

CHAPTER II
The Stubborn Twig

THE inevitable, dreaded first day at Nihon Gakko arrived. Henry and I were dumped into a taxicab, screaming and kicking against the injustice of it all. When the cab stopped in front of a large, square gray-frame building, Mother pried us loose, though we clung to the cab door like barnacles. She half carried us up the hill. We kept up our horrendous shrieking and wailing, right to the school entrance. Then a man burst out of the door. His face seemed to have been carved out of granite and with turned-down mouth and nostrils flaring with disapproval, his black marble eyes crushed us into a quivering silence. This was Mr. Ohashi, the school principal, who had come out to investigate the abominable, un-Japanesey noise on the school premises.

Mother bowed deeply and murmured, "I place them in your hands."

He bowed stiffly to Mother, then fastened his eyes on Henry and me and again bowed slowly and deliberately. In our haste to return the bow, we nodded our heads. With icy disdain, he snapped, "That is not an *ojigi*." He bent forward with well-oiled precision. "Bow from the waist, like this."

I wondered, if Mr. Ohashi had the nerve to criticize us in front of Mother, what more he would do in her absence.

School was already in session and the hallway was empty and cold. Mr. Ohashi walked briskly ahead, opened a door, and Henry

was whisked inside with Mother. I caught a glimpse of little boys and girls sitting erect, their books held upright on the desks.

As I waited alone out in the hall, I felt a tingling sensation. This was the moment for escape. I would run and run and run. I would be lost for days so that when Father and Mother finally found me, they would be too happy ever to force me back to Nihon Gakko. But Mr. Ohashi was too cunning for me. He must have read my thoughts, for the door suddenly opened, and he and Mother came out. He bowed formally again, "*Sah*, this way," and stalked off.

My will completely dissolved, I followed as in a terrible nightmare. Mother took my hand and smiled warmly, "Don't look so sad, Ka-chan. You'll find it a lot of fun when you get used to it."

I was ushered into a brightly lighted room which seemed ten times as brilliant with the dazzling battery of shining black eyes turned in my direction. I was introduced to Yasuda-sensei, a full-faced woman with a large, ballooning figure. She wore a long, shapeless cotton print smock with streaks of chalk powder down the front. She spoke kindly to me, but with a kindness that one usually reserves for a dull-witted child. She enunciated slowly and loudly, "What is your name?"

I whispered, "Kazuko," hoping she would lower her voice. I felt that our conversation should not be carried on in such a blatant manner.

"*Kazuko-san desuka?*" she repeated loudly. "You may sit over there." She pointed to an empty seat in the rear and I walked down an endless aisle between rows of piercing black eyes.

"Kazuko-san, why don't you remove your hat and coat and hang them up behind you?"

A wave of tittering broke out. With burning face, I rose from my seat and struggled out of my coat.

When Mother followed Mr. Ohashi out of the room, my throat began to tighten and tears flooded up again. I did not notice that Yasuda-sensei was standing beside me. Ignoring my snuffling, she handed me a book, opened to the first page. I saw a blurred drawing of one huge, staring eye. Right above it was a black squiggly mark, resembling the arabic figure one with a bar across the middle. Yasuda-sensei was up in front again, reading aloud, "Meh!" That was "eye." As we turned the pages, there were pictures of a long, austere nose, its print reading "*hana*," an ear was called "*mi-mi*," and a wide anemic-looking mouth, "*ku-chi*." Soon I was chanting at the top of my voice with the rest of the class, "Meh! Hana! Mi-mi! Ku-chi!"

Gradually I yielded to my double dose of schooling. Nihon Gakko was so different from grammar school I found myself switching my personality back and forth daily like a chameleon. At Bailey Gatzert School I was a jumping, screaming, roustabout Yankee, but at the stroke of three when the school bell rang and doors burst open everywhere, spewing out pupils like jelly beans from a broken bag, I suddenly became a modest, faltering, earnest little Japanese girl with a small, timid voice. I trudged down a steep hill and climbed up another steep hill to Nihon Gakko with other black-haired boys and girls. On the playground, we behaved cautiously. Whenever we spied a teacher within bowing distance, we hissed at each other to stop the game, put our feet neatly together, slid our hands down to our knees and bowed slowly and sanctimoniously. In just the proper, moderate tone, putting in every ounce of respect, we chanted, "*Konichi-wa, sensei. Good day.*"

For an hour and a half each day, we were put through our paces. At the beginning of each class hour, Yasuda-sensei punched a little bell on her desk. We stood up by our seats, at strict atten-

tion. Another "ping!" We all bowed to her in unison while she returned the bow solemnly. With the third "ping!" we sat down together.

There was *yomi-kata* time when individual students were called upon to read the day's lesson, clear and loud. The first time I recited I stood and read with swelling pride the lesson which I had prepared the night before. I mouthed each word carefully and paused for the proper length of time at the end of each sentence. Suddenly Yasuda-sensei stopped me.

"Kazuko-san!"

I looked up at her confused, wondering what mistakes I had made.

"You are holding your book in one hand," she accused me. Indeed, I was. I did not see the need of using two hands to support a thin book which I could balance with two fingers.

"Use both hands!" she commanded me.

Then she peered at me. "And are you leaning against your desk?" Yes, I was, slightly. "Stand up straight!"

"Hai! Yes, ma'am!"

I learned that I could stumble all around in my lessons without ruffling sensei's nerves, but it was a personal insult to her if I displayed sloppy posture. I must stand up like a soldier, hold the book high in the air with both hands, and keep my feet still.

We recited the Japanese alphabet aloud, fifty-one letters, over and over again. "Ah, ee, oo, eh, OH! Kah, kee, koo, keh, KOH! Sah, shi, soo, seh, SOH!" We developed a catchy little rhythm, coming down hard on the last syllable of each line. We wound up the drill with an ear-shattering, triumphant, "Lah, lee, loo, leh, Loh! WAH, EE, OO, EH, OH! UN!"

Yasuda-sensei would look suspiciously at us. Our recital

sounded a shade too hearty, a shade too rhythmic. It lacked something . . . possibly restraint and respect.

During *kaki-kata* hour, I doubled up over my desk and painfully drew out the *kata-kanas*, simplified Japanese ideographs, similar to English block printing. With clenched teeth and perspiring hands, I accentuated and emphasized, delicately nuanced and tapered off lines and curves.

At five-thirty, Yasuda-sensei rang the bell on her desk again. "Ping!" We stood up. "Ping!" We bowed. "Ping!" We vanished from the room like magic, except for one row of students whose turn it was to do *otohban*, washing blackboards, sweeping the floor, and dusting the desks. Under sensei's vigilant eyes, the chore felt like a convict's hard labor.

As time went on, I began to suspect that there was much more to Nihon Gakko than learning the Japanese language. There was a driving spirit of strict discipline behind it all which reached out and weighed heavily upon each pupil's consciousness. That force emanated from the principal's office.

Before Mr. Ohashi came to America, he had been a zealous student of the Ogasawara Shiko Saho, a form of social conduct dreamed up by a Mr. Ogasawara. Mr. Ohashi himself had written a book on etiquette in Japan. He was the Oriental male counterpart of Emily Post. Thus Mr. Ohashi arrived in America with the perfect bow tucked under his waist and a facial expression cemented into perfect samurai control. He came with a smoldering ambition to pass on this knowledge to the tender Japanese saplings born on foreign soil. The school-teachers caught fire, too, and dedicated themselves to us with a vengeance. It was not enough to learn the language. We must talk and walk and sit and bow in the best Japanese tradition.

As far as I was concerned, Mr. Ohashi's superior standard

boiled down to one thing. The model child is one with deep *rigor mortis* . . . no noise, no trouble, no back talk.

We understood too well what Mr. Ohashi wanted of us. He yearned and wished more than anything else that somehow he could mold all of us into Genji Yamadas. Genji was a classmate whom we detested thoroughly. He was born in Seattle, but his parents had sent him to Japan at an early age for a period of good, old-fashioned education. He returned home a stranger among us with stiff mannerisms and an arrogant attitude. Genji boasted that he could lick anyone, one husky fellow or ten little ones, and he did, time and time again. He was an expert at judo.

Genji was a handsome boy with huge, lustrous dark eyes, a noble patrician nose, jet crew-cut setting off a flawless, fair complexion, looking every bit the son of a samurai. He sat aloof at his desk and paid strict attention to sensei. He was the top student scholastically. He read fluently and perfectly. His handwriting was a beautiful picture of bold, masculine strokes and curves. What gnawed at us more than anything else was that he stood up as straight as a bamboo tree and never lost rigid control of his arms or legs. His bow was snappy and brisk and he always answered "*Hai!*" to everything that sensei said to him, ringing crisp and clear with respect. Every time Mr. Ohashi came into our room for a surprise visit to see if we were under control, he would stop at Genji's desk for a brief chat. Mr. Ohashi's eyes betrayed a glow of pride as he spoke to Genji, who sat up erect, eyes staring respectfully ahead. All we could make out of the conversation was Genji's sharp staccato barks, "*Hai! . . . Hai! . . . Hai!*"

This was the response sublime to Mr. Ohashi. It was real man to man talk. Whenever Mr. Ohashi approached us, we froze in our seats. Instead of snapping into attention like Genji, we wilted

and sagged. Mr. Ohashi said we were more like "*konyaku*," a colorless, gelatinous Japanese food. If a boy fidgeted too nervously under Mr. Ohashi's stare, a vivid red stain rose from the back of Mr. Ohashi's neck until it reached his temple and then there was a sharp explosion like the crack of a whip. "*Keo-tsuke! Attention!*" It made us all leap in our seats, each one of us feeling terribly guilty for being such an inadequate Japanese.

I asked Mother, "Why is Mr. Ohashi so angry all the time? He always looks as if he had just bitten into a green persimmon. I've never seen him smile."

Mother said, "I guess Mr. Ohashi is the old-fashioned schoolmaster. I know he's strict, but he means well. Your father and I received harsher discipline than that in Japan . . . not only from schoolteachers, but from our own parents."

"Yes, I know, Mama." I leaned against her knees as she sat on the old leather davenport, mending our clothes. I thought Father and Mother were still wonderful, even if they had packed me off to Nihon Gakko. "Mrs. Matsui is so strict with her children, too. She thinks you spoil us." I giggled, and reassured her quickly, "But I don't think you spoil us at all."

Mrs. Matsui was ten years older than Mother, and had known Mother's father in Japan. Therefore she felt it was her duty to look after Mother's progress in this foreign country. Like a sharp-eyed hawk, she picked out Mother's weaknesses. Why did Mother find it necessary to stay up late every night to read and write poetry? She should be resting her body for the next day's work. Each time Mrs. Matsui called, Mother was on tenterhooks, wishing desperately for some sort of remote control over our behavior. It was impossible for us to remember the endless little things we must not do in front of Mrs. Matsui. We must not laugh out loud and show our teeth, or chatter in front of guests,

or interrupt adult conversation, or cross our knees while seated, or ask for a piece of candy, or squirm in our seats.

I knew I could never come up to Yaeko, Mrs. Matsui's only daughter. She was a few years older than I, and plump and vicious like her mother. Yaeko would sit quietly beside her mother, knees together, dress pulled down modestly over the ankles, hands folded demurely in her lap, and eyes fixed dully on the floor. Whenever Mother gave her a magazine to look at, Yaeko would bow graciously. "*Arigato gozai masu.*" And she would stare politely at one picture for a long, long time, turn a page so slowly and quietly that I felt like tearing into her and rattling the paper for her. But whenever we were given permission to play outside, Yaeko became a different person. She would look at me scornfully, "Let's not play jacks again! It's baby stuff. Don't you have some good magazines to read . . . like *True Love*?"

I did not have *True Love* magazines. So we played an ill-tempered game of jacks at which time she would cheat, pinch and jar my elbows whenever she felt I was taking too long.

Mrs. Matsui thought Mother's relationship with her children was chaotic. She clucked sympathetically at Mother, "Do they still call you 'Mama' and 'Papa'?"

"Oh, yes," Mother smiled to hide her annoyance. "You know how it is. That's all they've ever heard around here. In fact, my husband and I have been corrupted, too. We call each other 'Mama' and 'Papa.' It just seems natural in our environment."

Mrs. Matsui drew herself up stiffly. "I taught my young ones to say '*Otoh-san*' and '*Okah-san*' from the very beginning."

"That's wonderful, Mrs. Matsui, but I'm afraid it's too late for us."

"Such a pity! You really ought to be more firm with them, too,

Itoi-san. When I say 'no,' my children know I mean it. Whenever I feel they're getting out of hand, my husband and I take steps."

Mother looked interested.

"We give '*okyu*' quite often." Mrs. Matsui folded her hands neatly together. *Okyu* was an old-country method of discipline, a painful and lasting punishment of applying a burning punk on a child's bare back. "Believe me, after *okyu*, we don't have trouble for a long, long time."

Henry, Kenji, Sumiko and I eyed each other nervously. We wished Mrs. Matsui would stop talking about such things to Mother.

Mr. Ohashi and Mrs. Matsui thought they could work on me and gradually mold me into an ideal Japanese *ojoh-san*, a refined young maiden who is quiet, pure in thought, polite, serene, and self-controlled. They made little headway, for I was too much the child of Skidrow. As far as I was concerned, Nihon Gakko was a total loss. I could not use my Japanese on the people at the hotel. Bowing was practical only at Nihon Gakko. If I were to bow to the hotel patrons, they would have laughed in my face. Therefore promptly at five-thirty every day, I shed Nihon Gakko and returned with relief to an environment which was the only real one to me. Life was too urgent, too exciting, too colorful for me to be sitting quietly in the parlor and contemplating a spray of chrysanthemums in a bowl as a cousin of mine might be doing in Osaka.

One of my driving ambitions was to win the \$3000 reward offered in the true detective magazines to anyone who helped capture a fugitive murderer. I studied the rogues' gallery and tried to memorize the faces of criminals . . . especially those bringing

the highest rewards. I was sure that our hotel was a gold mine since so many of our customers looked like fugitives from the law, haggard, tough and unkempt. From time to time, real detectives appeared at our office window, flashing their badges. They studied the hotel register silently and departed with a mysterious air. I was sure that behind one of our doors was a frightened fugitive, lying low in his room.

I became suspicious of one gaunt, furtive-looking man who stayed in his room day after day, never showing himself in broad daylight. Only at night, he slunk out, cap pulled down over his gray, bleak eyes. I looked for his name in the register — Jack Montane. I inquired casually about Jack's background. No one seemed to know much about him, but Sam, the old-timer, told me that Jack worked nights as watchman. He was a hard-working man who sent money regularly to his old mother in Nebraska. This was a terrible blow to my plans, but one disappointment did not deter me. Day after day, as I kept an eager watch out for criminals, Mother worried about my dark mind and predatory soul.

I would have liked to turn over Kirby Dare to the police, but his picture had never appeared in the crime magazine. Kirby was a slender, pint-sized young man in his middle twenties. He had electric blue eyes, a Pinocchio nose, and a ruddy, odd face which wrinkled up like an old man's when he laughed. When he was in high spirits, he cackled and pranced up and down the corridor like a rooster. He flapped his arms and crowed with such a piercing shriek that his face reddened and his neck veins stood out. We always knew he was around by his loud abandoned singing, "K-K-K-Katy! You're the only girl that I adore . . . tum te tum ta, tum te ta ta, da da daaaaa!" Father thought Kirby must be a little *kichi-gai*, mad. So the name "Kichi-gai" stuck to Kirby.

Kirby took baths a half a dozen times a day. Looking like a boiled lobster, he declared, "I believe in keeping clean, because to be clean is to be like God!" He also carried a giant-sized Bible under his arm. When anyone was around, he would open the Bible and read aloud.

If Kirby was not sitting on top of the world, then he was at his rudest and meanest. Passing by one of us children in the hallway, he would reach out and pinch our arms or cheeks hard. It hurt. I sometimes managed to kick him on his shin bones and dart away, taunting him, "You, Kichi-gai!"

Father warned Kirby many times to keep away from us. Kirby was all graciousness, assuring Father that he loved children and he would never think of harming us. Then he began trying to lure us into his room with candy and toys. We were afraid of him, but we wanted the candy so badly that one day, we stepped across the threshold, grabbed it out of his hand and ran pell-mell down the hall. We told Father about it, we were so pleased with ourselves. Father turned pale, and his voice shook with anger. He made us promise we would never, never, go into anyone's room or accept gifts without his permission. And Kirby was firmly told to leave.

People in Skidrow were not all queer like Kirby Dare. There were nice, quiet men like Sam, Joe, Peter and Montana. We thought of them as part of the family.

Sam Orland was a tall, rugged, blue-eyed retired mariner with a photographic mind. He knew every man's character and habit in Skidrow. When Father first took over the hotel management, Sam used to sit near the office window and screen the hotel clients for Father. He would shake his head darkly whenever he knew the man to be a bad actor or a "wino."

When the large mission hall next door was vacated in 1928,

Father rented it and converted it into a mammoth dormitory with row upon row of neat-looking beds. He turned it over to Sam who managed it with great pride. Sam saw to it that it was shipshape and clean, patrolling the aisles like a sea captain up on deck. He kept a sharp eye out for stray characters who might sneak in for a cat nap. Because Sam was muscular as well as iron-willed, drunks and brawlers found themselves being swiftly escorted down the stairs.

Joe Subotich was a portly, cheerful man with a tiny black mustache and a deep dimple on his chin. He reminded us of a swarthy version of Santa Claus, for his pockets were always bulging with chocolate bars, apples and nuts. Joe had left Oregon years ago after a family breakup, and he had wandered into Father's hotel, broken in spirit and finance. Sometimes when Joe lost his job, it might be weeks before he found another. Father trusted him, and Joe's gratitude knew no bounds. Eventually Joe became our night watchman and Father's loyal friend.

Peter was a soft-spoken, gentle old Bohemian who delighted us by performing impromptu folk dances and singing gay little Bohemian songs. No matter how often we asked him, with each passing year, he solemnly told us he was seventy years old. He had a translucent, pale, bald head which he kept covered day and night with a cap. He was thin and delicately put together, but he had the most durable health and energy I have ever seen in a man. When Father placed Peter in charge of the second new dormitory, Peter came into his own. He fussed all day in the dormitory like a high-strung housekeeper, patting pillows into shape, smoothing wrinkles out of bedspreads, and sweeping the spotless, bare floor a dozen times a day.

Montana was our self-appointed bouncer. A bouncer was a necessity, not only in the taverns, but every place in Skidrow.

Well over six feet tall with a tightly curled, black beard growing rampant down over his faded flannel shirt, Montana was an awesome figure. He weighed two hundred and fifty pounds and required two sturdy chairs to hold his massive bulk as he sat dozing in the lobby. His ears were especially sensitive to loud, quarreling voices. Knowing that Father was never one for violence, by temperament or size, Montana hovered around him like a huge St. Bernard. "Now, Boss, anyone give you trouble, and you want 'em out, just give me the sign and I'll show 'em the way out, pronto!"

Father, barely reaching Montana's bulging shoulders, felt that it would not be diplomatic to refuse his services, so he merely smiled noncommittally. Father usually managed to extricate himself from trouble with hardly a hubbub.

I remember one evening Father was called to the front office by the bell. We heard a loud voice echoing down the hall to our kitchen.

"Goddammit! I demand my money back! I'm not staying here tonight, so gimme my dollar back."

Henry and I rushed out to see what was the matter. A grizzly bear of a man was stalking Father. "No, suh! I don't owe you a penny!" Father said as he turned and went inside the office, intending to close the subject.

The man narrowed his eyes, hitched his trousers up and followed Father belligerently. He bellowed, "You damn Jap! You know who I am? I graduated from a big university and I'm a lawyer. I can turn you in to the law for cheating me."

"That so? I'm lawyer, too, and I know American law. You come in five o'clock this morning. You sleep all morning until afternoon. No law say I owe you money just because you don't sleep all day and night."

"Why, you stinking little rat! I'll bash your head in, you runty son of a . . . !"!

Henry and I stood paralyzed, as the man picked up a chair and lifted it above his head to bring it crashing down over Father, just like in the movies.

"Wait!" Father held up his hand. "You want to fight? You know judo?"

"What? Nah, I don't know nothing about judo."

"Well, I do. But you don't know? I'm sorry, I can't fight you. Get out o' here . . . don't make any more trouble."

Father knew nothing about judo and he could have been twisted like a pretzel if the man had called his bluff. Instead the man dropped the chair and crashed heavily out of the office. On the stair landing, he turned around and discharged a last round of profanity.

Just then massive Montana appeared. Montana stared at the man quietly, from head to feet, from feet to head and waited patiently for the man to finish his speech. The man's voice died to a mere whisper and his eyes bulged at Montana's size. Montana asked him with deceptive courtesy, "Are you through talking to the Boss?"

The poor man let out a tiny squeak. Father said, "Montana! It's all right. Everything's all right."

Montana heard nothing. He simply gripped the man's coat collar, lifted him off the floor as if he were picking up a stray pup, and dropped him casually over the stairs. The man clattered and bounced down the long flight of stairs, heels over head, without uttering a sound. Montana watched as impassively as if he were looking at a sack of potatoes rolling down. The frightened man picked himself up and hurtled out into the street.

At first glance, Sam, Joe, Peter and Montana presented a rough and shabby front, but we were willing to swear by them against a stack of policemen. Like true natives of Skidrow, we instinctively disliked the beet-cheeked, paunchy policemen who patrolled our streets in twos. We were accustomed to the sight of policemen dragging a drink-befuddled man into the privacy of a store entrance. There, one would hold the sagging figure upright while the other shook him down, expertly frisking the drunkard's pockets. We would stop our games, walk up to them, curious to see how much they would find. The policemen, feeling boring, black eyes upon them, would shake their billys at us, "Get going, you kids! Watch out for the big stick."

With an impudent laugh, we would skip away, knowing that we could outrun them any time.

During those impressionable years, the police became our sworn enemies, especially after two of them shoved their way into our household one night and arrested Father as a bootlegger. It happened so suddenly and it was so unexpected that we magnified the incident as catastrophic and the most harrowing experience of our lives.

It was suppertime and the family was seated as usual around the kitchen table. Henry said grace for us in his high, piping voice. ". . . and we ask Thy blessing upon us as we partake of the food. Amen." A chorus of small voices rang out with a clear, "Amen!" Father and Mother responded fervently with a Japanese-accentuated, "Ahamen!"

Four round black heads bobbed up quickly. Henry played drums on his rice bowl with the wooden chopsticks and soon everyone was copying him, singing and shrieking.

"Where are your manners?" Father scolded gently.

We watched Mother fill six porcelain bowls with steaming,

fluffy rice. We screeched with delight when we saw her ladling our favorite homemade egg noodles cooked in hot pork broth into the red lacquer bowls — a perfect meal for a frosty fall evening. When I lifted my bowl of noodles up to my mouth I paused to feel the warm mist of the hot, clear brown soup rise to my cold face and to breathe in its rich fragrance.

Little Sumiko snatched Mother's long chopsticks in her chubby fists and wrestled violently with the slippery noodles which slithered away on the table like live eels. Unable to bring the noodles up to her drooling lips, she burst into frustrated screams. Just as Mother seated herself to feed Sumiko, someone rapped on the door, rattling the transom window overhead. Mother sighed, "Somebody wants to borrow money again." She reached around Father's shoulders and opened the door a crack.

A bass voice boomed through the opening, "Hello, Mama!"

A heavy-jowled, oyster-eyed head popped into the kitchen and then a huge policeman squeezed himself through, forcing Father to get up from his chair to make room. The officer glanced quickly around the tiny kitchen.

Father said impatiently, "Yes?"

The officer watched Father closely as he drew from his hip pocket a flask filled with a light yellow liquid. "You know what this is, Shorty? In case you don't remember, this happens to be yours."

Father's eyes flashed indignantly. "Mine? It's not. I don't drink. I see you new man here on block. You don't know me, but I'm not drinking man."

"Well, maybe you don't drink, but you sell 'em. I just picked up a fellow down the street who said he bought this bottle from you."

"I don't sell nobody no bottle. You make big mistake. I just starting dinner. I was here, not outside!" Just then a sharp clang of the office bell vibrated down the hall. "You wait. I go see who it is at the office."

Father hurried away, annoyed and worried. We smiled at the policeman. It was all very funny that he thought Father would do such a thing. Father would prove to him that he was not a bootlegger. The officer would realize his mistake, apologize to Father, and we would go back to our dinner.

To our dismay, the officer whipped the curtain on the pantry aside and started rummaging through the shelves, tossing bags and cans of food to the floor. Mother tapped him on the back and asked coldly, "What's matter? What you looking for?"

"All right, Mama, all right. Just don't get excited. I wanted to see if you have any more of this stuff that your husband makes. Ah! What's in this jug here . . . more sake, rice wine?" The policeman picked up a gallon jug and lifted it up against the light bulb.

Mother exploded, "What's matter you? That's *shoyu*, Japanese sauce. Taste it, taste it."

Mother wrested the jug away from the officer and angrily poured the soy sauce into a cup. She shoved it into his face. The officer sniffed at it cautiously, saying, "Now, don't get so excited, Mama. Everything's going to be all right. Don't worry. Yeah, I guess this stuff's bug juice."

Mother shook her finger at him. "See! We don't have sake. We don't make it. We don't drink it. You make mistake. Somebody else. Not Mr. Itoi."

"All right, all right. Just calm down now. Don't worry about a thing." He dropped his voice and whispered soothingly, "Just fifty dollars, Mama, just fifty dollars. No trouble then, see?"

Mother stood speechless for a second. Then she blurted out in Japanese, "Don't think we're such fools!" Mother laughed into the officer's face. Kenji and Sumiko giggled, hearing Mother laugh. Henry and I glared hotly at the policeman.

When Father reached the front office, he found that the customer at the window was another officer.

"Say, Charlie, I'd like to speak to you in private. Let me inside the office."

Father let him in. The policeman said to him in a confidential tone of voice, "Say we found a man who says he bought the whisky from you. You know what the charges are for peddling liquor like that. It's going to be hard on you . . . the law, you know."

Father felt as if he were talking to a stone wall. "But you have the wrong man. I never drink, never make it, never sell it. What you thinking about?"

"But we have proof, definite proof, man. You can't get away with anything like this."

"No, suh! I don't do nothing wrong."

"Oh, so you're going to be stubborn about it. Maybe you want to explain everything to the judge, Charlie. Come on, get your hat. We're going places." Father fumed as he flew down the hall to the kitchen, the policeman following close at his heels.

Mother clutched Father by the arm and spoke rapidly in Japanese. "It's awful! The policeman just asked me to give him fifty dollars to hush everything up for you!"

"*Nanda!* I'll never give an *ichi-mon* to these beggars. We'll see who's breaking the law!"

Father clapped his hat on and looked up defiantly at the officers. "*Sah*, let's go. I ready. I want to talk to the judge."

One of the officers suddenly laughed good-naturedly and pat-

ted Father's back. "Wait a minute, Shorty. Why don't you settle this thing like a smart guy? We want to give you another chance. Fifty dollars will make it even."

Father shouted in wrath. "But I tell you, I don't sell sake. I don't do it."

"Oh, what the hell! Let's quit stalling and take him in."

"*Iku tomo!* I certainly will go!"

Paralyzed with fright, we watched the men grab Father's arms roughly and whisk him out. Father trotted along, so impatient was he to get to court and clear the matter up.

Suddenly Kenji let out a shriek, "Mama! Don't let them take Papa away! Not Papa!"

Henry tried to calm him. "Don't worry, Ken-chan. Papa can take care of himself. He'll be back in no time, won't he, Mama?" His voice petered out toward the end.

"Yes, of course," Mother replied emphatically. Then without another word, Mother ran out into the hall to the telephone. With nervous fumbling fingers, she dialed a number and waited tensely for an answer.

"Halloh, Kato-san! Will you please come over quickly? My husband has just been taken to jail. They accuse him of selling sake."

Within ten minutes, Mr. Kato, who operated the hotel across our back alley, was bounding up the long flight of stairs. He was a prominent and respected figure in the community who always seemed to know what to do in a crisis. He pushed his way through a small group of men gathered around our tearful family scene. Many of the hotel clients had heard and seen the Boss being rushed out of the hotel, flanked by two red-faced policemen. Mother was walking up and down the hall with Sumiko in her arms. Kenji was sobbing into Henry's shirt.

Mother briefly described to Mr. Kato all that had happened. He listened intently, his head cocked to one side.

"It sounds odd to me. They didn't even have a warrant for search or arrest. Mr. Itoi didn't have to go at all under such circumstances. He was a bit rash. It may not be such a simple task to get him out right away, but I'll go up to the police station and see what can be done. Hmmm, I have an idea!" His face lit up as he drew out a card from his vest pocket. "Maybe this will do it." He dashed out with Mother's cries of gratitude following him down the stairs.

In the meantime, Father told us later, the two policemen had pulled him along, handcuffed between them, through the dark, littered streets. They headed for the telephone box on a corner a few blocks away. Loitering men stared impassively. A few bold characters hooted, "What's up, copper? Did I'il Tokyo get into trouble?" "Keep your eyes open, Tokyo, don't let 'em put anything over on ya."

The officers pulled Father up to the blue iron box. "Well, Charlie, I'm calling the wagon . . . that is, unless you want to settle this thing the easy way."

Father dryly ordered him to telephone. The officer hesitated, then slowly unlocked the door, barked a curt order into the phone, and slammed the box shut.

The police station was only five blocks away, at the foot of Yesler Hill, and in a short while the Black Maria careened down Washington Street and screeched to a halt on the corner. The policemen lifted Father through the back door and slammed the door in the faces of the staring, open-mouthed men.

At the police station, Father was booked at the desk and told by the sergeant that unless he posted a \$500 bail, he could not be released. Father refused to pay it, protesting his innocence,

and without further ado, he was hustled into the bull pen. There he found two cellmates. One confided that he had been picked up on a vagrancy charge and the other lay prone on the floor, reeking with liquor. Father remained aloof. It seemed like hours later that the cell door clanged open. "Hey . . . you there! Come on, you're getting out."

Bewildered, Father hurried after the guard. In the hallway was Mr. Kato.

"Oh, Kato-kun! This is most embarrassing. You didn't pay that exorbitant bail fee, did you?"

Mr. Kato laughed, "No, it wasn't necessary. I showed them my name card which I had printed when I president of the Japanese Chamber of Commerce. They were willing to release you under my custody. But you'll have to go on trial later on."

"Yes, I know that. By the way, Kato-kun, you had that office last year. Yoshida-kun is president now."

"Of course, but the sergeant didn't ask me when I was president."

A week passed before Father received the summons to appear in court. He appeared there accompanied by Mr. Kato, Mr. Naka, a young Nisei lawyer, and Mr. Lubeck, the minister of our church. The trial was postponed because one of the officers was ill. The next week, the officers pleaded for another postponement because their star witness was ill.

Father became suspicious. "Those rascals are up to something. I think they're trying to escape from the trial."

But the day of the trial finally arrived. Mother went with Father, while we children remained at home, frightened to death. The policemen would lie and Father might be put in jail. Mother told us all about it later. One of the officers stated the charges against Father. Mr. Naka questioned the officer.

"On what day and time did you pick up the person who bought this bottle?"

"It was on the twenty-fourth of October, Tuesday evening, about 6:15 P.M."

"Where did this take place?"

"On Washington and Occidental Avenue."

"Please tell us what happened at the time."

"We found a man drunk, sitting on the curb. We questioned him and found out that he bought the liquor from a Japanese man who operated a hotel on Occidental."

Mr. Naka questioned the officer about his conversation with the defendant's wife.

The officer's eyes flickered. "All I asked was where she kept the other bottles of sake."

"Are you sure that that is all you asked?"

"Yes . . . yes, of course."

"Did you not ask the woman for fifty dollars to keep the matter quiet?"

"I did not." The officer looked straight into Mr. Naka's eyes.

Later on the prosecution's star witness was called. An officer led a decrepit, ragged old man to the chair. He sat down nervously, his gnarled hands fumbling at a crumpled, greasy old cap.

"From whom did you buy this flask?"

A pair of pale, watery blue eyes squinted up at Mr. Naka. "I . . . I bought it from a Jap fer two bits."

"Where did this take place?"

"Uh, in front of the hotel?"

"What's the name of the hotel?"

"Uh, Carl . . . Carlson Hotel."

"Where is it located?"

"It's, uh . . . down there . . . I don't exactly remember the name of the street, but I kin show you the place."

"Now, will you point out for the court the man from whom you bought the liquor?"

Mr. Naka assisted the witness down from the stand, led him to the bench where Father and Mr. Kato sat, side by side. The old man bent down and peered into their faces near-sightedly, then pointed a knobby, shaky finger at austere-looking Mr. Kato.

"That's him. That's the guy!"

A roar of laughter broke out in the court. Someone shouted, "Frame-up! Ahhhh, it's just a frame-up."

The judge pounded his gavel to restore order. The case was dismissed.

Exonerated and jubilant, Father and his friends stepped out of the courtroom. A handful of reporters who had heard the uproar in the court swept up to Father to find out what had happened. Just then the two officers who had arrested Father elbowed their way into the group. They whispered something to the reporters and led them away. Father became apoplectic. "Did you see that? They're trying to cover themselves up. I'm going to expose those rascals and see to it that they stop their little racket!"

Mr. Kato calmed him, "I know just how you feel, but try to forget the whole thing. The police have the upper hand. If you try to settle scores, there's no telling what other miseries they might think up for you."

Father sadly agreed. "Yes . . . I have a family to think of."

At least it had been a tie. The police had put him into trouble, but they had failed to extract money from him. Yet it was a long time before I outgrew my hostility toward policemen. Every time I saw an officer, my lips curled and I felt an undignified impulse to kick his shin bones and run for dear life.

CHAPTER III

An Unpredictable Japanese Lady

FATHER was a great admirer of Gandhi. Sometimes I thought he even looked like him, especially after a bath, when Father would sit tailor fashion on the davenport, warming himself in front of the small gas heater, clad only in his B.V.D.'s. As he peered through black-rimmed reading spectacles to manicure his toenails, he wore the same patient expression on his face that I had seen in newspaper pictures of the Indian leader.

Father talked a great deal about the merits of Gandhi's ideas on nonviolence and moral resistance. Father did not approve of violence, and would never fly into a wild rage like Dunks's father, Mr. Oshima. Mr. Oshima loved his rice wine so much that he often closed his barbershop when he felt the need to commune with his porcelain wine bottle. When Henry and I went to call on Dunks, we often saw him scrambling out the door, urged on by flying hair- tonic bottles and Mr. Oshima's roars, "You nuisance, get out of here!"

Yes, it was nice to have Father sober and self-controlled like Mr. Gandhi, but I thought it unfair when he practiced moral resistance on us. For his part, Father found it the only way to deal with a daughter who was growing to be alarmingly headstrong — like the time I decided to be a dancer.

One day I attended a children's talent show at the Pantages Theater. I was enchanted by the fairylike grace of the dancers