

THE WOOING OF WISTARIA

Sullenly, dizzily, Mori raised himself, and, with the motion of a drunken man, stooped to his sword and helmet. Obtaining them, he turned on the woman burning eyes.

"Touch me not," he muttered. Then flinging aside the door, and seeking the stairway as if by instinct, he tumbled rather than walked down the stairs.

He heard the tramp of horsemen without. Brandishing his sword, he rushed into the gardens. He was in the midst of Oguri's horsemen. The leader flung himself from his horse and threw his arms about his disabled chief.

Mori tottered into the arms of the chief of his staff.

"Seize the Emperor!" he half moaned, half gasped, in command; "then—retreat—south—back—to our provinces."

Anxious to retrieve himself in the eyes of the army whose destruction he laid at his own door, Toro set off for the building within the court, shouting to his men, as Oguri received the swooning Mori into his arms.

"Follow me! To the Emperor!" shrilly cried Toro.

If any of the bakufu troops still remained within the palace they did not show themselves while Oguri, busied with Mori, let his cavalry stand idly by. The footfalls of Toro's party resounded through the inner quadrangle.