

**KUMOKIE  
A BRIDE OF  
OLD KOREA**

*A Love Story of the Orient*

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TO

MY MOTHER

whose love, self-denial, and steadfast faith in God have been a constant source of missionary inspiration

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# Kumokie—A Bride of Old Korea

## CHAPTER I

### OLD MAN YE OF SAEMAL

**I**N the early twilight the fierce heat of the day had ended in a smoky redness amid which each rock, pebble, and shell was giving forth the heat absorbed from the pitiless blaze of the sun. Two small fishing smacks were lying close to the shore securely tethered together for the night. Away somewhere between the purple hills and the sleeping river a dog howled. Out across the rippliless surface of the sea many gray hulls and brown sails lay motionless and calm, vividly silhouetted against the hot, lurid sky.

It was one of the hottest days of an unusually hot July; the air was laden with sickening odors from the heavily loaded racks of fish drying by the sluggish, slime-covered river; a few belated women were beating their clothes by the river bank; scrawny pigs, bleary-eyed dogs, and naked children tumbled and rolled on the beach. The diminishing population of the Korean village of Saemal were mostly fishermen, whose boats and nets comprised their chief worldly possessions, and the daily haul of speckled, spotted beauties was their stock in trade. The main street of the village was nothing more than a dirty alley ending near the mouth of the river, which flowed from the distant hills to meet the sea. The brown and yellow of twoscore houses sprawled

in crooked, snakelike lines along the sandy snore, grouped together with no plan, so that the alleys made many unbelievable turns and windings between the mud walls of the houses, the tumble-down gray roofs, and the stone-encrusted walls.

A tall, well-built man came with swinging stride along the brink of the river, turned the corner by the fish racks, and passed into the main street of the village of Saemal without a glance at the frolicking children or toiling women. He made his way along the narrow road with bowed head and only now and then gave a frowning glance toward the crowded doorways. The steaming heat of the tiny houses had driven the majority of the inhabitants to seek a cooler place, and many of these were sitting or lying on straw mats just outside their door. The hour of evening had brought Grandfather Ye home from his rice field, and when he reached his familiar old wall he entered the arched gate to the women's quarters. With no more greeting than a deeper frown to the busy workers there, he stretched himself full length upon the mat spread invitingly near upon the earthen floor of the open courtyard to take a well-earned rest for his weary bones.

Lying on the cool earth, he gave vent to half-muttered grumbings and complaints. The flies, the heat, the buzzing mosquitoes, the delay of supper—all these things exasperated him and added fuel to his temper. His plaint was against all humanity in general, but of his "lazy, good-for-nothing women folk in particular." These long-suffering ones, Mrs. Ye and her daughter-in-law, widow of the late lamented son, flew frantically about the

courtyard and kitchen lean-to, preparing the evening meal. Kumokie, the eight-year-old granddaughter, was hidden from Mr. Ye's vision by several huge earthen jars. Bethinking himself that a nice drink of cool water would help his feelings, he raised himself upon his elbows and bellowed with all his might: "Kumok-ah! Kumok-ah! You little beast; come here! Why that silly mother of yours wanted to call you 'Golden Jade' is more than I can see—vile, disappointing creature that you are! I shall call you 'Kangajie' ('Little Dog')—much more suitable. Where are you? Come here, or I'll beat more speed into your lazy body." All of which was entirely unnecessary and uncalled for.

The trembling child had been standing just out of sight, and at the first call was right there before him, in her hand a big, dripping gourd of water. With a weary grunt Mr. Ye reached out his great, hairy hand, took the water with an impatient gesture, and drank long and deep. After his thirst was satisfied, he gave the vessel a sudden flirt and flipped the remaining water over the child. Kumokie was never surprised by any such unaffectionate move on the part of this man, and so with silent, childlike solemnity she shook the drops from her hair and clothes while the man roared with laughter.

"Just exactly like a puppy I used to have! Kangajie! Here Kangajie!" Mrs. Ye appeared at this moment, carrying the traylike table with the master's supper, and as he sampled the savory dishes thereon and lifted the chunks of snowy rice, his temper improved, and he felt in a really amiable frame of mind. By the time his flying chopsticks

had emptied the rice bowl and disposed of the last boiled fish he felt quite able to discuss family problems and important matters concerning the future of the house of Ye.

Although Mr. Ye was a grandfather, he was by no means an old man, but, to the contrary, was in the prime of vigorous manhood. His life was embittered and hardened by the loss of his only son a few years past and by the fact that his only grandchild was a girl. This balking of his desires and plans by an unkind fate was reflected in an unholy temper, and "Old Man Ye," as he was called by his neighbors, was known by all of them as a hard old fellow. He was one of the few well-to-do farmers of the district, but he was far too crafty and wise to show his wealth. He protected himself alike from official extortions and exactions on one side and from family demands on the other by the appearance and profession of poverty.

The bowls and fragments of the evening meal were finally cleared away, and the kitchen shed was quiet for the night. The tired, pale-faced woman, whose only name was "Kumokie's mother," silently withdrew to the tiny room across the courtyard when the imperious call rang out from the *sarang*:

"Grandmother! Grandmother! Don't you know I am waiting for you here? Why don't you let that worthless mother of Kumokie do the work of a daughter-in-law instead of doing it all yourself? Sure, you, too, have to work when we are as poor as we are, but that lazy thing ought to do her share too," replied Mr. Ye as he knocked the ashes from his

long-stemmed pipe and proceeded to refill it with finely shredded tobacco.

Timid, shrinking, Mrs. Ye was very different from her husband, and that gentleman gave this gentle little woman many hours of care and anxiety. She was as colorless and faded as the sea on a rainy day. Her only desire was to remain unobserved and to keep from displeasing her lord and master any more than she could possibly help. He was a miser at heart, and all the petty economics and bitter hardships of the much-pressed home fell heaviest on her unprotected, shrunken shoulders. As for the whereabouts of the secret hiding place of the suspected gains, she knew no more about it than did the others and probably gave less thought to the question, for she had more important and personal matters to face. His discontent was written on every feature as he sat and called his wife that evening with harsh-voiced words. Mrs. Ye knew that this interview was not apt to be a pleasant one, so it was with visible timidity that she answered the summons and entered the stuffy room in which he sat. She seated herself in silence. Her thin, tired hands working and twisting within the folds of her apron were trembling evidence of the condition of her mind.

"Speak, woman! Can't you say anything?"

"Yes, my lord; what shall I say?" was the low-voiced reply.

"O well, of course! Who would be so stupid as to expect conversation from a woman? Answer my question about your daughter-in-law. Why doesn't she work? Every one about this place has to work

to make a living. I really do not expect you to make intelligent conversation, but it is supposed that you know how to manage household matters. Hey, can't you make your daughter-in-law obey you? Shame!" The scolding voice rose to a perfect roar. "Do you expect me, a poor farmer, to support a woman like that in idleness and luxury? A daughter-in-law without a son ought to be turned out altogether, I say."

"Yes, O yes; indeed, she does all she can," wailed the harassed woman. "Truly she does all she is able. Don't you remember that I told you how ill she is at times? Since it is the great white sickness, I fear that she may die soon. Did you not say that you could not and would not have another funeral this year?"

His injustice and seeming forgetfulness so far overcame her fear and timidity as to make this long speech possible. Just at this moment, as if to justify her defense, there came from the room across the court the hollow, racking cough of a consumptive.

"O, don't be afraid of that. She is just playing off; I've seen the like before. No danger of her dying soon. That cough is just put on. Just don't pay any attention to such tricks, and she will soon stop it."

But the uneasy look in his eyes as he listened to the harrowing sound from the dark room across the way belied his brave words. After all, it was easier to keep a living woman, even though she was idle, than to bury a dead one, especially when she ate next to nothing and never had need of new clothes.

When a member of the family dies, although during life she may have been only a despised and abused daughter-in-law, a disembodied spirit is something to be taken into consideration; besides, a funeral is a very expensive item. To be sure, it had never entered Father Ye's mind to try to win love and gratitude from that poor, tired heart while she lived. It would have given her scant comfort to know that when her spirit was released from that quivering, toil-worn body every mark of respect would be given her, because, forsooth, this man feared the harm she might then do to him.

Mr. Ye sat listening to the uneasy sound which came from the *kunapang* and frowned upon his wife as though she were to blame for this, too, as for all other domestic trials. But for once her mind was so taken up with other important things that she did not shrink from the blazing eyes, but sat quietly waiting until the great question which engrossed her thought should be brought up for discussion. The frown of the master deepened as he looked at this woman who had been his partner for thirty years or more. Three sons and two daughters she had borne him; but only one had escaped the dread scourge of childhood, the smallpox demon. Now, this last son, the pride and joy of his heart, was also dead, and he was wondering again for the hundredth time why he had been such a fool as never to take another wife. Deep in his heart he knew that he would never do anything that would call for such an outlay of his precious money. One household was enough expense; two was out of the question. As for the patient little wife, she was now,

as always, the humble servant. There was no question of love given or received. It is to be doubted if any idea of wifely help above this dumb service and doglike fidelity had ever entered her mind, or, if so, such tender thoughts had been killed and buried so long ago that they were forgotten.

After several minutes of reminiscent silence, Mr. Ye drew a long breath and asked with seeming indifference: "Well, did the *chungmae* [go-between, or professional matchmaker] come to-day?"

"Yes, she came." This brought up the important matter which was on her mind, and the old wife sat straighter and took visible interest in this question.

"Um; very good. No doubt those poor Kims in the city are only too glad to have their son marry our grandchild and become also our adopted son?" This statement was made with the rising inflection of interrogation, but by these words he revealed an intense egotism coupled with the determination to connect his family with some of the old aristocratic blood. It was his desire that the gold he cherished and hoarded so carefully might build up a great house to the name of Ye and do memory to him as the founder of such an estate.

Thus he was not merely on the outlook for some man willing to let his son be adopted by another, but he had very definite ideas about what kind of family it should be from which he took this son. After his own boy died, this idea had taken deep root in his mind, and now he was fully determined to carry out his purpose. The Kims were certainly one of the best and most aristocratic of the high-bred families in that part of Korea; and since they had

long ago lost their money, he had little doubt that they would receive his proposal gladly.

"This woman says that they are willing to consider it, since they have two older sons. But I am not sure that they are glad to do it; for they are asking a goodly sum of money in exchange, which I am sure you will not be willing to give, or, I mean, which you will not be able to grant, I fear. Then they are so proud and high-minded; she says that they will have very little to do with common people."

The dark eyes opposite glittered with a dangerous light as he snapped: "The slave dealers! How much do they want?"

"Fifty thousand *yang*." The answering voice was low and sad.

"What?" he fairly shrieked in his fury. "Dare you say that again! They must know that I, a poor man, have not that much money!"

Kumokie, the proposed wife for this prospective son, was no more taken into account in these plans than if she had been some inanimate chattel on her grandfather's farm. He wanted a son, she was old enough to marry, and by this stroke of diplomacy these two expensive birds would be killed with one stone. There would be one great, grand occasion instead of two and thus save money; that, as always with him, was an important consideration.

Far into the night the conference continued. The pride and stand-offishness of the honorable Kim family made it seem to the plebeian Ye a most desirable thing to form an alliance with such, and he was beginning to fear that this aristocrat was only making a politer refusal to his overtures by demand-



ing a much larger amount of money than he thought Ye possessed. This fear was increased by the realization that it must be a secret deal; for if people heard of such a transaction, he would never again be able to pose as a poor man, as poor as he desired others to think him to be. The final decision was to offer twenty thousand *yang* for the privilege of adopting the third son of Kim, who should become the husband of Kumokie, or, which according to Korean custom would be the other way around, the husband of Kumokie would be adopted by her grandfather as his heir.

While this discussion was under way one of those principally concerned was asleep in the stuffy little *kunapang* across the courtyard. She was a tiny thing for eight years, almost a baby. The smooth, soft skin, a creamy pink on throat and arms, shading into a healthy tan on cheek and brow, the golden brown of summer sun reflected by the sea sands. With a babyish movement she flung one plump little arm over her head. The sad-hearted, sleepless woman watching by her side stifled a sob and gathered the beloved form to her heart.

"O my baby! My baby! They would sell you, too! They would give you in exchange for something they want. But they shall not do it! They shall not, I swear it! There. There now, precious, don't cry. It's just mother. There. There, now; go back to sleep." This last was accompanied by a light tap, tap on her stomach, for the passionate embraces had half waked the child. After a while the quiet, regular breathing told that the little one

was again in dreamland, and the mother took up her soliloquy.

"Only a girl. Only a little girl. But you are mine—all mine! Who else has cared for you or loved you and protected you but *me*? You are only a girl to them—no good to the family, only a burden and expense. Ah! But you are my life. None shall take you from me, my own, until they have taken that poor worthless life of mine! Yes, but what am I? Only a dying, helpless woman." This was punctuated with painful coughing spells.

What, indeed, was she to take a stand against old man Ye? Homeless, friendless, dying, to whom could she turn?

"O God of heaven, if there indeed be such a God who cares for and loves us, have mercy upon me. O God, I don't know how to pray, and I used to laugh when the people in the great city tried to teach me about you. If there isn't such a God, there ought to be, because we poor, helpless ones need one so much. Hear me, O God; help me to be a good woman. Save my precious baby from the fate that has been mine. Please save Kumokie, God. Don't bother about me if it's any trouble, for I'm all worthless and am just about to die; but please save my little girl. Amen."

froid is to be admired even though disapproved. Be it said to the credit of our friend Kim that he seldom held it against a man that he was unresponsive to his need. He was more nearly angry at Cho for his refusal than he had ever been before, because he expected better things from him. Never before had he failed him. To be sure, Cho was a common fellow, but he had made considerable money by careful investment and high rates of interest from the honorable gentry in reduced circumstances. He calculated that it was worth a goodly sum once in a while just to have this autocrat as a regular visitor at his *sarang*, and so paid for it as he would for any other commodity he wished to buy. This had gone on so long that it was the expected thing. Kim began to look upon it as something of a right; and he had never asked Cho for large sums of money, though of late his requests had been more frequent.

"Well, friend, can you let me have a few cash to-day?" became such a common refrain that Cho tired of it. At any rate, his own position in the neighborhood was quite assured now, and there was no further need of social aid. Why should he help the beggarly Kims any more? Thus argued Cho of the money bags, and, upheld by the righteous decision, he stammered out an embarrassed refusal.

Angry, humiliated, and surprised, the gentleman of leisure left the *sarang*, and as he made his way down the crowded city street he mumbled to himself: "Things have come to a pretty pass in this land when a gentleman of uprightness is met with such discourtesy. It's enough to make my grandfather rise from his grave."

## CHAPTER II

### A GENTLEMAN OF LEISURE AND POVERTY

THE honorable Mr. Kim was very nearly as poor in this world's goods as Farmer Ye pretended to be, which is saying a great deal. To be as poor as Ye wished others to believe him to be was to have few comforts and no luxuries in life. Mr. Kim belonged to an impoverished and luckless branch of a wealthy family. Noble blood ran in his veins, blood as blue as any in Korea, and for many generations held to be superior to that of ordinary people. Marriages, particularly those of the sons, had always been arranged with great care. Daughters, too, must be well placed in life; that was a parent's manifest duty. When they were married they became part of another tribe and as such of far less importance than a son.

Aristocratic families have always held great honor in this "Land of Morning Calm." No matter how tumble-down the fortunes or depleted the treasury, to be a *yang-ban* is something greatly prized and to be revered by all comers. There comes a long-dreaded day to all such when veneration for their position and nobility, however, can no longer call forth a willing and ready loan of cash. What a sense of the divine rights of the upper classes Mr. Kim possessed to be able to approach a friend like Mr. Cho when he could scarcely fail to remember that he has not returned to him the last loan—no, nor the loan before the last, nor before that. When, in fact, did he ever repay anything? Such sang-

It was many years since he had taken much thought of his resources, or rather his lack of resources, and as long as he was able to borrow a little here and there or to sell something of his few remaining possessions he never let such sordid details of this world bother him. Now in this unceremonious way Cho had forced him to regard this matter and to think of his debts and to face the future.

"What shall I do? Of a surety I can't work. That would be a lasting disgrace and is not to be thought of; besides, I'm too frail." He passed his soft hands together in a gesture of helplessness and bewilderment. Cho had always been such a good friend before and had demanded neither interest nor security, though other money lenders were not so considerate, and many and pressing were the debts which faced him. To one of this man's sanguine and optimistic turn of mind debts, after all, were only an abstract sort of thing and need cause little worry unless they got too pressing, then, to be sure, they could be quite annoying and irritating.

Five years before this time Mr. Kim's father had died, and he as the only son became head of the family. Funerals and weddings are times of great importance in Korea, and many are the homes which have been mortgaged, many the families impoverished for years in order that the head of the family should be buried with fitting honor and ceremony. Every loyal son of old Korea is apt to say that Kim did only his duty and fulfilled his filial obligation when he mortgaged his homestead and the one small rice field left of his inheritance and spent it all in one

grand splurge at the father's funeral and at the appointed time of sacrifice during the two years of mourning. None could deny that the dying glory of the house of Kim flared up in a blaze of brightness and splendor. Such feasting! Such wine! Food of the best and in plenty and proper new mourning clothes for all. This unusual grandeur brought a glow of pride to the heart of Kim, and he walked with a little extra swagger. Just a little more pride was visible in the way he held his head, and it is to be feared that he thought little of the price he would one day be forced to pay for this brave show.

The money lender into whose hands he had fallen was one of those usury sharks who flourish and thrive on just this sort of pride and folly. The extortionate rate of interest demanded was such that one wonders how any sane man can ever be so foolish as to accept the conditions; but there is abundant evidence that there are, nevertheless, many who put themselves in the power of the usurer. According to the accounts of the latter, Mr. Kim now owed him several times the amount actually received, and the money shark declared that the time had come to foreclose the mortgage which he held.

Mr. Kim thought of these things as he slowly wended his way toward home. After a few turns in the crooked alley, he came to a stone bridge spanning a small stream. Below the bridge there was an inviting shade tree and several large stones for resting places, and thither he turned his steps. He sat and thought back on his career. He was not given to introspection, but the shock given to his sensibilities by friend Cho had shaken him out of

his usual carelessness and lethargy. He sat and stared with unseeing eyes at the distant hills. He thought of his boyhood, the years of his young manhood, and of his later life. The review took some time; and the longer he thought, the more disgusted and discouraged he became. A kaleidoscopic view of his life passed before him. The shadows of the summer afternoon grew more oblique; the blue of the hills turned to purple. Still Kim sat and stared and thought until out of this searching survey of the past one leading fact took definite shape. He was a failure. Something must be done. He did not realize that this failure of his was due to the inability to put the proper value on things. From a long line of ancestors he had inherited the idea that work was only for the common people and that the spending of money, not earning it, was a gentleman's duty. But Kim was now on the verge of losing his home. All would then be gone. How could he hold up his head before the relatives and neighbors, a gentleman without his ancestral home? Then he would have little or no hold on respectability.

"What shall I do? What shall I do?" groaned the unhappy man, lifting his eyes to the tree tops as though seeking aid and instruction from them. The usual resort of the Korean gentleman under these conditions is his relatives. The family tie is very strong; and while any member of it has money at his command, all the other less fortunate feel quite at liberty to call upon him for help. There was no such money member in his clan to whom Kim could go in this hour of need. He himself was

the head of this branch of the house. He had done his part with the little he had to help the other less lucky ones. But as he thought over his list of kinfolk now he was forced to admit that none of them were any better off than he. No; it was useless to go to them for help. His three sons, two daughters-in-law, and his wife would surely be turned out homeless on the cold, unfeeling world! Then what would they do?

This was a sad possibility that brought the gentleman to his feet with a start. Hurriedly he headed in a fast walk for home. That home was dearer to him than ever before, and since it was beginning to seem so uncertain he wanted to see that nothing had harmed it in his absence. When he entered his gate he was much more humble than usual and more in the mood to listen to the propositions of the unusual old woman whom he found there than he would otherwise have been. Whangsi, the *chang-mae*, or matchmaker and go-between, had just been having a heart-to-heart talk with Mrs. Kim, and that excellent lady had arrived at the conclusion that the best way to retrieve their broken fortunes and to recover the lost homestead was to drive a bargain with old man Ye of the seaside village of Saemal, who was of reputed wealth and anxious to adopt a son from a family of the gentry. Mr. Kim entered his wife's room to find the two of them awaiting him most eagerly with argument and the method of attack all carefully arranged.

## CHAPTER III

## THE GO-BETWEEN AND HER WORK

NO ordinary woman was Whangsi, but an unusual production of the age and of the conditions of her country. Gifted with a large degree of native wit and astuteness, her abilities had been sharpened to a keenness which might have placed her among the world's great diplomats. Shrewd and sagacious, she was a discerning student of human nature and in making advances was always careful that her point of contact be the most tactful possible. The self-complacent air with which she bore herself, the nice little house she had built, the position of prominence given her in that part of the country—all bore eloquent testimony to the prodigious success which attended her efforts. It will be a much more pleasant subject to discuss this success from Whangsi's viewpoint than from that of the many unhappy, mismatched ones who marched two by two in marriage chains behind the chariot of her progress. She was a little birdlike woman of uncertain age, quick in her movements as in her thoughts, her face having a sharp hawk eye and beaklike mouth which added to it lines of craftiness. Of course she was not too truthful. Who expected that? How could a person succeed in a calling like hers and stick to the letter of the law? Most certainly that was not to be expected.

This afternoon, spent at the home of the Kim's, was the kind which delighted her soul. Such an encounter called for the high order of intelligence

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which she believed she possessed, while to come out victorious in such a battle of wits meant a neat, tidy sum to add to her nest egg. All signs pointed to a very advantageous match between the third son of Mr. Kim and the granddaughter of old man Ye. She had talked the matter over with Mrs. Kim, and as she awaited the arrival of the master of the house she considered the question. Although this gentleman might be of the same opinion as herself, she was sure that he would not willingly admit it until she had brought up all the field artillery at her disposal and given him the advantage of all the bombs of her argument. Well she knew that the financial crisis in which he found himself would be the chief inducement for such a match; but she knew also that this could not be used as an argument, for Mr. Kim's pride would be immediately offended by such a suggestion. Thus she found herself facing a very delicate situation as she sat with Mrs. Kim and waited for Mr. Kim to show himself after his return from the house of his friend Cho. The hours spent under the willows by the bridge had resulted in a self-condemnation as bitter as it was unprecedented. He took off his linen coat and made himself comfortable to meet the visitor a truly humbler and, chastened man.

With a lordly air the master approached the shady veranda. Mrs. Kim arose to meet him, every line of her slender form and each delicate feature proclaiming the fact that she was a true lady of the nobility. It is not always a fact even in Korea that man is the supreme ruler. Not so here, for it was my lady who ruled within the domain of this