

THE LOVE OF AZALEA

with his employer. But strangely enough, Okido scarcely seemed to notice the presence of her daughters, and ate his meal in somewhat stolid silence. After the repast he permitted the pipe to be lighted for him and proceeded to smoke at his leisure.

Madame Yamada could contain her curiosity no longer. At a sign from her, her daughters withdrew. Then she addressed the Nakoda.

"In what way," she asked, "is the humblest one indebted to the esteemed Okido for his honorable visit?"

Okido put down the pipe on the hibachi and, turning toward Madame Yamada, looked at her keenly.