

The Little Lady of the Sea

By H. Bedford-Jones.

JAPAN is above all else the Land of the Past. There you may see weapons forged a thousand years ago, buildings erected before Charlemagne was crowned, pictures painted when Spain was a great Moslem power. Should you ever visit Nikko, you may see there in the gloomy old temple a picture, painted hundreds of years since, of a beautiful girl, sitting on the shore of the sea; and this is the tale of "The Little Lady of the Sea."

Long ago there was a very famous artist named Tajima Shume, who dwelt by the sea. Here he had school in his old age, and as his pictures were the most famous in all Dai Nippon, thither came the richest and most talented young painters to study under him. With him lived his little granddaughter, O Kiku, of The Chrysanthemum—pink as a spray of the plum-tree, brighter than the moon.

Older and older grew the famous painter, and the little girl grew to womanhood, passing her life beside the sea, dreaming of the wonderful Peacock Islands that lay gleaming out across the bay, and she became as slim and as beautiful as the old silver willows that clustered in the garden behind the school. Many were her suitors, but she cared naught for them; foremost of them all was Tokubei, the rich young merchant of the town on the hillside.

Then one morning came a young painter to learn the wisdom of the master. Young and poor he was, but slender as a cherry spray, beautiful as the dawn, and swiftest to learn of all the old man's pupils. For a year he remained in the school, painting, painting every day; most of all he loved to paint young O Kiku sitting on the seashore, and his paintings roused even his old master to envy.

At the end of a year Tajima Shume called to him the young artist, whose name was Sanza, and said:

"My son, I can teach you nothing more. You have advanced far beyond my art; go forth. The world is at your command; go to the court of Shogun, and soon you will become the first artist in the land."

Sanza bowed and left the master. He gathered up his brushes and his paints; and then he went down to the sea, and there beneath the silvery willows he found O Kiku waiting. Sadly he told her of Tajima Shume's behest.

O Kiku lifted her face, pale as driven snow, to his, and smiled—such a sad little smile, such a brave little smile!

"You are my king," she said, "and here will I wait for you, Sanza, my beloved!"

"Oh, moonlit blossom, I will return!" cried the youth. "Here beside the sea will I return, rich and great, and I will paint your face for ever!"

So Sanza departed, on his milk-white mule, riding along the Tokaido, the Road of the Eastern Sea, to Kioto; but O Kiku remained in the school of Tajima Shume beneath the silvery willows. She dreamed of the day when he would return, laden with wealth and honor, to claim his bride; and often she went to the little temple that crowned the hill, and there she burned incense-sticks, praying that the gods would help him and bless him, and bring him back to her in their wisdom.

Thus passed two years—two slow, weary years. Ever the rich young merchant became more importunate, and ever O Kiku refused him. At last Tajima Shume called his granddaughter to him one day.

"O Kiku," he said, blinking as he sipped his tea, "I am growing very old, and soon I shall lie upon the hillside, beneath the willows. Tokubei is an honorable young man, and wealthy; I would have you consider him, my daughter, for I would not leave you alone in the world when I am departed."

O Kiku blushed with shame, as she replied softly, "Honored ancestor, your command is my will." Yet is it al-

lowed me to inquire of the young painter Sanza, he whom you sent forth two years ago?"

The old man blinked over his tea, but O Kiku, her eyes properly downcast, did not notice. "Sanza is a great artist, O Kiku; his fame lights the clouds and rests upon the waters. He lives at the court, he is famous, more famous than I." Here the old artist hesitated an instant before continuing. "Let him not make a mock of you, my child; he has long been married to a noble lady of Kioto." But the old man lied.

Now indeed all the beautiful world turned grey and dull for O Kiku, for she believed her grandfather. Dumbly, and with heart far away, she assented to the marriage; she knew nothing of what was going on, she cared nothing. Only, in the evenings she would go down to the silvery willows beside the shore; where she had so often watched the beautiful young artist, with his wondrous brush, outline the most delicate of kakemonos; here, where for her alone he had drawn the golden sands, the purple sea, the islands that gleamed rose-red in the sunset light.

Old Tajima Shume made ready for the marriage in great glee, for he thought that the great artist had long ago forgotten the young maiden in the school, and Tokubei was very wealthy. In due time the presents arrived, the silk robes, the wine and the condiments; not even the magnificent sword and sash for Tajima Shume was forgotten. Through it all O Kiku moved as in a dream, thinking only of the silvery willows by the shore.

At last came the wedding night, and, guarded by two retainers, the litter arrived for the bride. Tajima Shume sent a girl for her, then, as she delayed, others; but she did not come. O Kiku was gone. In vain did they search everywhere; at last the old gardener recalled seeing her, a little before, wander down toward the darkened shore as a broken flower drifts in the wind.

Every inch of the shore was searched; even the old man himself took down a big paper lantern and joined in the search, his heart filled with grief and reproach of himself. All they found was a tiny slipper, washed up beneath the silvery willow-boughs.

It was just a week later than Sanza came, riding along the Tokaido on his milk-white mule, trapped with silk and golden bells. Joyously he rode up to the school and dismounted; but at the sight of him his old master groaned and put his head between his hands; now indeed was he aged and broken, for the face of the young artist brought fear and shame into his mind.

"She is gone!" he muttered, not daring to tell of his lie. "O Kiku has left me, and has perished in the sea!"

Sanza turned away in silence. He wandered down to the shore, beside the silvery willows, and he built beneath them a rose-white tomb to his loved one, but ever the tomb was empty.

Because of his grief, it happened that no one dared to speak to him of O Kiku's marriage, so that he never learned of it. He lived alone near the school, and the story of his fame and wealth went abroad through the town, many pupils coming to him; but always he remained grave and sad of face.

One day, as he was walking through the town, he saw a girl who resembled O Kiku remarkably. She had the same eyes, the same face, the same hair, the same gait; her name was O Toyo, and her father was a wealthy armorer of the place.

"Perchance, if I marry her," thought the young artist, "I will forget O Kiku, and come to love O Toyo with the same love!"

So Sanza visited her father, and the more he saw of O Toyo the more she seemed to resemble O Kiku; and in the end he married her.

Now one day, soon after this, he was seized with a desire to paint the wonderful Peacock Islands, across the

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