

A TRANSLATION OF "HOKAN" BY JUNICHIRO TANIZAKI

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Introduction

THIS SHORT STORY BY JUNICHIRO TANIZAKI WAS FIRST PUBLISHED in *Subaru* (Pleiades), a literary apprentice magazine, in September, 1911 when the author was twenty-six. Of course, it has appeared since then in various collections of Tanizaki's works. Tanizaki joined the ranks of first-rate professional writers after publishing only five stories (this is one of them) in "undergraduate" magazines, on the strength of the critical evaluation of his works by Nagai Kafu—then an established writer. "Hokan," besides providing clues for detective work in the literary history of modern Japanese literature, attests to the ability of Tanizaki to tell a good story. In this story, first of all, Tanizaki is a skillful raconteur. His story has humor, irony and a tragic note. In "Hokan," a professional jester provides the jokes and creates the merry mood necessary for the enjoyment of wine and song in geisha parties. (A geisha is a woman professionally trained to entertain at parties.) Sampei, the protagonist in this story, is not only a professional clown. He has the heart of a clown.

Seven years ago, Tanizaki's complete works were published in thirty volumes. Sei Ito, its editor and one of the foremost literary critics of Japan, noted that "Hokan" ranks as one of Tanizaki's masterpieces. This Japanese critic wrote that it has humor and the skillful finish of Tanizaki's later works. Moreover, its motif—the tragedy of a man who was too susceptible to the way of thinking of others—is repeated in Tanizaki's "The Mother of Captain Shigemoto."

The Translation *

H O K A N

(THE PROFESSIONAL JESTER)

The Russo-Japanese war, which agitated the world from the summer of 1904 to autumn, the following year, finally ended with the announcement of the Treaty of Portsmouth. Different enterprises suddenly rose to power, one after the other, as a result of the call for development of national power; parvenu and a new nobility arose. This story happened around the middle of April 1907, when the whole world was somehow as lively as a holiday.

The cherry flowers on the banks of Mukojima were just in full bloom. The day cleared up to a serene Sunday. Since morning, the steamships as well

* The *Asian Studies* is proud to include in this issue one of the first attempts, if not the first, of a Filipino to translate from the original, in Japanese, a noteworthy literary piece by a leading Japanese writer, Tanizaki Junichiro. (The Editor.)

as the Asakusa-bound trains were packed. Beyond Azuma Bridge which the people crossed like a slow stream of ants, from Yomatsu to the vicinity of Kototoi's boathouse, a warm haze settled. The opposite bank, from Prince Komatsu's Villa to the Hashiba, Imado and Hanakawado Districts, was enveloped in a bluish, misty light. Beyond that, the twenty steps of the park stood dimly beneath the wet, deep blue, stifling sky. The Sumida River which flowed from Senzumai passed below the bottom of the deep haze and formed fully a big river after meandering once at the tip of Komatsu Island. While the sunlight coruscated in the calm, tepid water which seemed to have been intoxicated by the spring on both banks as the river flowed straight on past Azuma Bridge. The rather thick and generous waves rolled lightly and languidly. A few boats—some of them, purposely for flower-viewing—were afloat on this river, the surface of which was as soft as quilt. A ferry boat sometimes left the mouth of Sanyo Moat and cut across the procession of downstream-and upstream-bound boats. It continuously transported its passengers who filled it up to the gunwale on the banks.

It was about ten that morning. A flower-viewing boat emerged from the mouth of Kanda River, passed by the walls of Kameseiro and was rowed mid-stream into Sumida River. Aboard this large junk's jolly boat which was attractively decorated with red and white striped curtains was a professional jester from Daichi. In the middle of the boat Sakakibara—a well-known stock broker, a *nouveau riche* who made his pile in Kabutocho¹—was accompanied by five or six subordinates. While slowly drinking from a large wine cup, he looked here and there at the men and women on board. His stout, ruddy face was already flushed with wine. As it was floating midstream along the walls of Count Fujido's Villa, a singing voice, accompanied by stringed instruments, floated from behind the curtains. The cheerful sound ruffled the waters of the Sumida River as the boat advanced along the banks of Hyapponkin and Daichi. Those on the streets along Asakusa bank and those on the Ryogoku Bridge craned their necks. Everyone was attracted to this resounding singing. Those who were on the shore watched for ways to discern the goings-on in the boat. Sometimes, the light breeze carried across the river the coquettish words of a woman.

I think that it was along Yokotsuna bank when someone disguised as a fantastic, long-necked monster appeared on the bow. Accompanied by a *samisen*,² he began to perform an extremely ludicrous dance. His head appeared to be completely covered with a very long, slender paper bag which was attached to a big balloon on which a woman's eyes and nose were drawn. His face was totally hidden inside the paper bag. He wore a gaudy, long-sleeved *yuzen*³ kimono and white *tabi*.⁴ A firm, manly wrist sometimes showed through the scarlet sleeve-band when his hands made the motion of holding something aloft. His brown, bony fingers were especially conspicuous. The lady on the balloon was blown lightly by the breeze. She espied the houses on the nearby river banks and grazed the heads of the boatmen she met, all the while

¹ Tokyo's Wall Street.

² A three-stringed instrument.

³ Printed muslin.

⁴ Japanese socks.

attracting the attention of the people on the shore who clapped their hands and resounded with laughter.

While they were shouting "Look! There!" the boat proceeded toward Umaya Bridge on which the people formed a dark swarm. Their yellow faces were lined along the railing as they looked down at the figure in the boat. As the boat approached, the long-necked monster's eyes and ears were distinctly drawn in mid-air and the onlookers were enticed to look at the indescribably buoyant expression which seemed to be crying, laughing, and sleeping. Meanwhile, as the bow of the boat moved into the shadow of the bridge, its head floated higher on the increased volume of water scraping slightly the railing and coming nearer to the spectator's gaze. They stooped for a look. Then it crawled languidly across the edge of the bridge girder and this time it floated gently toward the clear sky. When it reached Komagatado, the crowd on Azuma Bridge recognized it from afar and, even from inside the boat, it was apparent that the spectators were just like people waiting to welcome the return of triumphant troops.

As in Umaya Bridge, the humorous dance made the people laugh. Finally, the boat reached Mukojima. The sound of *samisen* became increasingly merrier. Just as a bull that pulls a festival float is urged on by meaningless shouts, the boat sailed as if pushed forward by the strength of the lively music. The river became narrow due to the number of boats that were rowed out for flower-viewing. The students in the boats, with fluttering red and blue banners, began to cheer. The crowd on the banks was simply astonished. They kept looking at the strange jester's boat as it moved along. The long-necked monster danced with increasing versatility. While the toy balloon was fluttering in the river breeze, the steamship suddenly belched white smoke and the jester immediately jumped so high he could see Matsuchi Hill below him. As if to curry favor with the onlookers, he continued his foolery, making himself the center of attraction in the river.

Near Kototoi, the boat left the shore but, even while it was going upstream again, those wandering around the riverbank—near Uehan Restaurant and the Finance Minister's Villa—looked far out at the river's course; while they watched the boat intently, they wondered what the face of the long-necked monster, which now looked like a ghost could really be. At last, the boat which caused much commotion on the banks with its audacious entertainment weighed anchor at the Kagetsugedan jetty. The passengers thronged pell-mell into the lawn. Surrounded by *geishas*, Sakakibara said, "Thank you. Much obliged." Amidst the cheers and applause, the man who impersonated the long-necked monster took off the head-fitting paper bag. From the opening in his blazing red neckband, his face that was beaming with smiles and his ebony black, bald head, began to show.

In place of entertainment on the shore, they continued their party here. Sakakibara mixed with the numerous men and women in the lawn. He made a commotion as he danced, ran about, played tag and hide-and-seek. The jester in a long-sleeved kimono slipped into his white *tabi* the red straps of a hemp-soled sandals and in faltering, tottering steps he chased and was chased by the *geishas*. After he wound a towel around his head to cover his eyes, he

caused more commotion than ever. Sakakibara and the geishas clapped their hands in mirth and, swinging their bodies, they began to dance. Beneath the jester's ornamental petticoat, his hairy legs showed.

"Kii Chan! Kii Chan! I've got you!" he would shout. Somewhere there was the strain of a sharp, mature voice which seemed to be a geisha's. He flitted through the sleeves of women, hit his head against a tree, ran confusedly here and there. He went about in an incomparably fast pace. Since he played the fool, it was not easy to catch anyone.

Everyone was amused. They held their chuckles, approached his back on tip-toe, then, suddenly and coquettishly whispered, "Here I am," tapped his shoulder, and ran away. Sakakibara shook him, pulled his earlobe asking, "How's this? How's this?"

"Ouch! Ouch!" he cried in pain. Knitting his eyebrows and intentionally feigning a very pitiful facial expression, his body seemed to be in agony. He had such an impishly appealing expression that they hit his head or plucked his nose. There was no one who did not feel like teasing him.

Then a fourteen-to-fifteen-year-old tomboyish, half-fledged geisha followed him and tripped him with her hands. He fell and rolled skillfully on the lawn. Amidst the burst of laughter, he got up slowly. With his eyes closed, he opened his large mouth and bellowed, "Who? Who bullied this old man?" Like Yura San,⁵ he extended his hands and groped his way out.

This professional jester was called Sampei. He was formerly a stock-jobber in Kabutocho but, even at that time, he was dying to do his present job. Finally, four to five years ago, he worked as the apprentice of the professional clown, Yanagibashi. Since he had an extraordinary knack for clowning, his patronage was soon arranged. Now he is a worthy member of the group.

His old friends sometimes gossiped, "Sakurai (that was his real name) is so carefree! He prefers being a clown to being a stockjobber. I just don't understand why it could be any better. He probably earns a considerable sum so finally that would make him happy."

During the Russo-Japanese War, there was quite a number of brokerages with several employees around Kaiun Bridge. He was the associate of Sakakibara and several other brokers. Even then, he was known to make parties boisterous and interesting. Since he pleased his friends, there was always a place for him in their parties. He was versatile in both song and speech and, even when he became affluent, he never put on airs. He would forget that he was a fine broker. In fact, he was apt to forget his dignity as a respectable man. He was indescribably happy when he was heartily praised and doted on by his friends and geishas. Under the bright electric light, he would gaily move about his flushed, smiling face, changing his expression while saying, "Yes. Yes." Then he would talk volubly cracking witty jokes. He would go on endlessly as if his life depended on it. His winsome eyes glistened with uncontained joy during those moments. He would shake his flabby, slipshod shoulders as if he were not misbehaving. He had truly penetrated the essence of pleasure and was just like the very personification of merry-making itself.

⁵ A character in the drama "Forty-seven Ronin" (Chusingura) who was often drunk.

The *geishas* could hardly distinguish him from the guests for he too welcomed and entertained them. At first, they thought, "What a weird person." They disliked him and felt something eerie about him in the pit of their stomachs. But they gradually realized what a sort of person he was—that he had no inexplicable intentions for he was simply the amiable kind who was happy to be regarded as charming. So they came to address him intimately as "Sakurai." But, though they found him useful, no one admired or flattered him even when he was already rich and influential. He was called "Sakurai" but never addressed as "Sir" or "Master." Naturally, he was considered as one rank lower than the guests but he did not find this rude.

In fact, he did not command love or respect. He was innately a person whom one held with a kind of warm contempt or regarded with pity—a likeable man whom one treated as a favorite pet. Perhaps, even a beggar would not have felt like bowing to him. Besides, even if they made a fool of him, he did not get angry; on the contrary, he enjoyed it. When he had money, he would surely invite his friends to a drinking spree. Whatever business held him back when there was a party or an invitation from his friends, he could not help himself. He would become a complete sluggard and go out cheerfully.

"Well, thanks for coming," his friends would begin to jest with him. He would bow again and surely revise his original greeting by saying, "Please, please. You don't have to be so salutary." The *geishas*, imitating the tone of the guests, would jokingly throw to him a crumpled ball of paper, "Here, here take this."

"Thank you so much," he would answer placing it on a fan and bowing a few times he would continue, "Thank you. Won't you throw a little more. This is only two farthings but it will do to help my family. Tokyoites usually side with the weak and crush the strong. . . ." he would continue glibly in the tone of a magician in a fair.

Even such a carefree man seemed to fall in love. Sometimes, he dragged in an ex-*geisha* although he did not have any intention of sleeping with her. If he fell in love with her, he would be more slipshod and in order to win her favor, he would be zealously funny, losing all his dignity as host. When he wanted to curry others' favor, he was willing to be used at their will; at their beck and call, he would do as they bid him. "Do this. Do that," and, without any self-respect, he would do so. Somehow, he had been struck on the head and called "Damn fool!" by women drunkards. His lady friends and, even his tea house acquaintances, often refused his invitations so that every evening, with his friends and employees and his *samisen* as his wife, they drank, sang and created a great uproar in the second floor.

Once, his woman was won away by a friend. But even so, he regretted parting from them. He humored the woman, bought some clothes for the man, brought them to the theater and invited them once as guests. As before, he played the jester and was happy to be used completely as a tool. Lastly, he sometimes made *geishas* stay indoors with him, under the guise of hiring them as performers. With his male friends, he was not obstinate at all. Nor did he get angry at them due to jealousy. However, towards women, he was

very fickle. When he liked someone very much, he persistently showed his attention and then suddenly his fervor would fade away. In this way, he has had numerous lovers. But, since no woman had ever fallen in love with him, he would press his suit as far as possible while there was hope for it. On opportuned occasions, he would go farther.

Thus, he had no prestige at all among his employees. Sometimes, he caused a heavy deficit. He neglected his business until, finally, he became bankrupt. After that, he worked as a salesman in spot bargains and then as a touter. When he met acquaintances, he bragged, "Just watch. I'll show you how well I can bounce back." He was quite affable and so, with his good foresight, he occasionally had a profitable job. But he was always taken in by women so that he would be badly off the whole year. Finally, he was heavily in debt. That was how he came to ask his old friend Sakakibara, "Please try using me for a while."

Although he was reduced to a mere employee, he could not fully forget the pleasures with the *geishas* which had permeated his whole body. Sometimes, while he appeared busy before his table, he would remember the voice of a coquette and the lively tune of the *samisen*. Lost in his own thoughts, he would sing a love ditty the whole day. When it became unbearable, somehow with persuasive talk and the money he bilked little by little, he would stealthily take leave of Sakakibara and go out to enjoy himself.

Some considering him pitiful would innocently give him some money. But he would go back to them repeatedly so that they became angry and they resolved to give him a good drubbing. "He's obnoxious! Such a hopelessly sloven person! I was not aware at all that he was so ill-natured," they would complain. However, there was something pitiful in him so that when they met him they would not speak harshly to him. When he said, "Next time I'll really fulfill my promise. Please let it pass this time," they would send him away but he would annoyingly follow them about imploring, "Please don't turn me away. Please. I'll pay you immediately. Please, for God's sake. For God's sake, please. . . ." Most of them lost their patience with him.

Hearing about it, Sakakibara told him, "I'll take you out now and then so please don't trouble others so much." After accompanying Sakakibara to one of his intimate *geisha* parties, he was like a different man. He worked zealously and went about cheerfully. More than anything, *sake*⁶ and his innocent face were balm to Sakakibara's moods of depression caused by financial worries, so that he frequently took him out with him. In the end, this became Sakurai's main job. The whole day, he was idle in the office. He would jokingly but proudly announce, "I am the paid entertainer of Sakakibara Ltd."

Sakakibara's wife came from a respectable family. They had three children. Everyone in his household, from Kami—his fifteen year old eldest daughter—to the maids, was fond of Sakurai. They would invite him inside to listen to his witty talks by saying, "We have some dainty dishes so please come to the kitchen and have some."

⁶ Japanese rice wine.

"One as carefree as you would always be happy. You would go through life merrily never suffering even in poverty," Kami told him once.

"That's true. I have never been angry. Surely, that is because I know how to enjoy myself," he answered.

Then, for about an hour, he would keep on chattering. Occasionally, he sang to them in his low, husky voice. He had a general knowledge of all kinds of songs—ditties, Tokiwazu and Kiyomoto ballads,⁷ etc. Elated with the beauty of his own voice, he would happily hum *samisen* tunes. Everyone listened attentively. Before anything else, he memorized popular songs. Then, he would immediately go inside and announce to Kami, "Shall I teach you an interesting one?"

He saw *kyogen*⁸ at the Kabuki Theatre and the stageplays from the gallery a few times and all as often as they changed. Soon, he could mimic the voices of the famous actors like Shikuwan and Yaozo. Sometimes, in his zeal to imitate, he would be so absorbed in his practice that he would stare his eyes out or move his head about while in the toilet or in the streets. During idle moments, he mimicked or hummed ballads from beginning to end. Somehow or other, he felt unsatisfied when alone. Since childhood, he had been very much interested in songs and comic stories. Since birth and during his elementary days in the foothills of Mt. Atago,⁹ he was considered a child prodigy. He had a good memory and he excelled in his studies. However, in spite of the fact that he was at the head of his class, his tendency to be a clown was already apparent. He was happy when his classmates treated him as their vassal.

He pressed his father to take him nightly to the variety-hall. He regarded the storytellers with a kind of sympathy; indeed, he longed to be one himself. Fashionably dressed, the storyteller would go up the stage and then suddenly stop to greet the audience and then begin, "I always hear that man has two weaknesses—wine and woman. This is so—most specially the powerful wife. Since olden times, it had been said that 'Our country cannot do without women'¹⁰ . . ." He spoke with relish and affection that he himself must have certainly enjoyed his work. He spoke lovingly of women with each word. Sometimes, with a look full of charm, he glanced at the spectators. He was so affable that he left Sakurai with a very deep impression of human warmth. Ejaculating "Ah! *korya!* *korya!*"¹¹ the performer joined the lively *samisen* and, when he sang Japanese limericks, tuned the *samisen* to a noisier tone, and plucked its strings in the fashionable manner, he aroused even in the child, Sampei, his dormant prodigal tendencies. Sampei felt that it was indicative of the joy and happiness of life. On his way to and from school, he often loitered below the window of a Kiyomoto ballad teacher and listened with rapt interest. If he heard the Shinnai tune¹² while studying at night, he could not

⁷ Types of ballad singing that originated in the mid-Edo Period (1603-1868).

⁸ Comic interludes.

⁹ In Kyoto.

¹⁰ Refers to the mythical story that when their Sun Goddess (Amaterasu-no mikami) was angered by her brother, she hid inside a cave and the world was plunged into darkness.

¹¹ Meaningless emotive words.

¹² A sad and moving style of singing ballads.

continue. His head would be giddy with the melody and finally he would throw his books away. He received his first invitation to a *geisha* party when he was twenty. The beautiful entertainers were seated in a row before them. While holding a wine-cup, the theater-*samisen* which he had longed for all his life was brought out. He was so moved that his eyes were filled with tears. No wonder, he is so skillful in entertaining others.

It was Sakakibara who hit upon the idea of making him take up the profession of clowning. When he told him, "You cannot be idling always. I'll help you, so how about becoming a professional clown? You can drink for nothing and receive tips besides. There can be no better occupation. I'll take you to a dumping place for lazy-bones like you," Sakurai immediately acquiesced. Finally, through the good offices of Sakakibara, he was accepted as an apprentice of the professional clown, Yanagibashi, who named him Sampei. His friends in Kabutocho thought, "Sakurai a professional clown? Really, nobody is entirely useless!" They helped Sampei by spreading the humor. He was skilled in the arts of entertainment although he was still called a novice. At any rate, since he had the reputation of a *harum-scarum* before he became a professional jester, in less than no time, he was hired out.

One day, Sakakibara was in the second floor of an assignation house with several *geishas*. He was practicing hypnotism on them, one after the other. However, only a fledgling *geisha* was hypnotized a little; the others somehow did not feel sleepy. Sampei, who was present, suddenly shuddered with fear, "Please, sir, I hate hypnotism. Somehow, even just looking at a hypnotized person, I feel giddy." He was so terrified that he seemed to have been hypnotized himself.

"This is interesting. I'll do it to you, then," Sakakibara replied and glared at him. "There! I've got you! There, now you will slowly feel sleepy."

"That alone I wouldn't do for anything. Not for the world would I do it," retorted Sampei. His color changed and he made a move to escape but Sakakibara ran after him, passed his palm over his face a few times, and said, "There, now I've really got you. Its useless. You couldn't escape now." In the meantime, Sampei felt fagged out and fell.

He did everything they asked. Out of fun, Sakakibara suggested various things. When he said, "How sad," Sampei grimaced and wept bitterly. When he said, "It's vexing," Sampei became red with anger. He made him drink water as if it were wine, and made him hold a broom as if it were a *samisen*. All the while, the *geishas* laughed boisterously. All of a sudden, Sakakibara rolled up his clothes right in front of Sampei's nose. He produced a big sound and asked, "Sampei, this musk smells good?"

"Of course, this smells good. Very good. This is refreshing," Sampei answered as if he really felt good. The wings of his nose quivered as he sniffed the malodorous smell.

"Then, bear up well." With that, Sakakibara slapped him right at the base of his ears. Wide-eyed, he looked around restlessly.

"I was caught after all. I had never been so terrified. Did I do anything odd?" he asked. Slowly, he regained his composure.

Then Umekichi, a geisha fond of mischief, sidled up to Sampei and declared, "I, too, can hypnotize Sampei. There! I've got you. Now, you will gradually feel sleepy." She ran after Sampei who was walking away from the room. She leaped at his nape and said, "There! Its hopeless. I've got you completely." She rubbed his face. Sampei felt spent out again. He fell limp on her shoulders.

When she said, "Goddess of Mercy," he worshipped her. When she said, "A big earthquake," he appeared terrified. As always, his very expressive face made innumerable and incomparable changes. After that, with a stare from Sakakibara or Umekichi, he was hypnotized—he would be limp, then fall. One evening, Umekichi met him at the foot of Yanagi Bridge on her way home. She started at him and ejaculated, "Sampei!" There, in the middle of the street, he threw back his head. However, despite such a predisposition, he still craved for people's attention. They did not think he was shamming because he was very cheeky and he adjusted to the situations very skillfully.

Someone spread about the rumor that Sampei was in love with Umekichi. That otherwise, Umekichi could not hypnotize him so easily. The truth was Sampei liked tomboys like Umekichi who were so spirited that they did not give any consideration to sex differences. Since she first hypnotized him, he often met her in the evenings. He came to fall completely in love with her temperament. When there was an opportunity, he hinted at his feelings but, as she had marked him off as foolish, she never considered him as a possible love-partner. He waited for a good chance but, when he teased her with a few words, she would be like a child at the prime of naughtiness. She would stare at him and warn, "If you say those things, I'll hypnotize you." When she stared at length, he would put aside his important entreaties and fall down immediately. When he could bear it no farther, he candidly laid bare his heart to Sakakibara.

"It's not really befitting a merchant, and really, you cannot be proud of the circumstances but please speak forcefully to her with all your influence. One night will be alright."

"It was good of you to come. Don't worry. Leave everything to me," Sakakibara assured him. He took the responsibility immediately for, even then, he was plotting to toy with Sampei.

That evening, he went to his customary entertainment house and spoke to Umekichi about it.

"It's rather criminal but ask Sampei to come here tonight. As much as possible, speak to him in honeyed words, then, at the most important moment, inveigle him into being hypnotized. Make him undress completely and then ask him to do things as you please. I will watch by hiding myself," he proposed.

In spite of herself, Umekichi hesitated, "But that's too much even for Sampei." However, when she learned that Sampei never got angry, she thought it was interesting and she agreed.

That night, a jinricksha man, with a letter from Umekichi, fetched him. She wrote, "Tonight I am alone. Please come by all means." Sampei trembled with joy. There can be no doubt about it—after his plea, Sakakibara arranged

for them to meet. He dressed more than usual. Dressed fashionably, he went forth with the air of a lady's man to their place of assignation.

"Oh, do come closer. Really I'm alone tonight. Don't be so formal, Sampei. Make yourself at home," she cooed. She offered him a cushion and she never stopped serving wine. He felt uneasy and, very unlike himself, he was timid. Gradually, the wine began to affect him. He gained his pluck and began to fish out for compliments.

"A spirited woman, like you, really likes me?" He was completely unaware that Sakakibara, with a few geishas, had crossed the transom by passing through the *hakidashi*.¹³ Umekichi firmly restrained herself from laughing. She enumerated his many skills off-hand.

"If you really love me so much, show me some proofs," she added.

"Proof. Well, really I feel like cutting my breast open that you may look inside."

"Then, how about being hypnotized so that you will confess the truth. Then I'll really believe you."

"No! I wouldn't do that for anything in the world!" Tonight also, Sampei resolved not to be deceived into it. If the occasion arose, he intended to tell her frankly that, because he loved her, he shammed a hypnotized person. But, at that moment, Umekichi stared at him intensely with her bright eyes and again, the desire to be used as a fool by a woman, came to the fore. At this critical moment, he once more let his head hang limp. He mumbled his answers and affirmed the questions as they were asked. He spoke glibly: "For your sake, I will throw away my life." "If you die, I'll die too," etc. Thinking that Sampei was already asleep, Sakakibara—who, up to now was peeping—together with the geishas, hemmed in around Sampei. They bit the sleeves of their *kimono* and hit their sides as they looked at Umekichi's mischief.¹⁴

Sampei was surprised but now it was too late to stop. The truth was that he was happy since Umekichi made him take up this terrible pretense. However shameful it may be, he decided to act as asked.

"We are alone so there's no need to be shy. Now, take off your coat," she asked him. He smoothly slipped off his unparalleled Japanese black crepe which was lined with evening cherry blossoms. Then, he untied his satin sash which had a simple dark blue peony design. After he removed his completely red clothes, only the long white crepe underwear on which the gods of lightning and thunder were dyed on the hem and back remained. One by one, he took off his smart clothes which he put on at great pains until, finally, he was completely naked. Even so, he was overwhelmingly happy over Umekichi's words. The result was that he did as she suggested. The things she said were simply appalling. After making much sport of him, she made him sleep soundly and then she left with everyone else.

The following morning, Umekichi woke him up. He suddenly opened his eyes and there, by his bedside, she was sitting in her night clothes. He

¹³ Window purposely for sweeping out dirt.

¹⁴ Japanese clothes.

looked up at her very lovingly. In order to cheat him, she purposely scattered about the room a woman's pillow and clothes.

"I just got up and washed my face. You really sleep soundly. Surely, your future life will be good," she said with an innocent look.

"Since you like me this much, surely, I have a good life ahead of me. I'm so happy. I have realized my long-cherished desire," he replied. He bowed to her repeatedly and then, suddenly, he stood up and changed his clothes. It's rather early but please excuse me. People will talk. Then, Umekichi, forever. Ha! this sensual fellow!" he added hitting his head lightly and then left.

"How did things go?" Sakakibara asked him a few days later.

"Well, thank you. What I ran against wasn't so silly. Stout-hearted or spirited a woman is a woman. Absolutely a slipshod affair," he replied delighted in the very state of things.

"You're quite sensual," Sakakibara bantered.

"Hii! Hii!" tittered Sampei. He struck his forehead with his fan and laughed in a coarse, professional manner.