

The Almanac of Love

Chikamatsu

Table of Contents

<u>The Almanac of Love</u>	1
<u>Chikamatsu</u>	1
I.....	1
II.....	8
III.....	16

The Almanac of Love

Chikamatsu

translated by Asataro Miyamori

This page copyright © 2001 Blackmask Online.

<http://www.blackmask.com>

- I
 - II
 - III
-

I

Since early morning of this, the first of November in the first year of Jokyo (A.D. 1684), all had been animation and merriment in the house of Ishun the daikyoji, publisher of almanacs, living at Karasumaru, a fashionable quarter of Kyoto, the Imperial capital. A stranger might, indeed, have mistaken this day for New Year's Day. Such, however, was not the case: to-day was merely the great day on which it was the firm's wont to commence the distribution to subscribers of the almanac for the ensuing year. Ishun, visiting the Imperial Court, the Princes of the Blood and court nobles, that he might present new almanacs, had accepted refreshments to such a tune that, drunk and still wearing full dress, he now slumbered in the sitting-room. Sukeyemon the head clerk, the pillar of the family, a man accustomed to exercise as much authority as his master and mistress, devoted himself despite the happy occasion to fussing and finding fault with all and sundry, while his underlings wrapped up the presentation almanacs and packed them for despatch to the provincial subscribers.

"So the master's asleep!" Sukeyemon remarked sourly. "Well, he's scarcely to be blamed perhaps, being away at our patrons' since daylight.

Where's that lazybones Mohei got to? I mean to visit our patrons in his stead just as soon as he shows his face. I'll wait no longer. If I don't hurry, this most important job of presenting the almanacs to our fine patrons will be delayed. Why, O-San Sama," he cried impatiently as he caught sight of Ishun's pretty young wife toying with the cat, "is this the time to be playing with a cat, for all the world as if you were her ladyship? Please be so good as to remember that all your relatives will be here to offer us their congratulations on this day according to custom. What, Tama," so did he abuse the maid, "you too idling? Be so good as to make haste and sweep out the little parlour in the courtyard, and, when that's done, you can kindle a fire in the kotatsu, and after that set out the backgammon and chequer-boards, and after that set water in the wash basin and set out new towels, and after that put live charcoal in the tobacco trays, and after that clean the bowls and spread the table, oh, and yes, get your supper before the guests come. Now then, there's plenty to do: hurry up. Why, even the cat is an idler mews loud enough, but as for catching a rat! Good for nothing but trotting after the gentlemen of her own colour, squeezing through the fence and scampering over the roofs. Now Kyuzo, take up this box of almanacs and follow me. There'll be tips to be had at some of our patrons' houses but don't run away with the idea that you're going to be in pocket over it. Anything of that sort will be deducted in advance from your pay, that you may be bound. I thought I'd let you know."

Satisfied at having given a taste of his tongue to all concerned, not excluding the unwitting tabby, Sukeyemon

hurried away, accompanied by Kyuzo.

O-San and the maid exchanged disgusted glances.

"That's a nice way to talk, O-Tama, isn't it? What would he lose by speaking gently as Mohei does? He's a well-meaning man at bottom I daresay, but his forbidding face doesn't help his talk. I think he'd make a very nice husband, eh? D'you fancy him? Give me the word and I'll play middleman."

"O Madam," rejoined the maid, not without a frown, "how can you? Indeed I'd rather be butted by a regular bull than marry such a man! Now Mohei San, the clerk, is quite the gentleman. A soft way of speaking he has, kind he is and pulls no angry faces. She'd be a lucky girl who should marry such a man."

O-San was reminded of her own married life. She uttered a brief sigh.

"True, very true," she returned. "'It's the same for cats and kings'; 'birds of a feather flock together'. Take our pussy now. The tortoise-shell tom from the perfumer's next door has a gentle way with him and woos in a pretty voice. That's the sort of tom I'd like poor pussy to have. But over the way at the dyer's there's a gray tom, an ugly beast that it positively hurts one to look at, and he calls our puss from up the roof in the voice of a savage, no better than if he were driving a horse. A horrid beast. Now listen to me, pussy, you mustn't flirt d'you hear? with such a cat. If he makes dishonourable advances, pussy, you must treat him as a lady should. Give in to him and you're done for. If you want a mate I'll find you one myself.

Think of that, dear pussy!"

O-San embraced the cat, which mewed softly. At that moment several tom-cats gave vent to amorous plaints without. Puss endeavoured to extricate herself.

"Wicked puss! Hush! What a caterwauling! What's the good of such a number? You're a flirt and no mistake. One's enough for any woman. Be careful or you'll find yourself in hot water. Have you no sense of decency?"

O-San clutched the cat but in vain. The creature struggled, scratched her mistress' hand and was off.

"You bad cat, you're looking for trouble, are you? So saying, O-San ran off in pursuit of the cat. O-Tama was about to follow her when Ishun abruptly awoke and clasped her from behind.

"Pretty puss, I've got you!"

And he began to pay her attentions after a style of his own; but, struggling to shake him off, she cried:

"Stop it! Whenever you get half a chance you cuddle me. Please let, go or I'll tell my mistress and make her pinch you till you're black and blue all over."

"Let you go not I! A jealous woman's as common as flies in midsummer. That won't frighten me. What if I do turn blue or even black; that's nothing to me for your sake, you hard-hearted little thing. Night after night haven't I been coming to your room, yet you've never given me a single 'yes'. Well, it's going to be different this evening, eh O-Tama?"

Ishun tightened his hold.

"Please yourself. But I tell you I'll call my mistress."

The Almanac of Love

Nor did she hesitate to do so, "O–San Sama! O–San Sama!"

The wretch was taken aback. At this moment there was heard a knock at the front door. O–San's aged mother had called to offer her congratulations. An offering of a basket of fish preceded the arrival of her palanquin.

"There! If that confounded hag of a mother–in–law of mine hasn't come!" Ishun retreated to the inner room.

A moment later the palanquin reached the porch. Stepping forth, the dame was greeted by O–San.

"Welcome, mother! Isn't father with you? "No, he's laid up at home with a slight cold. I congratulate you, my daughter, on this happy occasion. Ishun Dono is well pleased with the way his business is doing, eh?"

"Thank you, mother. My man's come back not quite himself on account of the sak" served him in honour of the occasion at his illustrious patrons'.

He's asleep at present in the back parlour. Come mother, let's go in."

The palanquin bearers and the two maids attendant on the old woman being dismissed, mother and daughter joyfully entered.

Now the above–mentioned clerk Mohei was a gentle, good–tempered, young fellow. Of modest disposition, kindly toward all and especially toward his fellow clerks, he was regarded with affection. And now it was that, accompanied by a servant, he returned tipsy and fatigued from the distribution of almanacs that had commenced at dawn.

"What a round, Shichisuk"! You must be tired. Go and rest. My master and mistress' relatives will certainly come to call by and by. I'll keep my hakama on and smoke and try and get sober before they arrive." He sat down, lit up and was leisurely smoking when O–San called to him from the inner sitting–room. He tapped out his pipe and presented himself respectfully before his mistress.

"I am sorry, Mohei, to trouble you when you have just got in tired, but I have got something important over which. I would like your help.

Please come nearer me."

Mohei sat down near her. His mistress spoke timidly under her breath. "The fact is, Mohei, my father's got into a scrape and I want to consult you about it. I am sorry to have to say it but this is what has happened. Being hard up, my father mortgaged his house and grounds the year before last for four hundred and fifty ryo under the joint signature of his principal neighbours. Last spring, finding himself once more in difficulties, he again mortgaged the house and grounds, this time for one hundred and twenty ryo, and of course in secret without the knowledge of his neighbours. And now the first creditor, having got some wind of the truth, has suddenly notified the authorities in father's district, demanding that father either give up his house or repay the money by the third of this month, otherwise the first creditor says he'll bring an action against him.

Poor father! He persists that he doesn't much fear the lawsuit or doesn't even mind giving up the house and grounds, but he can't stand the ignominy of having his secret disclosed. For you see, should the truth come out that he's mortgaged the same house to two parties it would be all up with his honour as a man of business. The very thought of it, I hear, has reduced him to tears. Fortunately we have induced certain persons to act as mediators and they have arranged that the matter be settled by the payment of an interest of thirty ryo by the third of the month. Not without a great deal of difficulty father has managed to raise fifteen ryo, but as to the remaining fifteen there is most unfortunately no prospect, no matter what he does. Of course I know that if I were to tell my

husband he would forthwith help us out of the trouble. But I am not to breathe a syllable to him; for my father, with the obstinacy and pride of the aged, will have it that if he ask his son-in-law for a loan his beloved daughter will be placed in an awkward position. If again I turn to Sukeyemon for help he's sure to go and blab the matter to my husband and pull a long face about it at the same time. If that happens my husband will take it as no end of an insult and that will make matters worse than ever. I know for a fact that a sum of about thirty ryo is due to father from a Court nobleman at the end of this month. So the money's only wanted for three weeks. Save you, I have nobody to ask assistance of. Do you think you could be so very kind as somehow to raise this fifteen ryo and relieve my parents of their trouble? Think of the pity of it! I wouldn't let my parents suffer over such a trifling matter if I were a man. How hard on them it is that I was born a woman! What a curse this womanhood is! I appeal to your sympathy, Mohei."

O-San, who had the heart of a man in the body of a woman and whose regard for her parents was profound, spoke in tones of deep concern.

"Can my lady be as faint-hearted as all that?" returned the sympathetic and loyal-hearted Mohei, in whose being the sak had not ceased to exert its exhilarant influence. "A sum, of one thousand ryo say, might well worry you, but why speak with such anxiety of a miserable sum like that? You see, my master often tells me to take his seal when I go to a wholesale merchant to get a bill of exchange for thirty or forty ryo accommodated. You only want the money for three weeks. Be easy in your mind, madam. I'll raise you fifteen ryo without fail to-day. If I do play false for a little while what of that? I shall not be committing theft. I am only going to make a temporary use of my master's seal. A parent's dishonour is a child's dishonour, and a father-in-law's dishonour is a son-in-law's dishonour. So in helping your father out of this mess I'm virtually serving both my master and mistress, aren't I? Please be quite easy in your mind about it, madam."

"I'm indeed glad to hear you say that, Mohei. I haven't appealed to you in vain. Let me tell mother and put her at her ease. Remember I entirely depend on you."

It was with a happy countenance that O-San went within.

"I might well do such a thing," Mohei ruminated, "were it only for a friend. How much more then can I do it for my mistress' sake! Though the deed may in itself be wrong my conscience is clear enough."

Emboldened by these reflections, he stealthily produced his master's purse from its receptacle and, taking out the seal, affixed its mark upon a blank sheet of paper with the intention of thereafter inscribing the due words and figures. Meanwhile, all unknown to him, Sukeyemon, returned home, was watching him from behind his back.

"What on earth are you at, Mohei?" he cried sharply.

Mohei started, but, quickly regaining his presence of mind, answered in desperation:

"It's you Sukeyemon, is it? Surely it's the height of ill-luck that I should be caught by you! This is the real truth. Needing about fifteen ryo I was by way of borrowing it in my master's name. I can surely repay it in the course of this month. Can't you see your way to overlooking the matter for three weeks? ... A heartless man you must be that doesn't turn a hair even at the idea of a friend's head being cut off! So be it. I am prepared for any chastisement. Bind or kill me, whichever suits you best."

"And why not, pray, you thief? Hullo there, come here a minute. Hi! master, hi!"

At this startling summons the whole household assembled.

The Almanac of Love

"Look there, master," cried Sukeyemon, "look at that thief who has stolen your seal and affixed it to a blank page. How are we to tell what he'll do to-morrow if that's the way he behaves to-day? A blackguard like that will betray his master and ruin the business. You should bind him and deliver him to his surety."

O-San and her mother turned pale. Ishun was struck with amazement. "What meanness, Mohei!" he exclaimed. "And I have always considered you an honest man incapable of misconduct. Leaving as I do my household management and business dealings to both of you it may of course sometimes happen that pressure of circumstance causes you to use my seal unbeknown to me. But since this time Mohei has seen fit to try and use it without even Sukeyemon's knowledge it stands to reason he must have been intending some piece of crookedness. Now Mohei, come, what's made you steal my seal? Sukeyemon, make him confess his secret."

"You're too easy-going," cried the impatient Sukeyemon. And seizing the apparent scoundrel by the hair he dealt him blow upon blow with clenched fist.

"Come, confess, you rascal," he roared, gazing malignly into the young man's face, who, his torn hair in his eyes, resentfully made answer:

"Go on, punch me, kick me. It's unpardonably wrong of me to have secretly used my master's seal, I know it. But so far I have never visited a tea-house. I don't know how to play cards. I am quite as well dressed as most men of my station. I am not married and haven't any children dependent on me. Then why should I do such a dirty trick on my own account? However, I don't intend to explain why I did it; no, not though I should be beaten to a pulp. O-San Sama and you, madam, I'll never forgive you if you intercede on my behalf. I tell you, Sukeyemon, that if heaven should speak for me and disclose my secret I could return your blows with double interest till you fell down and begged pardon on your knees. What an infuriating position!"

He ground his teeth, he wept.

"Dear, dear," said Ishun, bewildered, "a fellow that has so faithfully served me for twenty years without a slip can't have suddenly turned into a rogue. You must have something to say in your defence, Mohei. Come, speak up, plead for yourself."

But the determined clerk made no answer. Tama the maid, whose heart had long been so set upon Mohei that she would have died for him, kneeled before her master.

"It's all my fault, master," she said, "and not Mohei's. This is the truth: my uncle and surety, Bairyu, living at Okazaki and who is a poverty-stricken samurai out of employment, wrote to me saying he would kill himself because he couldn't repay a debt of eight ryo. To save him from such an act I have asked Mohei San to lend me that sum. It's his sympathy for me has induced him to do what he's done. Humbly I ask you to forgive him, my master."

At this saving plea O-San and her mother heaved a sigh of relief.

"Bravely spoken, Tama," exclaimed O-San, "what a fine honest confession! You see, husband dear, Mohei has done this wrong all on another person's account. Don't you think his motive is truly praiseworthy? To-day too is a joyful day, won't you please pardon him? I beg of you to grant my request."

"And I too," chimed in O-San's mother.

With clasped hands both women supplicated Ishun, but to no purpose. He forthwith flew into a passion due to jealousy of and hatred against the young pair.

The Almanac of Love

"So you're both carrying on, are you?" he roared.

"You will both please be good enough to remember that a daikyoji isn't an ordinary tradesman but at the Imperial Court enjoys the privileges of a samurai. How can I forgive Mohei such a crime as the theft of his master's seal and of carrying on an intrigue, if you please, in the household of a true samurai? It's getting dark now and accordingly I'll wait till to-morrow morning before summoning his surety and getting him properly tried. Hi! You! Conduct Mohei to the upstairs room of the empty house next door and mount guard on the ground floor. See to it that you keep your eyes and ears open."

O-San and O-San's mother, overcome with mortification and regret at Mohei's sacrifice, were still wondering whether the best course wouldn't be to reveal the secret when the servants seized the clerk. Mohei suffered himself to be led away without further protest.

Ishun addressed himself to his mother-in-law:

"Since O-San may feel lonely without you, will you please to stop the night here? I think I shall call on your husband to ask after his health. I shall acquaint him with what has happened and ask his advice. My hood, O-San, if you please. One moment, Sukeyemon: it will be late before I get home.

See that they all turn in early; shut the gate and be careful of fire. Light me a lantern, Denkichi; Shichisuk", you will come with me; as for the rest of you, keep an eye on that empty house next door lest Mohei make off."

Upon this he departed, taking the servant with him. Sukeyemon, having observed each of these injunctions, retired to his room.

The midnight bell had long since tolled in the far-off temple. The night was absolutely still. O-San, sitting up, brooded over this day's doings.

Something struck her and, attired but as she was in her night-dress, she made her way to Tama's quarters, a corner of the tea-room next the kitchen. Softly she pushed aside the screen about the maid's bed and found Tama sitting up lost in thought.

"So it's you, madam, is it?" said the maid, giving her a wondering glance. "I presume that, since you've deigned to come to my poor bed after midnight, you must have something important to tell me. Is that it?"

"Still awake and sitting up? I've come to express my heartfelt thanks to you. Mohei's trouble is all my fault. I wonder how you came to know about it. Indeed it's too good of you to have taken all the blame and helped me out of the difficulty. You were my sister perhaps in a previous life. I shan't forget your favour to my dying day."

O-San burst into tears.

"But madam, madam, I don't deserve your thanks. I didn't do it for you but for myself."

"No, no, that's not the reason. Why should you have pleaded for Mohei without knowing the circumstances?"

"No wonder you should think I did it for you. I am sorry to have to confess it, but the truth is I am I am up to the ears in love with Mohei San. For two years I have done all I could to attract him, but to no purpose.

Despite his looks he is stubborn and unsympathetic. He says that while he's in service he'll never put his arm round a woman or even so much as look in her face. Never has he spoken a kind word to me. Because of all this my love for him turned to hatred and I couldn't find a good word for him when, unexpectedly enough, there came

The Almanac of Love

this trouble of his to-day. At first I thought him well served for his treatment of me. But in a few moments I saw the unreasonableness of my resentment. Sympathy took the place of hatred. I determined to turn his trouble to account if so be I might win his heart. I told a fine tale and pleaded on his behalf. Yet for all that I can't help wondering whether he'll have any feeling for me or not. Imagine how I feel, madam. What's more, I'm sorry to say I have another secret to soil your ears with," she continued tearfully. "I regret to have to call your husband by such a nasty name and you must excuse my rudeness in doing so, but Ishun Sama is a mean, contemptible seducer. His cruelty to Mohei San is all due to jealousy. The fact is he's so infatuated with me that whenever he gets a chance he attempts to mishandle me and tugs me by the sleeve. Then he will whisper to me coaxingly, 'Leave my service, Tama. I'll set you up in secret somewhere. I'll look after your folks in the country. I'll buy you dresses and give you money. Yes, anything and everything you may want.' He hangs round me day and night behind your back and worries me to death with his nasty suggestions. So far I have kept the secret from you for fear of domestic upheavals. Every evening you know he goes out until late and kills time in listening to gossip at some neighbour or other's. Then, when everything's quiet, he steals upstairs through the menservants' rooms, from there creeps over the roof and, slipping down the skylight rope, makes for this room here. What a nuisance all this is! Every time he makes a visit I tell him angrily what a plague he is and that I can't stand his dirty tricks. 'If you don't get out immediately' I say to him, 'I'll peach on you to O-San Sama and what's more I'll tell the police!' He feels the rebuke and slinks off crestfallen. Then, pretending to have just come home, cries, 'Hullo, I have just got back!' and enters your bedroom.

Think what a comical and odious figure he cuts! Naturally under these circumstances he was consumed with jealousy when I stood up for Mohei this afternoon. Yes, there's no doubt jealousy was at the bottom of it. He'll come stealing into my room again to-night, I'll be bound, so I've stayed up awake like this without un dressing properly, determined to scream when he appears. No wonder you should feel annoyed and grieved. It makes me shiver to think of his nasty goings-on."

"What a sensible, strong-willed woman you are!" exclaimed O-San with a sigh followed by tears. "What a perfect beast that Ishun Dono is! Of course a man often loves another woman than his wife, but it makes me furious to think of the insult he offers me. I can't bear it.... Well, I've a favour to ask of you. Let us exchange places to-night. Please let me sleep here. If Ishun Dono calls according to his wont I'll suffer him to woo and woo in darkness. I'll make him believe that I'm you and that you are yielding to him. I'll sleep with him till daybreak and then revile him to my heart's content in the presence of my mother and the whole house. Now will you please let me put on your night-dress."

"You are welcome to it, madam, but I fear you will be cold in a cotton night-dress, you who are used to silk."

"You needn't think that. It's a common saying that in the old days the flames of a certain woman's jealousy made the water in her pail boil. I'm so consumed with jealousy and hate that the cold is nothing to me. Now Tama, will you please go to my bed and allow me to remain here in yours."

"With pleasure. We must hurry. Good night, madam."

Tama replaced the screen, blew out the light and vanished in the darkness.

Meanwhile Mohei, who had so guiltlessly disgraced himself out of loyalty to his mistress, had fallen into a reverie.

"Poor Tama," he thought to himself, "how good it was of her to have shielded me like that instead of resenting my repeated and heartless rebuffs! How generously has she returned good for evil! I am ashamed of my hard-heartedness. Executed I may be, but I must visit her once before my end and do my best to repay her kindness."

The Almanac of Love

Thus he resolved and, drawing over his head a hood which left only his eyes exposed, stole out of the upper room and made his way to the roof of the main house. Foot by foot, with bated breath, fearful lest he be discovered and captured for a thief, he crept forward on all fours. More than once he narrowly missed slipping off the shingle roof, wet as it was with rain and mist. After much difficulty he reached the skylight and peered down into the kitchen. He could make out nothing, so dark it was down there. At length, he seized the skylight rope and slid down it.

Arrived, he stole stealthily forward, feeling his way with his hands upon the walls and pillars until he found himself in the maid's room. He knocked gently on the screen, quivering with apprehension. At this O-San's heart beat fast, but, mastering herself, she feigned sleep. Gently and slowly Mohei pushed aside the screen and putting both hands on the quilt softly shook the sleeper. O-San pretended to have just awakened, not without surprise, and feeling his cr'pe hood took him for her husband and nodded recognition. Mohei expressed his extreme gratitude for the maid's kindness not by words but by gestures. Again and again he thanked her with tears. The woman took his hands and suffered him to enter her bed.

Thus they passed some time together to each other's great content when they were aroused by a shrill crowing, repeated knocks upon the front door and the sound of a voice announcing, "Hi! There! The master is back."

O-San burst into a cold perspiration.

"Hullo! Hullo there!" cried another voice, which could not by any possible means be mistaken for any but Ishun's, "I have come back! Open the door." Sukeyemon awoke and grumbling, "Fast asleep everyone of them", appeared lantern in hand to open the door.

What was the consternation of the couple in bed at discovering by the passing light the mistake they had made.

"What! Is it O-San Sama?"

"What! Are you Mohei?"

II

Near Kyoto in a village called Okazaki stood two fine villas belonging to persons of wealth and between them an old thatched cottage.

Contrasted with the other buildings this hut appeared as mean as a sparrow between two peacocks. From its eaves a paper lantern hung, painted with the sign, "Akamatsu Bairyu, a reciter of the Taiheiki". This Bairyu, a samurai out of employment, was Tama's uncle and her guarantee.

One evening, when Bairyu's recitation was done, his audience dispersed by twos and threes eulogizing his performance as they went.

"It's worth the money and more!" exclaimed one of them. "He's close upon seventy I should say. What dignity in his person and what power in his interpretation! When he recited with gestures an account of Wada bravely fighting at the battle of Minatogawa he looked the hero himself, didn't he? Let us come again to-morrow evening. Good night, all."

"Good night."

"Good night."

The Almanac of Love

Hardly had they departed when Sukeyemon made his appearance behind a palanquin. He made as if to open the door, crying, "Is Bairyu San at home?" But the door was locked.

"Locked up so early? What's the point of locking it at all? There's devil a thing to steal!"

With this sneer he loudly rapped on the door.

"That's a pretty noise!" exclaimed the reciter. "Who's there? No one in this house is deaf. If it's recitation you come for kindly be so good as to call to-morrow evening."

"I've no wish to hear you recite. I am Sukeyemon, clerk of Ishun the daikyoji, and I come on urgent business. Open the door at once."

Once more he hammered on the door.

"You're in a great hurry. Can't you wait till I come? Reluctantly enough Bairyu opened the door and stepped forth. A partially bald, grizzled, big, old man, dressed in paper dishabille with a long sword at his side.

"Now Sukeyemon Dono," he said bluntly, "What's your business, knocking me up at this time of night?"

"What business? Why, several times during the last few days we've sent for you about this affair of Tama's, but on one pretext or another you have refused to put in an appearance, now haven't you? Where do you think we can find in all Japan another surety like you, eh? You will kindly be good enough to lend an ear, my old friend. At daybreak on the second my master returned home at the very moment when Mohei the clerk saw fit to have the audacity to elope with Ishun's wife O-San Sama. In fact we learned it precisely then. On looking into the matter we found that the lovers had slept in O-Tama's room while she remained in madam's.

O-Tama had in fact acted as confidante and for this she can scarcely escape punishment. Since you are her uncle and her surety I have brought her in this palanquin to put her in your keeping until madam and Mohei are hunted out. Please to remember that if the couple are crucified she will surely be beheaded. You will now take charge of her. Now my men, carry that palanquin indoors."

At this the coolies made as if, muddy-legged though they were and none too clean in body, to carry the palanquin into the house. Bairyu's indignation knew no bounds. Seizing the pole of the palanquin he exclaimed, "That's a nice way to behave," and forced it back a few yards.

"I'd have you keep in mind," he said, "that this is my castle for all that it's a mean cottage and a rented house. Yes, I tell you, a castle it is and a castle as great as the castle of Chihaya, that proved impregnable, yes, even to sixty thousand troops from Rokuhara. How dare you bid these scabby coolies break into my castle? Strictly speaking of course I ought not as a samurai to have put my niece out to service with a tradesman, but unfortunately Tama is an orphan and I, in whose care she is, am a reciter of The Taiheiki and poor enough at that. I haven't the means to buy Tama pretty dresses and put her out as a maid of honour to a nobleman's family. The daikyoji is of course a tradesman, but unlike an ordinary tradesman, it falls to him to publish the almanac, which is, in a manner of speaking, a mirror all the year round even with the Emperor and the Ministers of State. Moreover this almanac, I'd have you know, is an accurate record of the sun and moon, so that in serving the daikyoji one is serving the deities of the sun and moon.

That's why I sent my niece into his service. In my own province I served its lord and received payment. True, I am now out of employment as a samurai, but for all that I am a samurai. Know then that there are ceremonies proper to dealings between gentlemen. Therefore, if you want to deliver Tama, deliver her up with the ceremony proper."

The Almanac of Love

He spoke with a force and fluency worthy of his profession.

"Enough of such threats. Sukeyemon is not the man to be afraid of a samurai. Well, I will deliver the girl with ceremony."

Sukeyemon dragged Tama, bound hand and foot, from the palanquin. Poor girl! She was bathed in tears.

"I am truly ashamed of myself, uncle."

So saying she once more burst into tears. Saddened by the sight the stout-hearted old man became silent with grief and rage.

"Sukeyemon San," said Tama resentfully, "every question has two sides. O-San Sama and Mohei San, having fled together, it may be impossible to plead their innocence. The real cause of this trouble, as you very well know, is in Ishun Sama's evil ways and your jealousy and wickedness, Sukeyemon. You were wildly in love with O-San Sama. You fancied yourself as her lover. I am very well aware that you won over my fellow maid O-Kaya by plenty of presents, asking her to bring about a secret meeting between you and madam. Many a time I all but informed my master of your evil purposes, but each time just refrained. Such a thing would, I thought, lead to your utter ruin, bad as you were. I took it to be enough if through my vigilance O-San Sama might be preserved from guilt.

With this in my mind day and night I waited upon her so constantly that O-Kaya couldn't find a chance to tell her of your unlawful love. I remember O-Kaya casting a look of hate toward me and burning a billet-doux of yours in secret. From sheer malice and treachery at your disappointment you gave Ishun Sama an exaggerated account of what happened the other night and this serious trouble is the result. But for my good nature and restraint you would have been crucified and O-Kaya beheaded. Whenever I began to plead for my mistress and Mohei you twisted the truth round and prevented me speaking further. Alas! My forbearance has proved my own undoing! Sukeyemon, you are a devil in human shape!" Once more she relapsed into tears and fell prostrate.

"Nonsense, you crazy girl! Take notice, Bairyu San, I have now placed Tama in your charge."

Sukeyemon was making as if to depart when Bairyu, springing upon him from behind, took him by the throat.

"What are you up to now?" demanded the clerk in a fright.

"What am I up to? Pray, why have you bound Tama for all the world as if she'd been taken up by a policeman? I'd have you call to mind that it's against the law for a mere tradesman to bind anybody. Much more so to bind anybody policeman fashion. It's perfectly within my power to hale you before a magistrate and get you a sharp sentence, but if you apologize and unbind Tama I will pardon you. Will you do so, you scoundrel, or do you wish to see the inside of the law-courts?"

The old samurai gripped the young man's throat.

"Ouch! Ouch! I think there's no harm in binding O-Tama like a prisoner. The daikyoji, you know, is different from an ordinary tradesman he is, after a manner of speaking, in the service of the Imperial Court. If you wish her unbound you can unbind her yourself."

"Silence! Such a thing has never been heard, from the days of old till now, as to bind a person put in one's charge. But since you know such a lot about it kindly be so good as to enlighten me as to who has issued a law permitting tradesmen in the service of the Imperial Court to bind a person as a prisoner and when was it issued? I can take any steps I wish with a person who breaks the law. Here's a present for you, you villain!"

The Almanac of Love

Bairyu pulled out the pole from the palanquin and belaboured Sukeyemon with a right good will.

"You brute!" Sukeyemon whimpered, almost battered out of breath.

"You dare to take a stick to Sukeyemon!"

"I have indeed. Which is worse my giving you a drubbing or your having bound O-Tama as if she were a prisoner? Let's go to law about it.

You come along with me, Sukeyemon."

So saying he endeavoured to propel him forward.

"Have it your own way then," faltered Sukeyemon. Give me a moment and I'll unbind her."

Bairyu released Sukeyemon who however made no sign of fulfilling his pledge.

"Well, why don't you unbind her now? D'you want another taste of the stick?"

At this threat Sukeyemon unbound the maid sulkily enough, saying, "Take notice, she is in your charge now. I'll be off and report the matter to the head man of this village. Remember that if you should let her out of your sight a minute your head and body will part company and so will Tama's."

"That'll do now."

Bairyu contented himself with dealing the younger man a cuff or two over the head with his fist, led Tama into the house, shut the door and locked it.

The coolies, somewhat crestfallen on Sukeyemon's account, said, "I fear you've been damaged, sir, you'd better ride back in the palanquin."

"Thank you," replied the sufferer, nursing his cheek. "This sort of thing hasn't happened to me before. But such a thing is scarcely to be wondered at for the almanac says that this place is likely to be unlucky this year as far as I am concerned. And there's no getting past the almanac as you observe."

He stepped into the palanquin and the party set out at a smart pace.

.....

O-San and Mohei, who had never previously loved each other either waking or dreaming, had been driven by the caprice of fortune into a dream-like love and had run away as if in a dream. Impossible to make any preparations for so unexpected a journey, Mohei's slender purse contained but three pieces of silver. Under these circumstances O-San disposed of certain trifles of apparel, and the unfortunate pair travelled onwards without any particular goal, in constant dread of pursuers and of the police.

Nara and Sakai were reached. There they turned about and retraced their way to Otsu and Fushimi. Forsaken, as it seemed, alike by the gods and Buddha, by relations and by friends, they found their hearts bowed down by grief. Walking together they would covertly gaze at one another, blush and stifle their tears.

Now through the village of Okazaki the couple took their way.

The Almanac of Love

"Ah! Mohei San," said O-San between her sobs, "now we are in such plight that sunset to-day or sunrise to-morrow shall behold us no more; the delight of life has gone from me. Nevertheless Tama's fate is yet a matter of concern to me and how I long to see my parents. However hard I endeavour to renounce this idea I cannot achieve it."

"Even so do I feel, madam. I also long to see your parents who were so kind to me. I see we are now at Okazaki, O-Tama's native place. That house on which the paper lantern hangs is her uncle's abode. Indeed I have guided you here from no other reason than to visit him for news of your parents and O-Tama. It were rash however to enter without learning somewhat of what goes forward within."

Standing at the door of the house they listened. O-Tama's voice was audible, but the sense of what she spoke indecipherable for tears. The uncle's voice was heard:

"This volume is the twenty-first of The Taiheiki which I recite nightly. The story concerns Kono Moronao, chief counsellor of the Shogun Taka-uji. Kono Moronao fell in love with the beautiful wife of Yenya Hangwan, a warrior of high rank, and in consequence has left an evil reputation. As a result of this love affair the unfortunate Yenya was murdered. The cause of all this trouble was a maid of honour attendant on Yenya's wife who acted as a go-between. Now, though O-San Sama and Mohei Dono may not always have been lovers, it's beyond all question that they have run away together. Therefore, should you happen to meet them anywhere or if they should chance to come hither, do not speak to them but turn your face away. I know my words may sound harsh, but I don't wish you to be harsh. It is for their sake I say it. If it should become generally known that those two, already branded as lovers, and you, suspected to be their go-between, have met together, you may be perfectly sure people will say, 'They are foxes of the same earth, just as we thought. There can be no doubt since they meet together that O-San and Mohei are lovers and Tama is their go-between.' If such a rumour should get about their punishment could but become the heavier. Think over this. Your seeming harshness will but prove to their good in the end. As this affair has already caused you the humiliation of being bound and put in my charge, so you may expect such punishment as falls to their lot. I charge you, therefore, though you may be beheaded or suffer the loss of a limb or be used as a subject on which to test the sharpness of a new blade, never to show cowardice, but to take thought to yourself that you fall a noble victim to your mistress. Remember you are the niece of a samurai: be brave to the last, my dear."

O-Tama's voice followed. Though it was not strong it tokened a firm resolution.

"Have no fear on that score, uncle, I am quite prepared for death. Yet in this wide world we are but two—an uncle and a niece. How lonely you will feel when I am dead. Ah! That I could know what Mohei San is this moment doing! How grieved I feel for O-San Sama's sake! Where, I wonder, is she now and what has become of her? Knowing what an honest but chicken-hearted woman she is I can well imagine her grief and pain."

"It's natural enough you should so feel. For my part I can well imagine the great grief of her parents."

Uncle and niece mingled their tears.

O-San and Mohei, listening without, dared not give themselves away, but, contenting themselves with peeping through the chinks of the door, gave way to tears like the subdued sound of winter crickets.

Inseparable is the bond of affinity between parent and child. At this very moment O-San's parents, Dojun and his aged wife, chanced to pass by.

The old couple had been overwhelmed with shame at the news of their daughter's elopement. Afraid of meeting their neighbours in broad daylight, they chose night-time for their errands. This evening, accompanied by a little maid, they were walking to their family temple at Kurodani. The moon had not yet risen. As they were about to

The Almanac of Love

pass the cottage the sound of fugitives sobbing reached their ears. Mechanically they stopped to listen.

"Who can it be?" said Dojun, peering into the darkness.

Ere the old woman could make answer Mohei caught sight of Dojun by the light of the lantern and, turning to O-San, exclaimed, "See, it's your father!"

O-San, overjoyed, ran to her parent and embraced him, exclaiming, "Father, father! He shook her off.

"Father? Not I! I would not be called father by one as guilty as you."

He lifted his cane to strike at her, but instantly the old woman blew out the flame in the lantern and shielded her daughter with her sleeve.

"Oh! Grandpapa," she intervened, "please pardon her. "

"Alas, my life in the other world is doomed," mourned the old man.

"O-San being our only daughter, we hoped to have chosen a husband for her and made her succeed to the family estate. But alas! during the last few years many of my customers in the provinces have failed to pay their dues and I have been reduced to such narrow circumstances as to be obliged to mortgage my house. Were she to succeed to the family estate she would, as things are at present, be the loser. Pondering over this I resigned myself to our family relinquishing its name at my death and gave O-San in marriage to Ishun Dono. This I did out of sheer affection and sympathy for her. As for Ishun Dono's family, it was good enough to sympathize with me and declared it needed neither bridal outfit nor marriage portion. That family had a high opinion of the qualities of our line and concluded O-San must be possessed of a like virtue. Accordingly no dowry was asked but that of her pure soul. Oh! The pity of it! Before anyone was aware, the soul of an animal took the place of her soul. Observe the wild ducks and the mandarin ducks on the pond, or the swallows nestling under the eaves.

With them one male pairs alone with one female, such is the rule of all creatures. What female, with the exception of the bitch and the tabby, bears different coloured children to different fathers? And my daughter Oh! My daughter! Can it be that she was born a dog or that I have brought her up to be a cat? Not one word would I speak to such an unclean beast. So much from my point of view but now the mischief is done O-San ought to hide in the depths of the mountain that she may escape pursuit as long as may be. Thoughtless indeed it is of her thus to linger anywhere near Kyoto.

Is it her wish to be arrested and led in open shame through the streets branded as an adulteress? Does she desire that her body be pierced with the spear of the executioner her body for which we had such care? Whether she is alive or come to her death I don't care a fig I neither sigh nor weep over either event. . But it grieves me to see grandmama weep."

Once more the old couple abandoned themselves to tears. Mohei cast himself at their feet.

"Mother dear," said O-San, clutching her mother by the sleeve, "we were never guilty of a deliberate intrigue, but the caprices of chance drove us to a seeming sin and in consequence the infamy of a supposed misconduct attaches to us throughout the capital. It is now no longer possible to prove our innocence. Grieved am I indeed for father's sorrow and mother's grief, yet we must account ourselves lucky in having met you before taking our journey to the world beyond. To that world I shall take the memory of father's kind words. Now that I have seen you I can leave this world without regret. Yes, I shall be without regret, even though the next minute find me caught in the web of fate and though I be fastened upon a cross and pierced with spears."

The Almanac of Love

"Do not say that," cried her father shuddering. "We are all anxiety that you should escape crucifixion."

Once more he wept. O-San's mother produced a purse from her rosary bag.

"I give you all there is in this," she said, "poor girl, you must feel the cold for I see you have disposed of some of your garments. You can use this to renew your wardrobe. I should advise you to escape notice by leaving this neighbourhood with all possible speed and in a palanquin. Spare us the knowledge of your death."

"Thank you, mother," returned O-San, accepting the purse with gratitude. "You are quite right, I have sold my light blue under-dress. But this upper-dress, bearing upon it the design of a heron standing still among the rushes, the present you made me last autumn, I shall wear till the last moment as a memento. Don't be troubled about my clothes, mother, I am past feeling cold now. So long as we do not fall ill we can beg our way. This money I will keep for funeral expenses."

"Alas," her mother replied, "again you speak of death!"

At length Mohei found his tongue. He addressed the aged pair:

"To you it may seem unmanly and shameless that I should still cling to life after committing so great a sin, but my only motive is to find some way or other of saving O-San Sama's life. Will you please take her home with you? Once I am assured of her safety I will assume all the blame and meet execution alone. Consider the matter, I pray you."

Once more he wept, clasping his hands.

"What nonsense is this you are talking!" O-San scornfully exclaimed.

"Were it possible for me to remain unpunished, both could remain unpunished. Although the happening was unintentional it is a fact that I, a married woman, slept with you. Though I were reborn a woman with a different face yet would it be impossible for me to rid myself of this stigma.

I fear you have lost your judgment, Mohei."

"You are right, O-San Sama. Hark! Surely that is the sound of vehicles passing along the street of Sanjo. Day will break ere long. I have no special place of refuge in view, but let us make at all events for my native place Kaibara in the province of Tamba. Come, O-San Sama, bid farewell to your parents."

O-San hesitated. Her parents were unwilling to let her go, fearful lest this might be an everlasting farewell. Till this moment the moon had not arisen and since they could not clearly descry each other they might more readily have overcome the pain of separation. Now, however, the moon illumined their faces and rendered that separation the more difficult.

Almost they hated the moon.

"Ah, father," cried the dame, "for all that a sick man's pulse may be gone, we yet know they continue to give him medicine, trusting to a lucky chance. Our only daughter, our most precious possession, may at any moment be discovered and put to death by the authorities. If this should happen how can we leave her to her fate? Let us three therefore remain in each other's company until the worst befall and let us die together, parent and child. That is my plan."

The Almanac of Love

"No," replied her husband. "True it is that an apparently mortal disease has sometimes been known to be cured by skilful treatment or miraculous potions. And even a man whose heart has ceased to beat is suffered to repose for twenty-four hours undisturbed before he is given up as dead. But this most fatal of all diseases, violation of the national laws, is beyond the farthest art of the great physicians of China, India and Japan.

Only one hope remains to beg forgiveness of Ishun in humility upon our knees. When O-San is arrested and faces her last moments let me bow my grey head to the earth in supplication to the authorities for her life or in entreaty to permit me to die in her stead. For the present it were best if we parted from each other, for thus we shall best benefit O-San. Did it become known that we were sheltering you, the deed could but become an offence to Ishun who cannot forgive you even if he would. Whereas, if it gets about that O-San is deserted, even by her parents and her household, and is undergoing all kinds of misfortunes, Ishun's sympathy may be excited. Do not remember it against me, O-San, that I have called you hard names, likening you to a cat or a dog. There is neither god nor Buddha to whom I do not make supplication for your sake. Every morning, old man of seventy years of age though I am, I purify myself in icy water that I may be in more fit condition to worship sun, moon and stars. Thus doing, all my bones seem to freeze, but, thinking how my suffering can be nothing to the agonies you must experience when crucified, I fortify myself and address those deities the more fervently. Nor do I consider those prayers will be of no avail. Have a care of O-San, Mohei, lest she fall ill. See, I have fifteen ryo which I have borrowed from the priest of the temple at Kurodani as part of the interest of the mortgage on my house. As things are now I have no further care for public reputation and shall accordingly deliver up my house to my creditors. I have therefore no longer need of the money which I ought in truth to return to the priest. I cannot therefore either give it you nor can you accept it if I make the offer. Nevertheless, suppose an old gentleman named Dojun, being under the influence of great emotion and blinded with tears, should happen to let it fall out of sheer absence of mind" here he dropped the money upon the ground "Why, then one may suppose that you, O-San, would not be incapable of picking it up.

Neither the powers of this world or the other ever punish the pickers up of unconsidered trifles. Now, mother, we must home." The old couple took two or three steps forward. Mohei and O-San burst into tears. She picked up the money and held it to her forehead, exclaiming, "What generosity! What love! O father, mother, I am overwhelmed." The old man, permitting himself one backward glance, answered, "Say no more, my darling.

Farewell," and made as if to proceed. His wife stopped him and, if she showed signs of going forward, he in turn stayed her. Thus did the poor fond fools linger. O-San and Mohei, equally reluctant to take the path appointed them, climbed a neighbouring mound that they might follow the old couple with their eyes. Then did the moon, casting their twin shadows and the shadows of Bairyu's two clothes-poles beneath which they stood, project upon the white of the cottage wall in hideous silhouette two figures crucified.

"Look there! Look there cried the mother aghast. See the figures of two crucified!"

"No, what are they but shadows? Heavy am I, for how can I but take this for a sign that their pardon is beyond even the succour of the gods!"

Again they wept bitterly, whereon the cottage door softly opened and O-Tama's head appeared, casting a dismal shadow on the outer wall.

"See!" cried the old woman.

"How dejected a head!" cried Dojun.

They stood momentarily stupefied while O-San and O-Tama gazed on each other in recognition.

The Almanac of Love

"Is it O-Tama? "Do I see O-San Sama? The aged couple, recovering from their stupor, made off with a final farewell. Hardly had their adieus been uttered when the lesser bell of the temple at Kurodani tolled Shometsu-metsui, to be shortly followed by the peal that announces the dawn known as Jakumetsu-iraku, sounds such as appeared prophetic of the final destiny of the young lovers.



In the province of Tamba, among the mountains, Spring, sweet with flowers and loud with bird-song, was come. From the snow of winter, already thawing beneath the warmth of the breeze, a mist ascended, to hang its curtains above the fields and along the flanks of the hills. No more did the icicles glitter like swords from the angles of the eaves. Glens were musical with the universal voice of many waters released.

At Kaibara, an out-of-the-way little town, a troupe of manzai (strolling comic dancers) made their appearance and the pulse of their tabors seemed to possess something of the joyful abandon of the running streams. Dancing before a cottage door they sang:

All upon New Year's Day
The springs unfrozen play,
Green burgeoneth bud and spray;
Hurrah for the Happy New Year!
Ten good deeds does the Emperor do,
Nine only can the wise gods do,
The third day brings Ebisu,
Under whose kindly care
The merchant and his ware
Prosper right well and fair.

Hurrah for the Happy New Year!
Then in the city streets,
Where mart with mart competes,
What welcome our eye greets:
See in the fisher's store
Bass, sea-bream, "Johnny Dore."

And heaven knows what more;
Near by turnip and bean,
Plump pumpkin and radish lean,



The Almanac of Love

Red peppers and peppers green;
Hurrah for the Happy New Year!
With gold and silver hoard
Is the merchant's chest now stored,
Joy gladdeneth house and board;
In family unison
Grandad and his son's son
Alike now share the fun:
Hurrah for the Happy New Year!

"Thanks for your good wishes. Here is a hundred mon for you with the prayer that my father and mother may live to be each a hundred years old and in good health."

The speaker, a beautiful young woman, offered the dancers the alms wrapped in a piece of paper and set upon a tray. The leader of the dancers received the offering with thanks, at the same time curiously scrutinizing the donor's face.

"Ah, madam, how are you? This is indeed a pleasant surprise."

"Your meaning? I have no friend among the manzai."

"There's no reason why you should recognize us, but how can we forget you, madam? You are the lady of Mr. Ishun the daikyoji at Karasumaru, Kyoto, are you not? Every year when New Year's Day came round we danced in your courtyard while you were pleased to look on us from your parlour where you sat on a splendid cushion attended by your waiting maids. That was you, wasn't it, madam? You used to like the Rice-Planting tune. Shall we dance it now, madam?"

O-San was taken aback.

"Those are sharp eyes of yours," said she. "I must have seen you every year and yet I don't remember you personally.... I ask you to be so good as to tell nobody that I am here. The fact is my father, owing to a business failure, retired and took up residence in this town some months ago. I myself came here recently to inquire after his health and my mother's. For a particular reason, with which I won't bother you now, I thought it best to report myself to the head man of this town as a light-o'-love from Shimabara, Kyoto, who had been bought out by her lover. If anybody should question you concerning me, please say I am a lady of easy virtue you used to know at Shimabara, and when you visit the capital please don't talk of me, but keep my presence here a dead secret. Let me offer you something more."

O-San took some fifty further mon off the string of cash and gave it to the dancer.

"A thousand thanks, madam. We shall go up to Kyoto in two or three days and during our visit call at your house and take a friendly cup with Sukeyemon Sama and your other clerks, according to our annual custom.

I'll inform them that you are in good health, madam."

The Almanac of Love

The dancers were about to make off when O-San called them back.

"Oh! And this too, gentlemen. May I beg you never to mention my name before the people of Karasumaru. Somewhat fearful I am lest my name should escape your lips when the sak" has done its work. I therefore beg of you, give up this idea of going to Karasumaru this year. The following New Year I hope to be back at Kyoto, when we will celebrate the occasion together. I wish I could offer you some sak" here and now, but unfortunately we are out of it at present. Will you use this to drink with when and where you choose?"

She slipped two or three pieces of silver as hush-money into the leader's hand.

"A thousand thanks, madam. Depend upon it we won't mention you anywhere. Such a sum makes us more drunk than any sak" can. Again a thousand thanks."

The dancers departed, rejoicing over their luck.

O-San was yet immersed in a brown study, pondering a thousand things, when Mohei returned, pale and crestfallen.

"How glad I am to see you back, Mohei San," she hastened to say. "It is but a few minutes ago since the manzai that used to call on us every year in Kyoto were here. They were much surprised to see me and asked me how I came to be here. I concealed my consternation and told them a cock-and-bull story. However, I feel we can hardly remain here, for not even here are we safe."

Mohei, no less panic-stricken, made answer:

"In great danger we are indeed. I have but this moment learned that Ishun Sama, Sukeyemon, and all the other clerks have halted from their pursuit of us in the next village. I don't wonder at it. 'Both heaven and earth' as the proverb says, 'know all about it'. Beside the manzai, many chestnut sellers and hawkers of firewood from Tamba who occasionally visit Kyoto must have noted us, and it is probably from their lips that our enemies have heard of our movements. Moreover two palanquin bearers went by just now, carrying visitors to the hot springs of Tajima Province, and let drop some unpleasant details, saying, 'O-San, the wife of the daikyoji, is known to be hiding in the mountains of Tamba and despatches from the authorities at Kyoto to this effect have reached the bailiff's office in this town. We have carried an officer post-haste these five miles from Oinosaka Hill, searching for O-San's whereabouts.' They said they were paid no less than ten ryo for the job."

"Our hours then are numbered," exclaimed O-San. A shudder shook her frame.

"Well, I am prepared for it. But how my parents will grieve at the news! That alone worries me. Since it is my duty as my parents' daughter to prolong my life every hour I can, let us leave the town during the coming night."

"That will be best. Of the money your father so kindly gave us we have spent but three ryo. There is therefore twelve ryo yet remaining which I have put in charge of Sukesaku, the owner of this house. Thinking that it would be better to die with that money, the symbol of your father's affection, in our hands, than leave it as treasure to another man, I have this moment called on Sukesaku to ask him to return it. He said he'd bring it presently. We had best make our way somehow or other to Miyazu in Tango Province, where a relative of mine is living. But in the event of ill-luck overtaking us before we reach the spot, I beg of you, as I have often begged before, to resign yourself to the ordinances of fate. It grieves me to think that your precious life may come to be lost through any doings of mine."

Mohei appeared much dejected.

The Almanac of Love

"Once more you repeat yourself. Remember what we suffer now was preordained from the beginning of the world. I am therefore resigned to it, but none the less cannot refrain from constantly thinking of my parents.

For Ishun Sama I also grieve, who has been my companion from childhood up. I nurse a desire to prove to him our absolute innocence before we die."

So saying, O-San wept bitterly. Sukesaku entered abruptly.

"Shinroku San," he said brusquely, "I thought it a pity to let your money remain idle in my coffer and have accordingly lent it out on interest for your benefit. I cannot therefore return it to you forthwith. Please allow me one or two days' grace. You're a reckless man. Give up, my dear fellow, your foolish project of wasting more money after redeeming such a light-o'-love as this."

"Nay, Sukesaku San," broke in O-San, assuming the manner and language of those amongst whom she gave herself out to be numbered, "'tis not my lover but myself who needs the money. A woman who has 'gone gay', why, the more patrons she has the more showy must her style of life be. This means that she gets into debt and has a poor time of it in consequence. A sum I borrowed from one of my former patrons is due to-night. If I fail to repay it at this the proper time I shall cut a poor figure.

Shinroku San, you see, has been disinherited by his father, the Osaka millionaire, purely on my account; none the less we expect to be reconciled ere long. When that reconciliation takes place and he returns to Osaka be sure to call for his assistance if you need it at any hour of the day or night.

He can accommodate you with any sum you please, a thousand ryo if you like, why, ten thousand if necessary I speak the truth, sir and that without asking any interest." She turned to Mohei. "You could do that, couldn't you, dear?"

"Certainly," replied Mohei. "I regret to be such a trouble to you, Sukesaku, but will you please do your best to return me the money to-night."

"Why, then I will do so. I had no notion of your urgent need. I won't fail to bring the money between four o'clock and nightfall. You two will make sure to be at home, won't you, for I shall need a written receipt."

"Why not? We shall not stir."

Sukesaku departed in haste.

"How skilfully you deceived Sukesaku. Your frequent play-going has not been without its results I see. If we set out directly we receive the money and walk as fast as we can, we should be able easily to cover some seventeen or eighteen miles in the course of the night. The priest of the Monju Temple near Miyazu is a relative of my mother's. If we ask him to shelter us he can scarcely refuse. Come, let us make ready." As they made their preparations the sound of arms and of heavy footsteps drew near.

O-San listened intently.

"What's that?"

"Heaven protect us! I fear Sukesaku has undone us. We can no longer escape. Do not play the coward."

"I am quite prepared. Have no fears."

The Almanac of Love

A moment later several officers appeared, Sukesaku guiding them.

No sooner did they spy the pair than, crying out, "Consider yourselves our prisoners; we arrest you in the name of the authorities," they rushed forward, flourishing maces and cords.

Mohei, not a whit daunted, stepped forward and said "Quietly, sirs, I offer no resistance. I am a tradesman and bear no arms as you see not even a dagger. True it is I have practised ju-jutsu 10 from boyhood up and therefore can if need be throw half a dozen officers and more, for all that my arms are so slender. But resist you I will not, for this trouble arises from my master's resentment. Were I to resist you it would be tantamount to resisting my master. As for my companion here, I could proffer you irrefutable proof of her innocence, but I will not do so. If your charge be adultery, please make that charge and bind us."

The officers, once more crying, "Consider yourselves our prisoners,"

closed in upon the young pair and tightly bound them. Neither offered any resistance or showed the least fear. The officers were struck with admiration at their heroic bearing.

"How mean a peasant," O-San exclaimed, fixing her eye on Sukesaku.

"Out of what depth of base avarice have you betrayed us!"

She turned to the officers. "One moment please. The truth is, sirs, we have lodged twelve ryo in this man's charge. We prisoners have no need of money, but that sum is a symbol of my father's profound love toward me. I beseech you, sirs, extort it from this man and have it sent to the priest of the temple of Kurodani, of whom my father is a debtor." Scarcely had she thus spoken when Sukesaku roared:

"The jade! I never borrowed a penny of her! Quite the contrary. I let this house to you for some fifty days for which you owe me about five ryo, representing the house rent and the price of rice and miso. It's sheer cozenage to suggest that you have entrusted me with twelve ryo." At this Mohei, bound as he was, rose to his feet and dealt the villain such a kick as to send him sprawling.

"To what end should we lie to such a wretch about so paltry a sum? If you covet it so badly why then we make it yours. When you get to Hell's house be sure to have the money about you, then you can spin a yarn to King Yama as to how you were a Midas in this world."

So saying, Mohei dealt Sukesaku another sound kick or two and resumed his seat with some composure.

Then it was that Sukeyemon, who had been observing the scene, rushed forward. Turning to the officers he said respectfully:

"Sirs, I am cousin of this informer, Sukesaku, and head clerk of Ishun the daikyoji of Kyoto and my name is Sukeyemon. Accept my thanks for the trouble you have been at in effecting the arrest of O-San and Mohei. My master and I rejoice at the glad news. Our desire is to carry the prisoners home to Kyoto. Will you be so good, sirs, as to deliver them up to us?"

"A saucy fellow," rapped out the chief of the officers, "to demand the delivery of the prisoners! Keep in mind that we haven't arrested them on your account, but on the order of the authorities in Kyoto, whither we are forthwith to carry them, there to be placed in gaol. They are prisoners of particular importance and are to be the subject of a careful examination.

Offer any more impertinence and you will very soon find yourself a prisoner too."

The Almanac of Love

Sukeyemon, abashed and not a little seared, withdrew.

A palanquin, borne in great haste, appeared, from the recesses of which there stepped out no other than the old man Akamatsu Bairyu, having in his hand a closed wooden box. He made obeisance to the officers and began:

"Sirs, my name is Akamatsu Bairyu and I am uncle and surety to O-Tama, a maid of Ishun the daikyoji. I beg to assure you these prisoners are not guilty of adultery. Some misconstruction of my niece's hasty talk and an overhasty jealousy have caused O-San and Mohei most unjustly to be considered as adulterers. My little fool of a niece was alone to blame.

That she might make atonement for her great fault I have killed her and brought her head here in this box. I humbly beseech you, sirs, to save the lives of these innocent prisoners."

Bairyu uncovered the box. Within reposed O-Tama's head, the eyelids lowered as if in slumber. A murmur of horror escaped the prisoners, then, averting their eyes, both burst into tears. The chief of the officers bent a compassionate glance upon Bairyu.

"A rash deed have you done, old man! Know that the prisoners' guilt has not yet been clearly established. It was our intention to carry them for examination at Kyoto and to summon your niece as witness. Under such procedure all would become clear and all three of them might possibly be found innocent.' But, forasmuch as you have seen fit thoughtlessly to slay the witness, what evidence have we that can stand them in good stead? I grieve to have to say it, but their punishment is settled. To Kyoto must they go, there to suffer execution. Officers, make ready to convey the prisoners."

"As you will, sir."

The henchmen, taking up the ends of the cords, ordered the prisoners to stand up.

Bairyu stamped and raged in vain:

"Rash and thoughtless have I been! All in vain have you perished, Tama. Seventy summers have I seen and, having seen them, made the greatest blunder of my life. Shame overcomes me, but if I despatch myself as token of atonement a mere laughing-stock should I be. Where may I find me an enemy?" here he caught sight of Sukeyemon "Sukeyemon, none fitter. You I will slay that, charged with murder, I may be executed with this poor couple."

In a flash the old samurai had drawn his blade and fallen upon Sukeyemon, who, cut about the face, ran hither and thither, dripping blood.

"Nothing but the head itself will suffice me."

Bairyu made at him, but the constables stepped between, crying, "Enough, no murder!"

"Let me get at him! Let me get at him! If it be murder it has a purpose."

Vainly he struggled to free himself, the waning strength of an old man borne down by the strength of many.

O-San and Mohei, tightly bound, were seated upon separate horses and the procession started for the execution ground in the suburbs of Kyoto. The horses that bore the prisoners were, no less than all other living creatures, doomed sooner or later to the land of shadow, but to that pair of prisoners, whose last moments were so rapidly approaching, it seemed that they alone were vanishing from the world. Slowly as the horses ambled, too swiftly,

The Almanac of Love

all too swiftly were they felt to proceed by those who momentarily neared their lasting home. Nineteen summers had one and but twenty-five the other, from whose eyes, wistfully gazing upon the frosts that starred the path, the hot tears fell like drops of dew down their cheeks and upon their saddles. Passers-by and guardians alike were moved at their sorrowful faces and dejected figures.

"Listen, Mohei San," said O-San timidly, her little voice nigh broken, "What grief is mine that for my foolish jealousy's sake you, who are guilty in no wise, should have come to be branded as an adulterer. Very grieved am I for your sake and beg your forgiveness."

Mohei lifted his head a little.

"Not so should you speak, O-San Sama," Mohei made answer, scarce able to speak for tears. "Whether I be burned by fire or the water take me, I am resigned to my doom. Yes, I am utterly prepared for the worst, but, that I may be spared the agonies of the life to come, I make prayer to Amida Buddha in my heart. Do you pray too."

"I thank you. So will I."

At length the slow and dreary journey, across the mountains, down the ravines and over the plains, drew to its close. Lo! Afar off glittered through the bitter boughs of winter a ghastly flashing: the naked spears of executioners. When this reality came home to the prisoners a shudder seized them. For all their resolution a low murmur escaped their lips.

Gazing upon each other they wept bitterly, the tears falling even upon the manes of the horses. Through the tops of the pine-grove whistled the frore wind of evening, scattering upon them a handful of snowflakes. Numbed were the prisoners' hands and upon their sleeves the tears were frozen.

Reverie of intense melancholy fell upon the prisoners, and thinking upon their natures, each was downcast. Might not O-San's "metal-nature" signify that it was ordained she must perish by a blade? Might not Mohei's "earth-nature" prefigure a doom consequent upon a former life that early he should be buried in the earth? Her maid's name "O-Tama" or "Bead", what could it have been but an omen that, like a bead of dew O-Tama should perish early? Short as O-San and O-Tama's relationship as mistress and maid had been in this world, now might they enjoy companionship in Hades. Ere long the party found themselves upon a level road and approaching the execution ground. A throng of spectators noisily discussed the prisoners. Dojun and his spouse, with difficulty making their way through the crowd, prostrated themselves in tearful entreaty before the officers. "Sirs, our daughter's crime is dire, nevertheless most humbly we beseech you, favour her with mercy. For her sake we fear neither crucifixion nor decapitation. We here beseech you that you grant our earnest request, which is that you kill us as substitutes for her. Do this and save our dearest daughter's life. Ah! O-San, poor daughter!"

Weeping, the pair clung to O-San as she was lifted from the horse.

The henchmen drove them away.

The fatal moment was all but come, when, like a messenger of the gods, the priest Togan of the temple of Kurodani suddenly appeared.

"Permit me, sirs, to make an attempt to save the lives of O-San and Mohei. Refuse a priest's request for mercy and damned you must be eternally."

So saying, he endeavoured to shelter the prisoners behind his flowing sleeves. This Togan was a celebrated priest who enjoyed great influence with the authorities of the capital. None the less the chief of the officers made angry answer:

The Almanac of Love

"Not so, your reverence, you overleap yourself in seeking to save the lives of criminals whose sentence has already been pronounced. It is not your affair."

But for all that the priest persisted.

"Grant me these lives. Guilty though they may be, were I to take them for my disciples, who knows but that they might find such a path as would release them from the burden of sin. Suffer me, sirs, to save their lives in this world, whatever be their lot in the next. Saved them I have, yes, I see they are pardoned!"

At this assertion a cry of exultation suddenly arose from the sympathetic crowd. It goes without saying that the old couple were beside themselves with joy and gratitude.

Thus were saved O-San and Mohei.

This joyful tale, even as the daikyoji's almanac, came to be repeated year after year and is thus handed down to this very day.