteen, though her manner was mature. She was tall for a Nipponese woman. The inverted-fan or Fuji-san-shaped hairline on her forehead drew one's eyes to the straight black hair dressed in *shimada*. The new-moon-shaped eyebrows over the brown eyes, the well-balanced nose, full mouth and somewhat pointed chin marked the typical beauty of feudal days.

She used thick make-up. Her voice was clear and her pleasing manner had little trace of artificiality. She matched her older companions in every branch of the entertaining art this evening, yet, like the others, her head and chest were bent forward in traditional Nipponese feminine submissiveness and grace.

Tama wore a silk crepe kimono of light purple. The back and each sleeve had a white crest in 'hawk-feathers' pattern. A small pink maple-leaf design on the collar of her dress blended with her complexion and the kimono color. Her sash was tied in a drum shape, *taiko musubi*. Under the crested dress she wore a crepe *nagajiban* of lighter color with a delicate design of wild chrysanthemum. Its dainty collar peeped out from beneath that of the kimono, and the skirt showed when she walked or danced.

But Saionji was not impressed. He preferred the court ladies and Kyoto beauties he had known. The Kyoto women were more elegant and passive than these Tokyo girls.

Suddenly Tama asked again: "Did you fight for the Tokugawas or for the Sat-cho, you young *Okuge-sama*?"

"I fought for the Imperial House."

"What is that? Is that what threw my father and brother out? Disgraceful! Driving people from their places which were inherited through generations!" She brought a cup to her lips.

"We, all the Tokyo people, still think you are rebels. Look here, you destroyed this business, too. Even in our Nakamura-ro, every room is now covered with spider-webs. Thousands are moving out of the city. You newcomers are nothing but poor, unkempt rascals!"

"Hey, keep your mouth shut or I'll tear it to pieces!" the half-dreaming Omura suddenly exploded. "Such abuse of the Imperial Government!"

"Hush, Omura!" Kido whispered. "Let her alone, I want to sound out the sentiment around here. She's drunk, and I'll learn how we stand with the people in Tokyo. They won't talk when I'm around."

She railed against the invaders. "Maybe the Tokugawas were inhumane and fools, but one thing you must admit. They were confronted with a rising tide of changes over which they had no control. You couldn't have done any better if you had been in their place. Even so, if they had stuck together, we would have died for them. You would not have had a chance to capture this city intact. But there wasn't even a major battle. The city was just handed over to you fellows. Because you brought over a few shabby troops and a couple of cannon, the Tokugawa leaders, who knew nothing but luxurious living, lost even their code of honor. And who suffers? Not the Tokugawa. Not you. The common people who have lived here peacefully for centuries. Look, the people are starving. Their daughters are in brothels and in the geisha profession!" Her voice rose to a scream.

"Listen! My father was of the honorable *hatamoto* class, the Shogun's immediate vassal, and far above you Sat-cho *ashigaru* who call yourselves our masters. To save my family from starvation I became a geisha girl. Once I sang for my parents' pleasure. Now I entertain strangers—the Sat-cho themselves."

She was dazed, her face lifeless, her eyes closed. Her pretty *nagajiban* skirt parted at her knees. At every sentence she threw back the dishevelled strands of long black hair falling on her face.

There was no sound of music or song or whispering in the room, except Omura's snoring. Kido's arms were folded; the others had lowered their eyes.

Tama breathed a long sigh and picked up another cup filled with stale liquor.

"Oh—well—well—maybe you people have a cure for Tokyo's troubles. If you have, I'm—I'm—" Suddenly she slumped down and was fast asleep on the matting, like a rain-soaked cherry blossom in the moonlight.

The spell was broken by the entry of the *joshō* and her chief clerk, the *banto*. They bowed low, their eyes towards Kido, and thanked him for his payment for the party and the ample tips to the entertainers and the Nakamura-ro household.

Then the geisha, *oshaku*, *maiko*, and *hokan* also bowed.

Saionji, the host, was bewildered, and pale with sake.

"Councillor Kido, I gave this party. I didn't want anybody to pay—"

The councillor, with a smile on his reddened face, raised his hand: "Let's not talk about money matters. Let me share your burden—it's my expression of thanks for your association with us—"

The voice and manner were gentle but decisive.

Kido offered Saionji the red lacquer cup: "We'll cement our friendship. Pass it to General Omura after you drink—"

More sake and plates arrived. The *joshō* announced that these were the Nakamura-ro's tribute to the distinguished guests.

The merriment began again.

Towards dawn the entertainers slipped out, one by one.

Saionji looked at Tama who was still sleeping. "One wouldn't have thought—" he murmured.

A hand rested on his shoulder: "Kido and I are leaving now. We'll see you tomorrow. And—take care of that girl."





II



*STUDENT*



## CHAPTER II

### STUDENT

"PRINCE, ARE YOU UP?" CAME THE CHEERFUL VOICE of Okiku, the young geisha who some months before had made the bold speech at the Nakamura-ro party.

"Almost ready, Okiku."

"Here is your basin of water and a towel, sir. I brought them myself."

"I guess you snatched them from the maid, huh?"

The warm sunshine was already radiant on the paper screens.

While waiting for Saionji to come out, she bent over the water to study her reflection. She took a comb from the folds of her sash.

"I see you, Okiku. Your pretty shadow is on the screen."

"Don't tease me, Prince."

"Were you up late last night?"

"No, sir. No merrymaking these days. Times are getting from bad to worse."

"Why is it so dull?"

"Why? Oh, you *Okuge-sama!* Don't you know anything? You are just as bad as those *daimyo*." She dipped the comb into the water and drew it through her hair.

"Started again!"

"The Shogun and *daimyo* used to get their money from all over the country and spend it in allowances to the *batamoto* and other retainers. That finally came down to us geisha." She powdered her nose and reddened her lips with *beni*.

"Huh."

"But the Shogun is gone. The people have no jobs."

"I see!"

Okiku's delicate fingers and comb were still busy.

"If all that's true, why are you so concerned about your make-up?"

"You are really mean! Don't you think I want you to—I mean I want to look decent at any time. What keeps you in bed so long, anyway?"

"Huh, now you're teasing me, huh?"

"Tired from too much drinking?"

"No. I am used to that now, but I am thinking—thinking, not drinking. I am much puzzled these days. Many things have come to my attention—"

"Things whose existence you never guessed. So you're growing serious. Well, I was that way too, when I came away from my people. You had never been out of the Kyoto palace grounds?"

"Only the last fourteen months of my life."

"You are just an infant in the hard and cold reality of the world. I am now at home in it."

"To hear you talk one would think you knew something."

"Maybe I do."

"If I were to be honest, I would have to admit that you have taught me some things. Say, Okiku, about the *Go-Isshin*, the New Start, you know—"

"I hear *Go-Isshin* everywhere, too. It's a slogan, but I don't know what it means."

"Huh, some think we are going to start back in the period of the multiple gods."

"That sounds like nonsense to me. How can we go back to cave life after we have lived many centuries of refinement? I don't want to change my silk kimono, though it's old, to a piece of bark or a leaf of hemp-palm, for instance. But talking about changes, how would you like the way of the Westerners, the civilized people?"

She was still bent over the mirroring water, and turned her head from side to side. Saionji, in a *tanzen*, stood behind her unnoticed.

"Prince, aren't you going to get up? Don't you want my company?—Oh, you frightened me!" Okiku gasped as she saw his handsome face reflected beside hers.

Laughing, she left the basin.

When he had finished washing, Saionji stepped into his clogs, that stood on the clay pavement outside the veranda. He walked about in the inner garden. Okiku followed him.

"I hadn't noticed this *yamazakura* here. Oh, it has several flowers open! Aren't they graceful?" He pointed to a branch with young buds.

"This cherry is a very early variety, Prince."

"And look at that plum tree—no more flowers, all green leaves. It still had blossoms left when you made your famous speech in our company when General Omura and Councillor Kido were here. You don't make speeches any more."