

Details Matter
by oyster50

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Description: What happens when the good boy meets up with the wrong girl and finds things outside his experience, things that shouldn't be there, Things that just aren't right. That turn out right.

Chapter 1

Sybil sicced a succubus on me.

Second year of college, studying hard for an engineering degree. I'm Robert Richard. That's Cajun, pronounced "REE-shard", and I've been called 'Bud' by friends and family ever since my younger sister hung the tag on me when she learned to talk.

Anyway, I'm from a little farming community in Cajun country of south Louisiana, and when I decided to go to college, my great aunt and uncle had a garage apartment that they kindly turned over to me _gratis_, where 'gratis' means "you get to clean it up, make repairs to make it livable, then you can live in it if you can keep from destroying the place or attracting the cops".

That part was easy for me. I was raised on a farm, so I grew up handy with tools, and the last two summers I'd snagged a job with an electrical contractor, so one of the things Aunt Doris and Uncle Gene got was an upgraded electrical system because I, as a college student and child of the twenty-first century, had more electrical and communications needs than when the little place was built in 1955.

The 'attracting the cops' thing was easy for me. Small Louisiana farming communities are usually centered around family and church, mostly a local Catholic church, but in my case, it was Baptist, great-grand-dad having had a falling out with the parish priest back in 1920-something. The family had been Baptist ever since, and not just in a perfunctory manner, but solid, pillar of the church Baptist.

So you take a kid out of that environment and stick him in the (relatively) big city nearby, in college, you might expect that veneer to wash off along about the first weekend he's on his own.

Didn't happen. Our pastor recommended me to the college's Baptist Student Union, and there I found friends and a social venue, and in some cases, study partners.

For the most part, that's where I hung out, at least a starting point, and from there I and similarly-minded friends of both sexes ventured forth to movies and somewhat sane social events. Of course everybody there wasn't quite as serious about that whole morality thing, so occasionally I found myself in places where I wasn't really comfortable. Sometimes I went along. Being there didn't mean that I did the alcohol or the drugs or whatever, but I knew they existed.

Same with female companionship. Some of those young ladies were very free with their bodies.

Good boy, though. Didn't partake.

In retrospect, that's how I got into trouble.

I shoulda known. Just the name, Sybil, has attached to it tales of woe, multiple personalities, starting back in Greek mythology where that Sybil was an oracle and witch.

Sybil Golding was about the 'alternative' lifestyle. I thought goth, but ultimately found that to be only a thin wash over everything she was into.

I thought 'cute'. Pixy-ish, a little plump, resulting in a nice-looking set of breasts. Big brown eyes. Hair in a short coif that went well with the pixy schtick. Dressed in black. Visible tattoos. Nose ring. Multiple ear rings. And kind of a bubbly, outgoing personality.

I kind of fell for her, probably more for the novelty than anything else.

Started out, after meeting at a party, with meeting for coffee, then chai at an Indian restaurant. She liked to talk and she had opinions on a lot of things, but it didn't take long for me to see all the New Age threads worked into her make-up. The Baptist kid kept his mouth shut.

For a while.

There's this place a couple of blocks from campus that is like the nexus of everything Sybil held dear – crystals, incense, Tarot, other arcana, that place did it. The owner, well, she was always the one in the store when we visited, was a late forties-ish woman who affected the look to go with the place, shawl over her long hair, deep, dark eyes enhanced by makeup, a deep, grating voice, that she could soften to make a sale.

I went into that shop several times with Sybil. She always walked out with something.

"You never say anything, Robert," she said. "You could use some of this..." She showed me today's purchase of incense. Smell..." she held the little box to my nose.

"Ain't bad, but ... I don't like the smoke thing..."

"You need to loosen up. The smoke is prayers rising..."

"Syb," I said, "that ain't the way I grew up. I do prayers, morning and night. That stuff ain't real."

"This incense?"

"None of that. Crystal's're just rocks. Tarot readings, fortune telling, that's all crap."

The incense speech was the end of me and Sybil. We parted with her looking at me, waving fingers in some fashion that I suppose she thought would have some effect, and saying, "There are things you DON'T know about, Robert Richard. You'll find out one day..."

I guess I regretted a bit the fact that I'd parted ways with a fellow human being, one who was good to talk with, who presented a view of things different than my own, but I had several friends, male and female.

One of the girls from the Student Union learned of the rift. "That girl's bad news, Robert, from a spiritual sense. You know what the bible says about being unequally yoked. You need to look at girls who believe like you do."

"Are you offering?"

"You know I'm engaged, Robert."

"I do know that. But if my relationship can end..."

"See?!? You thought it was a relationship."

"Friendship. Never anything more..."

"I heard that she's part of a real live witches' coven."

"Seriously? C'mon, Darcy. Buncha college girls playing games. That's all..."

"They think it's serious..."

"They'll outgrow that. Campus is full of New Age whackos."

The apostle Paul acknowledged sins of the flesh, saying "_I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate ... I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do"_

That's my struggle. I'm a normal young male and there's a lot of very attractive 'flesh' out there, some of it practically throwing itself at you. Me. Not unattractive. Clean. No bad habits. Studious. My upbringing keeps me from ... well, truth be known, I'm a nineteen year old virgin. Who succumbs to masturbation, complete with fantasies about any of a number of females, real and imaginary and all the shading in between. Sybil's appeared in some of those sessions. So has Darcy.

I try NOT to give in every night and I'm mostly successful, but I found that if I don't relieve pressure at a time of my choosing then the pressure will relieve itself in due time and make a mess.

I thought that maybe I was pushing the distance between relief sessions a bit too far. Maybe Sybil was an outlet, and now she's out of the picture.

Particularly vivid dream. Absolutely animalistic relief. I woke up from it. That happens. Usually I find myself with a sticky, viscous mess. Not tonight. But I thought for sure ... the dream ... The feelings...

And that general achiness in my balls was gone, just like ... but I didn't. No evidence.

I went to class, like normal. I spent the afternoon at the Student Union, went for dinner with a bunch of friends, nothing out of the ordinary at all.

Back to the apartment, shower, study, and off to bed.

And it happened again. Most unusual because usually after one episode, I can stave off conscious desires for a few days, and if it's an unconscious event, okay, I AM talking about a wet dream here, then I'm 'safe' for a while as well.

But this was a dream. Wasn't wet. I wasn't NEEDING relief. But it happened again. Same results. Or rather, lack of results.

After four days of this, the weekend came, I drove home for a visit on

Saturday with the intention of joining the family at church Sunday morning before returning to my apartment.

There's one thing I wasn't gonna do on a Saturday night in Mom and Dad's. In the wee hours of the morning, only the vaguest of thoughts recognized exquisite warmth and wetness at my crotch. Tiny bits of my conscious mind took the available data and arrived at the conclusion that I was being fellated. And nothing I could do could stop it, even if I wanted to stop it.

"You're kinda quiet this morning, son," Dad said. "Problem?"

"No sir. Just a lot of different things in my head, is all."

Driving back to the apartment, I was trying to analyze. Fellated? Sucked off? Blown? Only in my imagination had I experienced anything like it. I knew about it. What young male hasn't heard of it in various permutations. But I'd never experienced...

Matter of fact, the closest ... Well, that was Sybil at the movies, and the most she did was bite my ear and cup her hands over my erection from our kissing.

In my fantasies it was a pleasant and desirable thing, and now, in my dreams, it was even better than I imagined.

But why was it happening. So tonight, an experiment. After my shower, after reading a bit, it was time to sleep. But before sleep, I located a washcloth within reach, lowered my drawers, got comfortable. My dick was already hard with anticipation. Tonight's episode was Sybil on her knees before me, hungry for my dick. It's a great image, the sassy little smartass putting her demanding attitude to work in a very competent manner. The expected results didn't take long, and, I observed, the volume of output was in line with what I'd expect if I'd been holding off for a few days.

Curious.

But very relaxing. Easy to go to sleep after that.

And in the wee hours of the morning, the dream came back. This time there was a dark head of hair working me over, having extracted my dick from my pants, and I writhed with pleasure, then dropped back into deep slumber.

I tried the same regimen three nights in a row. After the third try, I woke up and I was not alone. Nestled next to me, completely naked, was a young Japanese (I thought 'generic Oriental' and was later corrected.) girl.

"W—who are YOU?" I gasped. "And how did you get here?"

She turned a perfect little face to me – big, dark eyes, delicate eyebrows, up-turned little nose, a tiny bit of an underbite balanced by beautiful lips. Not five feet tall. Small breasts. Delicate in demeanor. Completely naked.

"I am Sachiko. I am commanded here. You are fighting me. You should not try to ... remove your essence. It is for me to do, and then you die..."

And with that statement, she faded out like chalk sidewalk painting in the rain.

My head was turmoil through the next day. Sachiko? Sounded Japanese. I knew NO Japanese of an age, any sex, certainly not what I remembered from this morning. My mind whirled, searching for answers and none appeared. Nothing like this showed up in anything I'd ever read or heard. Where? How? Who? Why? What?

All questions. No answers. "You are fighting me." What was I fighting? My essence? For her to do and then I die?"

I was healthy. Had a physical this year. Nothing wrong. Felt fine. I'm supposed to die? How do you get answers?

Okay, Bud," I told myself. "She was real. You FELT her. SAW her. Maybe again..."

I almost couldn't get to sleep. Ah, but ... there it is ... the feeling – exquisite, wet, warm, sucking, demanding...

Force yourself to wake up, Bud!

Yes, head bobbing, going deep, pulling back, I'm all the way out, pink tongue swirling in a manner my fantasies never allowed for. Back down. Little giggle.

Giggle?

What was her name? I racked memory. Sachiko.

"Sachiko?"

"Yes, Robert..."

"What are you doing?"

"Is it not obvious? I am taking your essence."

"W-why?"

"I am commanded. It is what I am commanded to do."

"I didn't command you..."

"You have no choice. I was summoned, given your name..."

"Why?"

She looked up at me, licked her lips with that pink tongue, squeezed her eyes shut, then opened them. "I ... the word you know is 'succubus'."

I do know that word – some of the witchy crap Sybil read. She left me a book, I thought it was pure hokum. Yet...

"Now you need to go back to sleep and allow me to do what needs to be done. Perhaps this would be better." She drew my underpants down my legs, off my feet, folded them neatly on the nightstand. I got a chance to see her in the dim light from the window.

A flash. She went from nude to a diminutive female in a traditional kimono, then back to nude. I shook my head. She was crawling back into bed, this time beside me, kneeling. Her hand enclosed me, holding me as her head bowed. That little giggle and "mmmm".

This had to be the most vivid dream imaginable. There she was. I reached ... real flesh. Skin warm, soft. As my hand ranged down her side, following the curve from her back to a perfectly curved butt, I heard as well as felt her sigh.

My hand roved. The back of her head, like black silk. Reach under. A breast so perfectly young and firm. It sat in my hand, little nipple erect, poking into my palm.

First breast I ever touched. Gentle...

Surges built in my loins. Yes, 'loins'. What I was feeling was worthy of poetry. As I gently touched her, she purred and sucked and then ... thunder and lightning and a world that had colors making sounds.

Sucking and swallowing.

Then a kiss. And ... she was gone.

School the next day was a blur. Why? If I was going insane with these dreams, then I welcomed the insanity with open arms.

'Succubus'. Did you ever look up anything like that? I research things

that have factual evidence. Succubus isn't one of those things. All manner of legend exists, I read like I was possessed, trying to catalog and categorize and analyze. And feeling empty.

Empty.

Sleep. I welcomed it because...

"Sachiko?"

"Yes, Robert..."

"Can you talk with me?"

"I have not been told I cannot talk. You are my first..."

"I know nothing about what it is that you are..."

"What I am? I am this thing. I am Kaga Sachiko, daughter of a village porter. I was sold for a _koku_ of rice to Madame Sakura as an apprentice at her inn. I was fourteen when Madame Sakura was found to have betrayed the trust of Lord Minamoto Yoritomo. His samurai killed Madame Sakura and all of her household. My soul was not to rest. Now I am called."

"And you do not know..."

"I never asked. Since I was called and commanded, I have been faithful in my duties. Have you not been emptied?"

"I have been emptied," I said.

"I must empty you tonight, Robert. I am commanded..."

"Who commands you?"

"I do not know. I know I was summoned, and this thing I do, it is what I do. I must do. As a flower blooms without instruction, I do this thing."

"You don't have to..."

"But I do. As you must breathe, I must do..."

"Sachiko..."

"Do I make you unhappy?"

"Only if you are forced to do this thing."

"Is the water forced to run into the stream, to flow over the rocks?"

"Well, no ... but you seem..."

"Robert, you are my ... first..."

"First what?"

"First man. I must learn what I am, how I am to be ... Now, may I?"

"Sachiko, I was brought up to think this is wrong..."

"This is not wrong, Robert. It is what I am to do, and it is what you are to do. Like raindrops falling, first a cloud, then a leaf, then a rill, then a brook."

"You have no choice?"

"I do not understand 'choice'. This is what I am to do." She smiled shyly. "I do sort of enjoy my ... your..."

"But I'm supposed to DIE?"

"As I have been told, I take your essence and you die..." she smiled. "Not tonight. Not for many nights. You are young and have much essence. Now, may I?"

"You are beautiful."

"It pleases me to hear you think so."

"You ... I read everything I could find today about succubuses ... succubi ... whatever. From what I read, they are not supposed to be cute Japanese girls of pleasing disposition. They're supposed to be hellishly wanton and destructive."

"Perhaps there are things I am not told. I was called out of the aether, told I was now a succubus, and given you to perform my task upon."

"There's like, a place where..."

"I am a poor Japanese girl. I do not know many things. Only that I did not know ... screaming, the cries of the people in Madame Sakura's inn, that we girls were commanded to kneel, then the kiss of the sword on my neck. Next, I am standing before a light, being told that I was a succubus, that performing my duty would earn me steps toward Oneness..."

"Would you lie close to me?"

"I have done that. I liked it."

"The first time I saw you," I said. "You are a surprise."

She pulled up next to me, formed against me like a kitten, happily nestling in my arm. A tiny kiss. "Now, Robert, I must..."

"Sachiko, if you must..."

"I must..."

I didn't fight it.

The next night I welcomed her.

"I am the first to ask questions, Robert," she said. "Nobody understands. There are many of us in that place, some who know more than others. Nobody is told they cannot ask nor that they cannot answer, so I asked. You are cursed."

"I cannot be cursed. I'm a Christian. I am protected."

"Maybe she who cursed you did not know or she did not think you were real, or that your protection was real."

"Do you know who cursed me?"

"You know her as Sybil. She has other names by which she is known."

"And Sybil cursed me with a cute Japanese succubus?"

"There are those who know of Sybil. She has aspirations to power, but she is careless." She eased down in bed, dragging my drawers downward. "You may take a very long time to die, Robert."

Chapter 2

Normally when I wake up with more questions than answers, it's because I am in the aftermath of a math or calculus class.

Oddly, those thoughts rest easy on my mind. Dreams, though, oh so vivid dreams.

Baptist boys don't know about succubi. Or succubuses. See?!? We don't even know how to spell it. Funny that as I write this, _Microsoft Word_ knows.

Who else knows?

Worrisome. Who do you sit down with and say "Hi, my name is Robert and I have a succubus"? I can't come up with a list.

Wait. Sybil gave me a book. I remember flipping through few pages of confusing writing like if JK Rowling got hit by a medieval thesaurus. Find the book. Silly thought of itself. I know where ALL the books are in my apartment.

No wonder I called it goofy. The materials were modern, but it had been printed and bound to give the look of some sort of ancient document.

This time I paid attention to what I found. Succubi. You get 'em two ways: either you're just so depraved and evil that the universe conspires against you, or you have an enemy among the adept, or you have an enemy who can obtain the services of an adept, and you are cursed.

None of the creatures described were anything like Sachiko. Some were everything you'd expect for the spawn of Hell, horrific, rending, drawing, extracting your life-force through that member of your body that was part of your evil in the world.

Others were beauty on the outside, but wanton, destructive on the inside, and the result was death, although according to this book, a person who so dies is not transported straight to Hell as is the guy who brought it on himself.

There's precious little detail on how to get one, how to get rid of one, what protocols surround living with a succubus as a nightly experience.

And they didn't teach us anything like this in Sunday School or the Baptist Training Union classes.

I wasn't sure that talking with Brother Harrison, the minister who runs the Baptist Student Union, was the step I wanted to take.

I pondered. Went to class. Did a bit of study and tutoring at the Student Union. Not everybody's taking engineering, and a lot of those who aren't are struggling with the varying levels of math needed for other disciplines. I help a lot of 'em.

Still, end of the evening, I'm at home, apprehensive about going to bed.

Apprehensive, because part of me WANTS Sachiko to show up and part of me says there's something spiritually wrong about the situation.

"Sachiko," I said when she appeared. "You're here."

"I am commanded to be here."

"I like when you're here."

"Because I take your essence, Robert?"

"No, because you are soft and warm and beautiful."

"I am? Some tell me that I am to be an evil thing."

"You are a beautiful thing."

"I was sent to make you die, Robert."

"It's not working. I feel more alive each day. If I don't die, do you keep coming?"

"I am commanded."

"Come lay beside me, Sachiko, little one."

"I like that, Robert."

I held her. She seemed so tiny, so beautiful, even fragile.

"I have never held a girl like this, like you, Sachiko."

"I have never been held like this, Robert. I was being trained of many things between man and woman. It was to be my life. I was attendant to some of the ladies of my madam's house, but I was being saved for a special customer. My madam would have made much money, gained much stature, she told me."

"You would have been a prostitute?"

"That is a word you use. It is not the same in the world I come from. Ladies of the house can please men many different ways, including opening themselves to him. What I must do to take your essence is but one of those ways. Song, conversation, meals, many ways."

"What you do to me ... you did that?"

"You are my first, Robert. This I have told you. You are the first man I have lain with like we do now."

"I am privileged."

Her face glowed at the words. "Thank you, Robert. I don't think I am supposed to be a happiness to you. I am glad that I am. It is something that is for you and me."

Out on a limb here, Robert. "Must you go? After you..."

"I must. I know of no one who stayed."

"You know of others?"

"They are there. Commanded as I am."

"Are the others like you?"

Sadly, "No. some of them are demons that I do not know. Not Japanese. Fierce, ugly ... others are demons, beautiful on the outside, but bad on the inside."

"And you."

"I do not understand why I am me. I do not fit. Like it was a mistake. Like a horse was ordered and a bird arrived."

"I want you to stay..."

"I cannot."

"Can you kiss me?"

"I have kissed you before." A butterfly landed on my lips, then she slid slowly down, pulling down my drawers. The first kiss there made me gasp. This time it seemed that she was NOT performing a rote task. I felt as much as heard her humming as her tongue worked magic. The end came with a crescendo and a crash and she was gone.

I only recognize a difference. Class work seems to be no burden at all. I whip through the coursework with new-found ability and energy.

At the end of the day, though, I have decided that there IS someone I can talk with about my condition.

I enter the shop to the sound of a tinkling bell. The lady appears through a beaded curtain, its jewels glittering in the fragmented light coming through the windows.

"Hi. I'm Bud. I don't know if you remember me..."

"You came here with Sybil. You did not believe."

"No ma'am, I did not."

"Yet now you are here."

"Yes, ma'am. I'm a Christian..."

"A man of The Book, are you?"

"I am. Try to be."

"I know The Book. You know The Book."

"Yes, ma'am."

"There is truth. But the truth, my friend, is that you can know everything that is in The Book, but not everything is IN The Book."

"I am learning that."

"So you come here to ask..."

"Yes, ma'am."

She pulled a stack of cards out of one of her voluminous sleeves, dealt four, moved one from the top of the deck to the bottom, dealt another, then picked them up.

"You are not here from guile or deception, Robert."

"I said my name was Bud."

"Your friends and family call you Bud. Am I your friend now?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"The cards show me you have a night visitor."

"That is why I'm here. A succubus. What can you tell me?"

"Come, sit, young Bud. Will you take tea?"

"Uh ... normal stuff, right?"

"Nothing that will cause you to leave your body, gain enhanced senses ... Unless you desire..."

"Plain, please. I'm already having enough weirdness in my life."

"Sit. Close your eyes for a few minutes while the tea steeps. Let your mind bring thoughts together in order that we may talk."

"Yes, ma'am."

As told, closed my eyes. Incense lent a pleasing, exotic odor. I don't know where a breeze might arise to move wind chimes, but there was a faint tinkle, a very pleasing succession of notes that changed sequence, but always pleased the ear.

"Bud," she said gently. "Tea. Do you take sugar? Cream?"

"A little of both, please."

She served me delicately. Thought crossed my mind. What was that thing about a Japanese Tea Ceremony? Something to ask Sachiko.

She took a sip of her cup, watched me savor mine.

"Now, tell me about your night visitor."

"She says she's a succubus..."

"Says? She speaks?"

"Yes. Small, delicate voice in my head, but like I hear the spoken words. Surprising thing is that she is Japanese."

"Japanese? Curious."

"It's what she said."

"Very curious. Bud, every culture around the world had evil spirits of a sexual nature. Most people know only of the legends of Europe."

"She says I was cursed."

A sculpted eyebrow arched. "Cursed."

"I only know of one person..."

"... Sybil," she finished for me. "Silly girl wanted to go further. Witch, she calls herself. Child playing with fire. I was mistaken about her..."

"She was cute..."

"Her mind ... still a spoiled child. Playing with things..."

"I wouldn't let myself be one of them. We parted ways."

"She says you were rude. An unbeliever."

"I was an unbeliever. Now I'm not sure what to believe."

"Believe your Book, Christian. Just know that everything is not in The Book."

"What do I do? About Sachiko?"

"You think of her by name?"

"I do. She talks to me."

"Interesting. What I know of Succubi does not include conversation with the victim."

"She told me that she is to take my essence until I die..."

"That is a common thread..."

"She told me that I was young and healthy and would not soon die..."

"You might take comfort in that idea. You will die from her taking your essence, not from a car wreck or poisoning or something else."

"Interesting. One can infer that?"

"Perhaps. Still. Japanese. That intrigues me greatly. And young and pretty and of good temper. Also intriguing."

"You got me. I can do semiconductors and relays and a great number of electrical and electronic devices, but nobody's ever sicced a succubus on anyone I know."

"I have part of the mystery in my hands, Bud."

"You do?"

"Yes. I know who sold the spell to Sybil."

"And that would be..."

"Me. You see those posters on the walls?"

"I do."

Many people see them as decoration. Some are. Some are not."

"And Sybil bought a REAL one?" I got up, looked. "Specialty paper, conditioned to look like parchment." I looked closer. "Offset printing. Possibly a photoprocess master. Hand-inked additions for the initials and marginal notes. Pretty impressive."

"Sybil has bought many, but she specifically asked about one relating to Succubi. The one I sold her was authentic, as relating to content, but it was in Latin, with marginal notes in Gaelic, according to old Celtic tradition."

"You read those languages?"

"Bits of Gaelic only. Much Latin, however."

"And it was authentic? How come YOU don't use it?"

"Bud, I am at peace with my place in the universe. I have no real enemies, only annoyances. Having the spell does not tempt me."

"Apparently it tempted Sybil."

"Sybil would have been tempted by an unlocked liquor cabinet in her parents' house. She's an experimenter. No rhyme, no reason. Just playing with things."

"And you sold it to her?"

"I have means for controlling her. If you walk in off the street and buy a poster, you pay with cash or with credit card. If you wish to buy a real spell, I take ONLY silver or gold, and I require a lock of hair and nail clippings."

"That's, well, that's kinda spooky."

"You perceive what leaving those in my possession might imply."

"I heard of voodoo and stuff..."

"Indeed."

"So you have a handle..."

"She who summons, she may have power to recant."

I thought of Sachiko's gentle, innocent face. "Perhaps I don't want it to stop..."

"I need to do some research, Bud."

I snorted. "You have to understand that one word I never imagined I'd hear in this place is 'research'."

"Young Robert," she said sternly, "I take my craft seriously. You may see this as an emporium dealing in trinkets and gewgaws, but I take

seriously that one of my customers might come here seeking something for comfort or peace or tranquility.”

“What about one who comes in wanting something to cause harm to another?”

“Many do. Many walk out with, well, in medicine they would be called placebos, and they put them to work as they imagine they should work, and the very act of taking an action provides the psychic relief to their problem.”

“Because many times the problem I think is YOU is really a problem I have with myself...”

“You do understand...”

I left with promises that she would have something to give to me at the end of the week.

Driving away, I replayed conversation. Sachiko would end my life. I was healthy. And somehow, I felt more free. I won't say 'satisfied' because it's not supposed to be like that. Too many Sundays. That satisfaction is supposed to exist within the confines of marriage.

That thing I struggled with, my flesh, that was not tugging, pulling, dragging me. My mind felt relaxed, free, and it showed in my increased understanding of my academic challenges. That understanding passed on into my interactions with the students I tutored. Got positive comments. Better than positive comments, though, the results of my efforts showed in a few texts and emails of the 'passed that algebra quiz' variety.

A supporter had pizza delivered to the Student Union, negating my need to think about a source for dinner.

All I wanted to do was get home, do my evening ablutions, and get to bed.

Expectant.

Expectations met. I left the window curtain open, allowing more light because...

Sachiko. Like a zephyr she appeared, a stirring, then she was here.

“Sachiko.”

“Yes, Robert?”

“I am glad you are here.”

"Robert," softly, like I was hearing the words rather than having them enter my mind, "I spoke with others who are ... succubi. Many of them do not find that their subjects look forward to seeing them."

"They are not like you, Sachiko. You are the stuff of dreams..."

"I was tasked, Robert. Told. Go here. See this man. Do this thing. Now, I want to come to you. I know I must do this thing, but now I do it with happiness because you tell me I bring you joy..."

"You are my joy, Sachiko."

She smiled. "I do not think it is supposed to work this way."

She was formed against me, her innocence rendering her desirable in ways my mind had heretofore not imagined, yet there was no urgency in me. I wasn't grasping, groping, my hand slid down her side with relish, drinking in with touch the same beauty my eyes beheld. She looked up at me with those liquid eyes, little smile, like she was thinking that maybe she wasn't supposed to smile, but it was happening anyway.

"No man has ever touched me like this, Robert..."

"I have had no woman this close ... no woman to become my joy."

For the first time her tiny hand traced fire across my chest as she caressed me. "I am happy to be that woman, Robert. In my life, I was being trained. I learned of the things a woman can say to bend a man to her wishes, to lead him, sometimes to higher pleasure, sometimes away from bad things, from pain and hurt. I use none of those words now. Robert, I am pleased to be with you. What was a task is no longer a task, it is a time that brings me joy."

"I want more, Sachiko..."

"I only have this small time, Robert. I must ... then return. But always tomorrow..." And she kissed me. Before this, sweet little meetings of lips. Now, soft, her lips parting, her tongue touching mine. Then she slid to my waist. The thing she must do, it is become artistry. And she was gone.

On Thursday I got a message to meet with Lady Ramona, suggesting that I show up after five PM. Dutifully I appeared.

"Tea, my young friend?"

"If you offer, yes."

Again the wait. I closed my eyes. With no effort at all I brought up the touches, the face, the form of Sachiko, the little snippets of conversation we had, usually her telling me about her life, me telling her that she brought joy to mine.

I opened my eyes to approaching footsteps. Lady Ramona placed the tray before me, allowed me to prepare my cup of tea. "Earl Grey, from a specialty supplier, Robert. I do wish you'd allow me to stretch your horizons, though. Teas are lovely to explore."

"I was raised where tea was something you drank over ice, Lady Ramona."

"I know." She sipped, then, "I have discovered interesting things. I summoned Sybil."

"That should be interesting."

"It was. As I said, she's flighty and immature and thought it would be, her words, 'fun' to see if she could actually summon a succubus and curse you with it."

"I thought that these curses were generally fatal..."

"She understood that. To her, you were an un-person, not of her coven, such that it is, and not of her beliefs."

"So basically I know that she's a person who wants me killed?"

"I suspect she never gave that a conscious thought. Like a child experimenting with liquor or drugs, no regard to consequences. I hold the thought that she didn't believe anything would actually happen. I know many like her, enamored of the trappings, a niche in which they can place themselves and be comfortably 'outside'. You say 'alternative', I think."

"That's what I thought when I met her – another goth girl."

"Of her coven, she is the most serious."

"So, the curse..."

"She says she followed the recipe. Robert, she does not know Latin. She translated. Poorly. And worse than getting a poor translation of the Latin, she got NONE of the Gaelic, the marginal notes."

"Surprised that anything happened at all."

"As I am myself," she sighed. "However ... the curse is based on an ancient Gaelic tradition to call forth a demon from the sea. The first

physical ingredient was dulse from the Hibernian coast."

"That's Ireland, isn't it?"

"Yes. And dulse is a seaweed. As you might imagine, there is no local supply of dulse. There is, however, an oriental food store that sells nori."

"Japanese seaweed."

"Which established that your succubus would be Japanese. Had she found Hibernian dulse, you would have been set upon by an Irish girl." She sipped her tea. "Next, she was to take water from the sea at storm."

"The North Sea," I posited.

"Yes. Sybil got a cup of water from a fine day with a north wind on the Gulf of Mexico. Your succubus, instead of being storm-blown, raging, is as calm and peaceful as a pond in spring."

"That describes Sachiko."

"And she was to employ her familiar in the casting."

"Familiar?"

"An animal. Harry Potter has owls. Cats. You see?"

"Yes. More things I don't believe in..."

"Not everything is in The Book, young Robert."

When she calls me 'Young Robert' I feel like I'm being schooled.

"The marginal notes in Gaelic tell that the familiar determines the experiences of the succubus. One would expect a familiar, a cat, in this case, to have been mature, having mated, roamed, fought, lived."

"Sybil had a kitten."

"Yes. You see..."

"Sachiko is very much the innocent, unsullied kitten of a girl..."

Lady Ramona smiled. "You could have been set upon by a wanton harridan of a demon who might have torn you apart psychically..."

"I am Christian. I am protected..."

"Your salvation would have been assured. Your physical and psychic

being would have suffered. The Book, Robert. Everything is not in it." She sighed as if chiding a child. "You know of karma?"

"I am aware of karma."

"Karma. The good you do..."

"What goes around, goes around..."

"You, Robert, in being boring to Sybil, apparently you are good to others. Your Karma..."

"If I believed that..."

"There are parallels in the Book. Laying up treasures in heaven."

"So I got Sachiko instead of some red-headed demon spawn. What happens?"

"I know there exist spells to counter your curse..."

"Lady Ramona, for Sybil, bless her heart, I think her curse backfired. Sachiko ... the only curse I get from Sachiko is that she is not real, that I cannot have her in my life like a real woman..."

"Be careful, young Robert. Be careful what you wish for."

Chapter 3

What do I wish for? College graduation, a good job in a field I enjoy, being a source of satisfaction to my parents, an example of the Gospel in peoples' lives, wife and family? Pretty good list.

I'm on track with a lot of that in my own estimation, but right now the edges of my path are ragged.

Example of the things I believe? I thought I believed in chastity and the sanctity of marriage but here I am walking in the sunshine of a fine autumn day longing for night so I can...

I can what?

I know it's real, right? Sachiko? I can feel her, touch her, talk with her, and what she does ... Even she says that at first she did it because she was commanded. Now she says she enjoys. When she first came to me, I was unconscious of her activities. Now I'm very conscious, anticipating, and yet not, because at this point I think that when she finishes me for the night, she goes.

I don't want her to go. But what do I do? A month ago Sachiko was a creature that, as far as my knowledge went, did not exist. Now I know she exists. I did not know I had a need. Now I know I have a need.

It's a need that far surpasses the feelings that I get when her little dark hair is moving at my crotch, when her hands and lips and tongue and teeth are leading me through unknown space to ecstasy.

I want Sachiko. I ask myself why. Common sense tells me that first, I know little about her – snippets of revelation from our short conversations. Second, not only is she from an entirely different culture, medieval Japanese, which I know nothing of, but she was training to be a prostitute. Third, we're in two worlds. I'm quite assuredly ensconced in everyday, normal reality. She's from a spirit dimension that I never believed existed.

I found myself at Lady Ramona's emporium.

"I had a feeling you would be back," she said when she saw me.

"Of course," I said. "You're the only one I know of that has any insight into my situation."

"Ah, it's a situation, is it?"

"How many people come to you and tell you they're cursed?"

"Quite a few actually. How many are REALLY cursed versus how many who're told they're cursed or how many are trying to blame a curse for the results of poor choices, those are all very different numbers."

"How many of them do you help?"

"Robert. Bud. You came here the first time as a skeptic. I sense that you still are, but you're shaken to your foundations..."

"I am."

"I explained before, some of what I do is art, is placebo, is effective because the user needs a false cure for a non-existent problem. Your problem, young Bud, is real, made worse by the circumstances. Had our Sybil brought forth the creature she thought she was summoning, you would be screaming for an end. Sybil put about as much diligence into the summoning as she does with other areas of her life, and you become the only man I ever heard of who was in love with his succubus."

"If you could see her ... She's a very bad succubus. I want to scoop her in my arms, carry her to the altar, commit..."

"Be careful what you wish for."

"You said that before. I take it to mean there may be a possibility."

"I do not know. Nobody seems to know what may surround such a creature as Sybil has called into existence."

"Kind of like Fleming and bread mold."

She smiled. "Yes. I do know of that story and a myriad of other happy accidents. Fleming's 'accident' benefited many." She saw my bemused expression. "Oh, yes ... the young engineering study finds it amusing that Lady Ramona has knowledge beyond arcana and essential oils..."

"Sorry. It's just..."

"Enough said, young student. I take your happiness as something I have brought into the day."

"It is. But my problem..."

"Right now, I have no answer. You are safe."

"Every night."

"She is a summoned succubus."

"Now, every night, we talk. Her words, they're like one of the incenses you sold Sybil – they bring calm, happiness – except they leave me with longing."

"And you, Bud, you are not one of those males who thinks only with his..." She paused. "One factor in why YOUR succubus is as she is. Also why Sybil is not beside you..."

"Sybil was ... interesting."

"Interesting, for a start, then tending toward flighty, impulsive and tedious," the lady said.

A customer, two, actually came in. Lady Ramona left me sitting while she tended to them. I overheard parts of the conversation. These girls were in the 'experimentation' phase of getting into adulthood. Lady Ramona came back smiling.

"A sale?"

"Very best for me. They are curious and happy and their needs are easy to satisfy because they anticipate good things. Herbal teas, incense,

a couple of crystals..."

"None of those things connect," I said.

"Oh, you think too much about it. Do you see that car across the street?"

I looked through the gap in the drapes. Somebody's 'ricer', a Japanese car all decked out with spoilers and air dams. "Yes, ma'am."

"Do you honestly think that the owner really drives that car in a manner where those appurtenances are any possible help?"

"Probably not."

"Our two young ladies are like the owner of that car. They have good, even privileged, lives, and they want a stripe or a spoiler or an air dam to show others that they're a bit more advanced. Different."

"I didn't want to be different, Lady Ramona."

"Yet here you are."

"What am I supposed to do?"

"I am looking into things." She smirked at me. "I won't say 'research' because you're a scientific young man and you KNOW that we occultists don't really do research."

"I'm sorry. That was a poor thing to say."

"And my pointing it out is your punishment for saying it. I will talk with people who know things different than what I know. Perhaps we may gain insight. In the meantime, I don't think you have a choice. She will come to you. If you try to stay awake, you will fall into fitful sleep and she will still come to you. But you, young Bud, you WANT her to come to you, so I recommend that you simply enjoy her as the gift you think she is."

"Sybil gave me quite a gift."

"Quite by accident. And Sybil's intentions apply measures of things to her karmic balance. She has that sword hanging over her head."

"She played with something that she thought might kill me..."

"You ascribe a depth of thought to the girl..."

"She's not stupid..."

"No, she's not stupid. Just self-centered. No thought. You need to stop thinking about her. She has her path. You have yours. Your paths crossed. Now they go in different directions."

"I see."

"DO see, young Bud. And go in peace. Enjoy your Sachiko. Consider that many people live lives without the piece of happiness such as you enjoy."

"Yes, ma'am. And thank you."

I left the little shop of un-routine and went back to my routine world. Harrison was making chili in the kitchen at the Student Union. It might not be the best chili on the planet, but he's proud of it and it's the best chili to which I'll have access tonight. The bowl marked the end of the day for me. I drove home, showered, went to bed, was reading and went to sleep with the lamp on beside the bed.

A voice. Sachiko. "Robert. Turn out the lamp."

I did. Half awake. And when the lamp went out, she was there standing beside my bed.

"My beautiful Sachiko."

"My Robert. My duty that is my pleasure. May I?" she asked, lifting the covers from me.

"Please, my lady."

She giggled. "You are funny. I am no lady. Perhaps one day I might have become a lady, like Madame Sakura, but now I am only a maid from the inn."

"You are the lady who enters my dreams."

She fit herself against me, tonight leading with a kiss. "You like to kiss me."

"I love to kiss you."

"You love to ... everything about me."

"This is true."

Her hand reached down, gently wrapped around my erection. She smiled. "I love everything about you. We are together like that."

"Sachiko..."

"You may call me 'Chiki'. It is my little name, for my friends."

"My Chiki. I want you to stay after you..."

"That is not possible for me. I am summoned, commanded, a boundary set. When I ... you ... then I am here no more."

"But I want you here."

She took my hand, put it over her breast, holding it there. "I know ... if there was a way, I would be here."

I rolled to face her, sliding my left arm under her slight form, pulling her against me. This was new. First time. Face to face, nude bodies touching. And I kissed her.

I honestly thought my soul was leaving my body. Chiki offered not the slightest protest, moving to press as much of herself as she could against me. her hand between us gauged my hardness.

"I think that if I ... I so much enjoy gathering your essence, Robert. You are ... Tonight it will ... she smiled. "I will try to make it last."

"You know to do that?"

"I was being trained, Robert. I was instructed that to prolong a man's release is to prolong his glimpse of heaven."

"Chiki..." I sighed as she slid down. A prayer of thanks for her trainers.

The next day between classes I ran into Darcy at the Student Union.

"Hey, Bud," she greeted me cheerily. "What's up with YOU lately?"

"Nothin'. Normal stuff, you know. Why?"

"No particular reason. Just that it's been a while since you made some skeezy comment about me and you..."

"I never made a skeezy comment. Just indicated that if you were not encumbered with a fiancé, then you and I might date..."

"Over my engagement ring. Skeezy."

"I guess. For a certain range of 'skeezy'." I did a theatrical sigh. "But alas! The ring remains."

"You just seem less ... I dunno ... stressed. So, any new girls in your life?"

"Not since Sybil..."

"You were NOT Sybil's type..."

"Thank you for running interference for me. Perhaps I should submit to you a list of names and you can tell me who MIGHT be suitable." I grinned at her feigned discomfort. "Or, you can sit your butt on the Xerox over there and run me off an unencumbered copy."

"I am NOT giving you a Xerox of my Butt!"

"Noooo, dive in headfirst. I want ALL of you..."

"Skeazy!" she giggled. "ANYWAY, a bunch of us are going for burgers at The Barn this evening. You can come..."

"Unencumbered. And if I strike up a conversation with a girl, you can signal me as to her suitability."

"Don't be a pig."

"I'm NOT a pig, which is probably why I don't have a date tonight."

The evening out was a pleasant event. I won't say 'respite' because I really didn't consider the inclusion of Sachiko – Chiki in my life to be something from which I needed relief. And true to Darcy's implication, there were two girls who might have interested me. Neither of them was Chiki.

Chiki came to me in the night. Oh, for more of Sachiko in my life. Our time ... talking, me trying to get information as to how she existed, where, among whom, what she knew. How she understood this world...

"How did you know about turning out the lamp?"

"I just knew. I was never ... We had candles. We had oil lamps. You have these things that provide light without fire. I just knew..." she kept on. "Like your bed. I slept on a futon, like this mattress except on the floor ... it was thinner, but very good to sleep on." She smiled. "I think that for two people..."

"Sachiko, I want to sleep with you, to go to sleep with your head against me, to wake in the night with you here..."

She gave a tiny, flirty giggle. "I fear that if I slept on your futon, I would not be safe..."

"You would be safe as you could be in my arms."

"I think I would start the night as a girl and end it as a woman..."

"You're ... still a girl?"

"I am. I was being saved. I am told that the offer of a young girl for her first time is worth much money, and I was being trained, taught, prepared for that..."

"But you ... My essence."

She giggled, her eyes surreally bright in the dim room. "That is different. It is the time when a girl is with her first man..."

"I think it's the same way. Well, it used to be, that a man and a maiden, when they ... it was the physical act of creating a marriage."

"It is perhaps so. But in the world of Madame Sakura and ladies of the inns, that first was only the introduction, of great price to the right man, and after that, the lady was ... it was just one of several things she could do to present herself of worth to her madame and her clients."

"But you escaped that..."

"I was prepared for that," she said. "I escaped at the sweep of a samurai's sword. You tell me if that was a better path."

"You are here."

"Indeed I am, and I ask why I am still a girl who is sent to gather a man's essence and only allowed one tool." She kissed me, drawing away, letting her tongue dance around my lips. Her hand reached down, stroked. "Perhaps this would also be a tool, but the essence would go everywhere. You are a vigorous man. I could not gather it all."

Thus ended the night's lesson. She slid to my waist, then her head bowed. "Slowly, my Robert. Slowly. I love the feel..."

Girl. Woman. I think they call that data.

The next day I went to see Lady Ramona. Gave her the information.

"Curious," she said. "I would have thought ... I understand what she said about the collection of your essence. There are all manner of nuances and permutations that we do not know about the legends and spells and the creatures who inhabit that world."

I shrugged. "That's what she said."

"Curious. A virgin succubus. I need to talk with some people."

"Yes, ma'am."

That night it was me and Chiki, kneeling together in bed for the first time.

"You are quite manly, Robert."

"Thank you, Chiki, flower. You are more female than my heart dares to desire."

"I am still girl. Not here..." She put her hands on her small, perfect breasts. "Nor here..." Her fingers of her right hand touched her pubic curve, where only a few straight dark hairs resided.

"You are beautiful beyond dreams. Here..." I took her right hand, put it over my heart, "And here..." and I pointed to my head.

"And this part thinks me beautiful as well?" as she circled my shaft.

"Yesssss," I hissed.

She giggled. "The ladies say that THIS has no need of beauty in a young man, only a smile and some place warm and wet..."

"That may be true, but Sachiko turns a dribble into a fountain..."

Smile. "I do. Every time. Very much."

"But then you go," I said sadly.

Her hand touched my face. "You are real, Robert. You really do not wish me to go."

"I want you to stay."

"I cannot, my Robert. We have this ... but before the sun rises, I must ... And you will always allow me..."

"If I didn't?"

"You will. It is the way things must be. I am not one of the other creatures who will stun you to stupidity and then wrest your essence in screams. I am Sachiko. I am Sachiko who is bound to her task with Robert, and Robert will allow..."

"Robert doesn't allow, Sachiko. Robert yearns. Robert needs. But Robert lives because Sachiko, Robert's Chiki, comes to him with beauty and gentleness and brings him a world..."

"I know of the world of which you speak. We were told of the Willow World where we ladies had our lives. It was beauty, though fleeting..."

"I want your world. I want you in my world."

"My Robert. As much of me as I can give you..." and she sank down.

I was gone. And she was gone.

This is the curse, then? That I'm craving Chiki sitting by me, talking, her face expressive, her eyes, even in dim light, animated. That I get this much of Chiki, then it is time and she gives me a glimpse of heaven and then she's gone and I'm wanting more.

Okay, it IS a curse because today I stumbled through the day. It wasn't total destruction. It's just that this is weighing on me, occupying my thoughts.

Tonight. Can't wait for tonight. Sunset. Bathed, shaved. Read a little, turn off the light...

"Sachiko..."

"My Robert."

We met like lovers, her diminutive body wrapped in my arms.

"What of your day today, my Robert?"

"Too long. I waited for the time when I would be with you."

"I do not want you to do that, Robert. You must live your life. Otherwise, the curse..."

"You keep taking my essence. I have more essence, Chiki."

"That liquid, it is life, but your mind, it is life, too. You must not let me take that."

"You are taking it. I think of you..."

"I am just a silly girl, Robert. Men do not give up their beings for silly girls."

"You are more than that, Chiki, and you must know it."

"I..."

For the first time I let my hands course up her thighs, over her butt and around to the front. She gasped as I touched her plump pubic mound, teasing the sparse hair.

"Robert ... I ... no man has ever..."

"Exquisite." That's me, dealing with the total experience of the female form starting with the one in front of me right now. Robert, take your time. Listen to her. Pay attention to her.

I didn't want to be a fumbling moron with Chiki. My fingers toyed with her pubic hair, stopping just at the indentation of her slit. Her hand touched mine. I thought she'd pull my hand back.

"Gently here, My Robert," she said, guiding my fingers. Kissing me. Sighing. A little spasm as I found a slick little nubbin.

"Here. Around." She kissed me again, grasping my dick and stroking me with enthusiasm that didn't mesh with her comment about collecting my essence.

With a shudder and whimpers against my neck, she came, gamely continuing until I erupted, gouts of semen shooting freely.

"Oh, Sachiko, my love..."

"I am your love, Robert. You are the first man to touch me like that, to bring me to the heavens." Her hand idly toyed with the slickness she'd caused from me. "I have much work to collect your essence now. It is all over."

And while she was twisting, crawling over me, her lips and tongue driving me crazy as she studiously searched out my discharge, she turned, her legs parted, and I kissed what presented itself. She spasmed into a curled ball around my head.

"Oh ... oh ... Robert!. Oh..."

And she faded away.

Chapter 4

"Women and cats will do as they please, and men and dogs should get used to the idea."

Robert Heinlein in _Glory Road_

"Since when do you have a cat?" I asked Harrison.

"What cat? We don't have a cat."

"This cat," I said. I had an adolescent grey tabby with a bobbed tail climbing into my lap. I stroked her head and was rewarded by a resounding purr as she pushed herself further into my lap.

"Anybody missing a cat?" he said loudly.

No answer. "I don't know where it came from."

Somehow I felt that 'it' was 'she' and she was friendly.

"I need my lap for my laptop," I told her. Of course I talk to cats. Don't you?

Still purring, she insinuated herself next to my leg, ignoring my motions to pull my laptop out.

I was expecting a couple of the students I tutored (for a small fee) to show up, and when they did, I normally took them to a side room where we were freed from distractions. The first one of those showed up.

"Sorry, kitty," I said, patting the cat as I got up. She pushed her head into my thigh, then left. I gathered my student up and headed into the chosen room. Sat down.

"Where'd you get a cat?"

The cat was back. When I sat at the table, she jumped up into my lap.

"I dunno. First time I ever saw her was today," I said. "Leave the door open in case she wants to leave."

"She?" Benson asked.

"I think so. Kinda hard to tell with young cats." I picked her up expecting her to twist out of my grasp, but she went limp until she was near my face. Then she rubbed her head against my cheek, purred, and licked my nose.

"Yeah, that's totally YOUR cat," he laughed.

We spent an hour going over some basic (to me) algebra stuff, then it was time for me to go. I started putting my iPad away to go. I looked. No cat. I checked around the main room. No cat. Outside. No cat. Oh, well, cats come and go as they please.

Leaving the Student Union, I drove over to Lady Ramona's shop.

"Hello, Robert," she said. "Tea?"

"You're addicting me to tea," I said. "So, sure, thank you!"

"Sit. Have some quiet time. I will be back."

I am getting used to this. I closed my eyes, breathed deeply through my nose, trying to parse the exotic smells. Incense? Potpourri? Spices? Herbs? I dunno. Exotic and pleasant and somehow relaxing. It's like some of the debris in my head fell away, sharpening my senses and thoughts.

She reappeared with a tray. Two cups of tea. Sugar. Cream.

"I haven't gotten replies from some questions I've asked, Robert. These things, they're, I think, in your view, very imprecise. There are no tables nor scales. I deal in a world that is ages old and poorly, by modern standards, documented. This is a place where Google and Wikipedia offer little help."

"Yes, ma'am. I understand that. But you said that Sybil failed to attend to detail and now I'm dealing with Sachiko, a very non-standard demon."

"Perhaps that's part of the problem, Robert. Sybil didn't do many things correctly in her summoning. Maybe she didn't manage a demon at all."

She smiled. "In the past, the development of a person into an adept, one who could summon and command spirits, demons, if you will, acquired her knowledge over years, decades of learning, working under the eye of those before her. In Europe it was a dangerous thing. You read of witch trials. Know that only a few such trials were recorded. An adept, a witch if you will, in a rural area often met her end with no record or fanfare."

"Like lynching," I offered.

"Very much so, except often ending in fire. Fire was thought to cleanse."

"Sybil walked into a bit of knowledge, thought it much the same as everything else in her life, bits of real and imagined, nothing to be dealt with in respectful, traditional and careful manner. You got Sachiko."

"Because she used the wrong seaweed. And wrong water."

"Many, many things come into play, young Robert. Just as in your

studies you started with two plus two equals four, you built that rule, plus another rule, plus another dozen rules, and now you can derive very complex findings, far above how many birds are sitting on a wire."

"Because two plus two was important and I got it right..."

"Yes. Sybil did not know two plus two in the spirit world, so she built wrong things because she failed to understand and employ basic..."

"Two plus two..."

"Yes. For instance, when summoning, you always scribe and work within a circle. The circle is your control. If you fail to close the circle and you fail to maintain command of your entity, then it can leave through the opening in the circle."

"I don't think she ever had control," I posed.

"I think not. I think she knew nothing of being able to command or control, only to summon and assign a victim."

"Me."

"Yes, you. And now she has no control and you have Sachiko who is no demon and she is assigned a task for which she has little preparation."

"I'm happy. I don't know how I would have handled a real demon."

"That is intriguing to me, Robert. You're happy. A creature was summoned against you and you are happy."

"Sachiko is no demon."

"I wish I could understand what Sybil missed to cause that. Details. Not some random making of scratches and tossing of herbs and mumbling..."

I am a bit amused by that. Random was a great descriptor of Sybil. She thought that a few evenings of conversation over meals would get me into her bed, and I have no idea what she had in mind past that point. She certainly couldn't have seen herself as long-term relationship material, could she?

"I am still trying to find more information, Robert. Your issue intrigues me. It has been a long time since I have dealt with a real issue with a spirit."

"Lucky me."

She smiled. "Oh, yes, EXTREMELY lucky you. Had our mutual friend been accurate in her work, you would likely have been rent apart and drained in a horrible manner over a short time..."

"I'm Christian. I am protected."

"Yes. Your mortal soul is protected. The pain and suffering, though – to this mortal side of you would have been tragic."

"That's part of the truth that's not in the Bible?"

"No, it's in there, Robert. Do you imagine that the people written about in the early church led lives of ease and luxury?"

"No ma'am ... persecution..."

"The flesh suffered. They knew that their spirit was safe."

"I know I read of the early church..."

"Then you know. Even Paul in his letters said that you fight against things not of the flesh."

"I read that. I think I didn't understand..."

"Indeed. I told you that everything might not be in The Book."

"That's in there..."

"And you read and you did not comprehend."

"Yes ma'am." I'm learning that sometimes the world is not 'the world as we know it' and there are some grey areas in the path from black to white.

I met with a couple of fellow engineering students for dinner at a local hamburger emporium.

"You stepped up your game," Tyler said. "Instructor's talking about you."

"Yeah," added Dylan. "What happened?"

"I dunno. Nothing, really. Just like I kinda got my head into the game, that's all."

The conversation followed along the lines of 'Man, I wish I could understand that stuff better' and dove over into 'you seein' anybody?'

"Not since the Great Sybil Crash."

"Dude, that's one strange girl," Tyler announced.

"Yeah, I know. Chalk it up as an educational experience."

"Well, one thing I can say," Tyler continued, "At least she's not one of those 'I'm pregnant. Let's get married' girls."

"I didn't get far enough along to expose her to that," I admitted.

"You're about the only one."

"Nice to know. Ain't chasing that anyway."

Party broke up, I headed home. Nope. Not chasing anything.

Shower. Watch a little TV with a history book on my lap, then bed. And blissful...

"Sachiko."

"My Robert." In the dim light the smile told me that she's as happy about her being here as I am.

The pattern has changed. In the beginning, it was simply her opening my fly, extracting my dick and sucking me to orgasm. The fact that I had only a bit of masturbation for a sex life meant her task was not difficult. Now it's different. She appeared beside me, forming herself, depending on my position, to a full-contact embrace, her face close, kissable. Demon, indeed.

Conversation. Sweet words about how happy we were to be with each other. Her questions about my day, my feelings. I'm trying to understand how this girl, a product of 12th century Japan, could even know to ask about my life in 21st century America, but she asked questions, nodded, encouraged. I felt the stresses of the day going away from just talking with her.

That her hands caressed me, loving me, chest, arms, face, and ... I exhaled.

"You like when I touch this," she smiled. "It's such a silly thing, but it gives you pleasure and it gives me pleasure to attend to you." She wiggled against me. "and the last time ... you ... me ... you made me soar..."

And it wasn't her dashing in, performing her task, then disappearing. She stayed. Two hours. She started to go down on me.

"Sachiko?"

"Yes, my Robert?"

"You always take care of me. Can I ... to you?"

"With your mouth?"

"Yes."

"I have never..."

"Nor I. You will be the first..."

"Robert, I am yours..."

So that's what it's like. I imagined that she got similar pleasures from attending to me. I found her sweet and musky and juicy and responsive. Her hips became uncontrollable as she writhed and whimpered to a crescendo, then fell, sated, back.

I moved back up to cradle her little form in my arms. She pulled me down to her face to kiss.

"Robert. Best. Very much best." Big, liquid brown eyes. "I do not want to leave, but I must..."

She had a task to perform before she went. Enthusiasm. "I hope I make you feel like you made me feel."

"I cannot imagine better."

I'd had my fingers there. I'd had my face there. There is an obvious next step.

Three classes the next day. I suppose I should have had muddle-headed fallout from two hours with heaven in my arms last night, but instead I felt alert, energized and amazingly calm even when one of my elective classes was interrupted by a green-haired fat chick who thought we needed to understand the impact of our white, cis-normative civilization on Mother Gaia.

When she finished her rant, I raised my hand.

Mizz Latham recognized me. "Yes, Mister Richard?"

"Is what she said gonna be on the test?"

"No."

I slid back to the Student Union where my car was parked. Walked in, said hi to people I knew, then sat down in the corner out of the way.

And was joined by the cat.

Harrison noted the purring from the grey tabby making a cat loaf on the arm of my big cushioned chair. "Did you bring it in with you?"

"Nope. Just sat down and here she is. D'ya see 'er hanging around during the day?"

"No, not at all." He raised his voice. "Anybody let a cat in?"

No answers. But here I am with a very friendly cat. I stroked her fur, eliciting purrs, then she twisted and stood, reaching, licked me on the nose, then pushed her head against my cheek.

"She loves you," Harrison said.

"Getting loved by a cat can't be a bad thing," I smiled.

"I just don't know where she comes from. I asked next door..."

"Hard to control a cat that doesn't wish to be controlled," I said. "We had farm cats. Lived in the barn. Came and went as they pleased. Every time there was a new one, Dad would try and trap it. The vet would neuter them for cheap so we wouldn't get overrun with kittens."

"I wouldn't know how to tell," Harrison stated.

"Females will have a scar on the belly. Males lack defined scrotums. I'm pretty sure this is an intact female."

"Intact?"

"Not neutered. Spayed."

"Oh. You farm boys know some stuff." With a laugh. I knew that Harrison hailed from a very small town himself.

"Yeah..."

"You got a study group this evening?"

"Every weeknight except Friday. Math makes good money."

"Yeah, especially with education majors needing a math to graduate..."

That was a cause for laughter. The intellectual capabilities of

education majors as a whole was sub-par. Yes, there were a few bright ones, but the bright ones didn't come looking for somebody to help them over a math hurdle. Afterward, I stood up to gather my materials to leave. I looked around. No cat.

"Anybody seen the cat?" I queried.

"Your cat?" Harrison echoed.

"I didn't bring her. She just shows up."

"And she is always right there with you."

I hadn't noticed that, but a quick retrospective and he's right. Curious.

I resigned myself to a bowl of ramen for dinner – the instant stuff – cheap, easy, and if you add an egg and bit of chopped green onion, not a bad meal at all.

That night Sachiko was even more talkative, asking questions about what I studied and oddly more questions about what I was teaching as a tutor. We talked of her childhood and mine. She was fascinated that my family farmed rice, among other things.

"In my village, everybody farms rice. When it is time for planting, everybody, man, woman, child, we all help. Also with harvest." That my family's farm included both land we owned and land we leased, hundreds of acres, was amazing to her. But we talked.

And made love. It had to be lovemaking because I was falling in love with her. And now, the final thing where she fulfilled her instruction, it was a happy bit of art for her, her face smiling, giggling, teasing, that pink tongue flicking out in ways I could only dream of, gathering me, teasing, her voice...

"Come, Robert ... I can feel you. This is going to be a special one..."

And then she was gone.

Longing. I understood it, but I felt reassured that she'd be back tomorrow night. As I repositioned myself to go to sleep I enjoyed the warm, satiated glow from my orgasm. Lovely. I reached down, I'm pantsless. I didn't start out that way but Sachiko always makes it so, now helping me out of them as soon as she appears.

"I could just come to bed naked."

"No, my Robert. This is my gift. I enjoy taking it out of its

wrapping.”

Now I touched myself, slowly stroking my very much depleted dick, remembering, thinking. If oral sex was foreplay, how would it feel to completely have Sachiko? I have no point of comparison. Before Sachiko, I had my hand and my imagination. Sachiko, her mouth, her hand once, jumped up the sensation by an order of magnitude, and left me thinking what if the ultimate were in my grasp. That’s a new hunger.

She’s always nude, except for one flash of a vision where I saw her dressed in a traditional kimono, looking like a doll in a museum. I’ve never tried, not even hinted that she and I should, well, one word is ‘mate’.

I want to mate with Sachiko – my delightful Chiki.

“There has been a development, young Robert,” Lady Ramona said over her teacup.

“What sort of development?”

“Apparently when our Sybil, whom I’ve recently discovered was born ‘Katelyn’, was casting her spell, she had an accomplice, an equally adept friend who calls herself Lady Ariana.”

“Who probably started out as Ashley,” I said.

“Likely so,” the older lady said. “Because who’d ever take seriously a spell cast by a Katelyn or Ashley?”

“Does it make a difference, really?” I asked.

“Only to them. So Lady Ariana,” she continued with an obvious smirk, “was there when Sybil cast the spell. They collaborated.”

“So there’s TWO of them.”

“Kids in a candy store with Monopoly money. And Lady Ariana videoed some of it on her phone.”

“Really?”

“Yes. Like it was a birthday party. Do you remember what I explained before about details? The circle?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“The circle was laid in salt, as explained in the writings of the spell.”

"Yes, ma'am."

"And with as much care as we can expect from those two, the circle was not closed. She has no control. The spirit can escape."

"That's one factor. Others – under what circumstances would the spirit choose to escape?"

"Some spirits are creatures with free wills. Curiosities. Desires. For them to seek out ... fortunately, the very worst are not. Pure demon, tied on spiritual leash to their masters, or if properly summoned, to their summoners."

"That sounds scary."

"In old times, when there were more adepts, some of them were very dark in their desires and ambitions and you are correct, very scary times. Fortunately, for every evil adept, there are good adepts who use powers to protect and heal and serve, and those were able to keep things more or less benign."

"And then here comes Katelyn with more curiosity than sense..."

"Just be thankful she did not summon a real demon." She looked into my eyes. "I am calling on people I know to see if I can cast a spell to have the summoning annulled. The words are old. They do not appear to have been used in modern times. In the past, adepts used them to contain evil spirits..."

"You mean, Sachiko gone? Sachiko is anything BUT evil."

"You do not want this? Your normal life back?"

"I think I've been given a gift, Lady Ramona."

"Robert, Robert," she said softly. "You've gotten involved with something that shouldn't exist between the unseen world and your everyday life."

"I LIKE it," I said. "My whole ... I'm a male. I desire to find my mate in life. Lady Ramona, she's perfect."

"She's not perfect, Robert. I looked. She's – even if she incorporated into this world, she's from nine hundred years in the past ... the shock..."

"We talk, Lady Ramona. She knows things. She asks questions about my life, my world..."

She shook her head. "Robert, this is outside of things I know..."

"Then I get to learn on my own."

The next day at the Student Union I showed up to chat with friends and wait on my students.

Darcy was there, pleasantly smiling. I greeted her, went to sit in my favorite overstuffed chair.

And here's the cat.

"I did NOT just see that!" Darcy squeaked.

"See what?"

"You sat in that chair and that cat just APPEARED!"

"What do you mean? She's gotta hang around here somewhere. She likes me."

"I've been here since three. I haven't seen any cat."

"Maybe she was hiding behind the furniture."

"No, Robert. There was no cat. Then you sat down. Cat."

And the cat jumped up on my shoulder, stretched to lick my nose, then glared haughtily at Darcy.

Chapter 5

The cat nestled onto my shoulder. Darcy said something. The cat glared at her.

I tilted my head and turned to nuzzle the fuzzy head at my ear. Got a purr and a lick on the cheek.

"That's gotta be your cat, Bud," Darcy said.

"Cats don't have owners, they have staff," I replied. "She just instinctively knows that I'm at first, harmless, and perhaps of some small use."

"Just means she sees something the rest of us don't," Darcy quipped. She walked over to me, reached to pet the cat.

The cat responded by jumping down into my lap and glaring at her.

Darcy reached down, the cat moved away from her, up to my other shoulder.

"I dunno, Darcy. She seems to be a great judge of character. Don't make 'er mad. We'll both get scratched."

"I guess I'll leave you with your new girlfriend, then, Bud."

Girlfriend? Nahhhhh.

Two of my students showed up. I left my comfy chair in the big room and commandeered a little study room.

"You bring your cat now?" the guy student asked me.

"Don't know where she comes from, but she seems to like me."

The cat nestled up by my feet while I taught. When I closed my laptop at the end of the session, my two students rose to leave. The cat jumped up on the table, came to me, licked my nose as if to say 'you did well. Here's your reward.' At least that's what it seemed like to me, but what do I know? I'm the guy who's falling in love with a mythical creature.

Got invited into a gang heading out to a burger joint for dinner. No, no date, no 'significant relationship', unless you count Darcy and her fiancé who remains amused at my blatant and playful comments to Darcy. She told him about the Xerox remarks from a few days previous. I'm angling for 'best man' at their wedding.

That put me back at the apartment with time to study a bit, then shower, shave, and off to bed. To Sachiko. There may be many parts of my life that are subject to schedule slip and random timing changes, but so far as I can tell, if I'm in bed asleep, Sachiko, my Chiki, is guaranteed.

No longer is it a delightful head of raven hair at my crotch. She's there beside me. Yes, Naked. And smiling. "My Robert."

"Chiki, little love."

"I like being your little love, Robert. It is unexpected."

"I like 'inevitable'," I replied.

"Tell me about love, Robert. You use the word. I use it because you smile when I say it. Tell me what you think..."

"I think I see Sachiko and I want to have her in my life, to live my life with her and for her, to bring her happiness and satisfaction as

we grow old together.”

“I am already old. And yet I am fourteen. The world I come from has almost nothing to do with the world you live in, that I visit now. Apart from eating and breathing and eliminating and making babies and...” she paused, finding my dick with her hand, “making THIS HAPPY...”

“Or this,” I said, touching her almost hairless mound, relishing her quiver.

Smile. “Yes, that as well. I was told that the woman’s pleasure was not always something that the man would be aware of. That if I found an enlightened lover, he would care.” She smiled. “It is funny in your language. You use ‘love’ and it means something very special between you and me. I use ‘lover’ and it means something different, the physical only...”

“It seems to me that Sachiko has brought two meanings into my life.”

“And mine, Robert.” Her fingertips pinched a fold of the skin of my dick, idly tugging it up and down my shaft. “It is the full moon tonight, Robert. Perhaps you can open the covering over the window...”

“Yes, my lady.” I got up to pull the drapes aside and open the blinds. The moonlight streamed in, the most light I’ve ever had in the room while Sachiko was here.

She was lying on her back, one leg drawn up, her small breasts rounded, flattened, punctuated by those tiny brown nipples. She noted me staring.

“Perhaps it is too much light. I am small in so many ways. Girls in your world, they are larger here,” she touched her breasts, “and here,” her hands traced her hips. “And blue eyes. Everybody in my world has the same color eyes...”

“You’re trying to say that maybe I don’t see you as beautiful?”

“I am different than most in your world.”

That was a fact. She was completely exotic. South Louisiana is not noted for a selection of Japanese nymphs. Oh, sure, we have exchange students from China and Korea and various other Asian locales, but Sachiko’s so far above the crowd and I can’t explain why.

“That’s a truth, Chiki. But why do I feel like I do about you? And why do you feel like this about me?”

“It is a question. I asked others in The Void. None have an answer.

There are legends of creatures called angels, who are good, who aid and comfort, but they do not have stories about them lying naked in the moonlight wondering why their lover is not beside them."

"Because this is the first time the lover gets to really see all of his Chiki."

She stretched. "Like this?" twisting onto her left side, bending her left leg, straightening her right.

"Beautiful."

"Or like this?" she asked, rolling over onto her knees, putting that svelte rear end into the air. She giggled. "I am like this many nights before I leave. My way to collect your essence."

I stepped close, reached out, traced my hand over the lines from the back of her graceful neck, all the way down over THAT curve, ending up at her tiny feet. I'm so erudite. "Beautiful."

She turned her head, hair falling clear of her neck. I couldn't stand it anymore. I kissed the back of her neck, nuzzling, sighing.

She quivered. "In that, you are very Japanese, Robert. We are taught that a woman's neck is of attraction to a man."

"Yours is irresistible."

"You make my breath go away when you do that."

"Perhaps it is better that we shouldn't be together very much, then?"

"Why?" she sounded hurt.

"Because I would do this very often and you would not be able to breathe."

"Come in my bed, funny man!" and she tugged me onto the bed with her, rolling over atop me, laughing.

"Sachiko, you're so beautiful, so perfect. And you're laughing."

"I am laughing because I am happy and I am excited and I am with you." She kissed me. "I was told that laughter in the bed is a dangerous thing, that some men think the lady is laughing at their member or their prowess or their looks."

"I see none of that from my Sachiko's eyes."

"This part of you tells me the truth."

We clasped each other tightly, my erection pressed between us, kissing, sighing.

"Do not make it too fast, Robert. Not yours. Me. You can love me with your mouth..."

Like I need a hint, okay?

I thought this 'succubus' thing was supposed to be a one-way street. That afternoon I posed the question to Lady Ramona over a cup of tea.

"That is rather graphic, Robert."

"I tried to frame it as delicately as possible, Lady Ramona, but the fact remains, we are very intimate..."

"How do you frame, then, what you seem to be relishing so very much to your Christian upbringing about chastity?"

"I pray for God's grace to cover my weakness, Lady. I am too weak to stop. And in all this, Sachiko is not real, at least not of this dimension..."

"Your lusts say otherwise."

"I may just the best dreamer in the hemisphere," I countered.

"But last night you opened the curtains. Were they still open when you woke this morning?"

"They were."

"Something is passing between the spirit world and your world, Robert."

"I know. In my heart I know. That's what I don't want to stop."

"So you plan on spending the rest of your life in love with a night creature? That might be troublesome for your wife..."

"If there were a way, Sachiko would be my wife."

"Think of what that means. She's from a different world. Feudal Japan. Nothing we take as normal had yet appeared in her world."

I told her about the conversations when we talked about Mom and Dad's rice farm.

"That's what I mean. She knows a world where there was only

rudimentary tools and human labor. You're in a world with electricity and tractors and crop-dusters..."

"Agricultural aviation," I said. "One of my buddies does it."

"How do you think Sachiko would react to seeing it? Or your thousands of cultivated acres?"

"You know, I think Sachiko would watch, think, ask questions..."

"You think a lot of her."

"Lady Ramona, we talk an hour, two hours every night. It's not about 'mythological creature satisfies young man's sexual desires'. She satisfies ALL my desires."

"That may be an effect of that disaster of a curse that Sybil wallowed her way through," she said. "Or It might be something else."

"Sachiko says she's heard of angels, but none of them were assigned anything sexual. They were just good."

"Sachiko talks of the other side?"

"She calls it The Void."

"Very Buddhist. Japanese. I know a little..."

"I don't have any idea how it works. I ask Sachiko, sometimes she has things to explain. Most of the time she's as confused as I am about everything, though."

"Except the part where you say she loves you..."

"We talked about the different kinds of love, Lady Ramona. She says that the concept she learned in Japan was very different, that there was a huge gulf between actions related to duty, and relations to joy. Said it was not unusual for a lady to have a lover, both in the physical and the spiritual senses. It was not common, but some sort of ideal, the stuff of stories and legends, often with tragic endings for one or both parties."

"Medieval bodice-rippers," Lady Ramona said. "Much of our whole 'knight in shining armor' chivalry legends have roots there."

"Now that I think about it, that makes some sense."

"I don't think I've mentioned that I have a master's degree in history, Robert."

I smiled. "Lady Ramona, my estimation of you continues to grow."

"Indeed. I discern that on our original meeting you thought I was an old woman who knew enough about niche marketing to eke out a living catering to weirdos."

"In my defense, I was in the company of Sybil..."

"My estimation of you, young Robert, has also improved with your disposal of that impediment."

"I am not sure of who disposed of whom there."

"You are not weak enough to submit to what she bore you, Robert."

"Yet here I am whining about Sachiko..."

"Questioning is not whining, Robert. More tea?"

"You are a corrupting influence, Lady. Yes."

"Sit. Think. Imagine. I will return."

It's still a ritual. She prepares tea in another room. We sit in an alcove within her shop space, only occasionally interrupted by customers. Another interruption is when a delivery driver enters and hauls away a stack of packages, delivering others. I wonder about the business model of a shop like this.

She returned with our tray – two teacups, the sugar, a tiny pitcher of real cream. We prepared our drinks, continued to talk, sometimes of life, sometimes of the world of magic and spells, things upon which I held only vestiges of ideas.

"When is the last time you visited home, Robert?"

"It's been a few weeks."

"Thanksgiving break is coming. You should go."

"I don't want to miss Sachiko."

"Sachiko came to you out of the void," she said. "She will find you. I think it would be a good thing to learn of your relationship to her."

"She will be there?"

"Robert, I sense that you will have Sachiko wherever you go in this world. However artlessly it was done, she was summoned, you were targeted. What she is, that is the question. My sense of this, though,

is that you will have Sachiko until the day you die..."

"But if I met somebody and married..."

She surveyed the bottom of her teacup. "That will not happen."

"Is that a prediction?"

"That is a statement, Robert. You will, that is you DO meet women all the time, some more suitable as mates than others, but even if you were to get past the reality that every night you have Sachiko in your bed, none of them will ever measure up. In some ways, Sachiko becomes the creature of your desires."

"But it's not like that, the way THAT sounds, Lady Ramona," I protested.

"Perhaps I chose words poorly. More likely, you're defensive. Robert, had you been one of those young men who thought with his penis, you would have probably NOT run afoul of Sybil."

"Sybil was pushing in that direction."

"And you are a moral man of good upbringing and you refused her. She reacted by plotting to bring your demise by having a creature of pure evil sex come to you..."

"And then she called up a tiny Japanese doll of fine temperament..."

"Messed up in a grand fashion, she did."

Later. "Sachiko, what if I travelled. At night..."

"You would be found. It is as I was summoned."

"Not to this place?"

"This place is where Robert is. If it were someplace else, Robert would be there, and that is the place I would be. Why do you ask?"

"We have a holiday coming up. I want to go to visit my family."

"It is good for a son to honor his family."

"What this son would like to do is present Sachiko as my new wife. Or at least as the woman who would be my new wife."

She smiled. "My Robert, I was not the girl that a man would bring to his family as 'wife'. I was to be 'consort' perhaps, and in my world that was not a title of dishonor. But to be wife, that was beyond my

dreams."

"I didn't know my dreams were for Sachiko."

"You didn't know what to dream, Robert. Perhaps you were supposed to dream of large American girls with big, round breasts and hair the color of rice at harvest time and eyes the color of winter skies."

"And something happened and I dreamed of a little Japanese girl with breasts like sleeping little happy hills and hair like black silk and eyes that are a place for my soul to lose itself."

"I should teach you to write poetry."

"You are the reason for poetry."

We twined our bodies together, loving. Now I have an urge, a desire, that has been building for a while now. I pushed between Sachiko's thighs, my erection now lying between her pubic mound and my belly. I shifted downward, raised to free it, then moved instinctively.

"Oh, Robert..."

I was THAT close. The head of my dick, her wet pussy, a little move and...

"We cannot, Robert."

"But I love you, Sachiko."

"And I love you as well, Robert. But I am told ... a line that cannot be crossed. I do not understand why. I only know that it is ... forbidden to me. we ... we have everything else."

"I want it all with you, Sachiko."

"Robert, I was told that the fortunate woman might have her contract purchased from the inn. She would become the favored consort of a rich merchant or farmer or even a samurai. I only dared to dream of that. Many women spent their whole lives in service at the inn."

"I would pay any price..."

She smiled in that sweet, shy manner that was hers. "I believe you would. And if you were purchasing me, I would be praying."

A week later I was sitting in the living room of the family home. Dad had run to town to pick up some tractor parts. If I'd been earlier I could've gone with him, but I signed up for a Friday afternoon class. I'd walked in, found Mom in the kitchen, lifted the lids on the pots

on the stove, gotten myself whacked with a spoon.

"You KNOW better. We'll eat when your dad gets back."

"Did you do steak and gravy for Dad? You know it's one of my favorites."

"I had steak. So steak and gravy. You didn't tell me anything special."

"Mom, just any of your meals are special."

"Thank you, son." She smiled. "I figured that by now you'd be bringing a girl around. You seeing anyone special?"

So, Robert, do you lie to your mother? "There's a girl in my head right now, Mom."

"And you couldn't bring her?"

"It's complicated."

"Much is, these days, Robert."

"In due time."

"Your dad will ask."

"I'm sure he will."

"So will your sister."

All of what Mom said was true. Dad showed up, arrival signaled by the rumble of his big farmer pickup truck. I hustled out to greet him and help him unload things – oils, parts and supplies to the equipment shed, feed to the feed shed for the few cattle, chickens and hogs. I remember what it's like to run a family farm. Feels like work. Still, I eyed the five silver storage silos that I knew to be filled with some of this year's harvest.

This year was a good one. Dad says a hundred eighty bushels per acre. I let my mind translate that into Sachiko's explanation of rice as a measure of wealth in her Japan. Five bushels was one koku, enough rice to feed a person for a year. Dad's one-acre yield was thirty-six koku, and Sachiko said that Dad's two thousand acres made him a very prosperous daimyo in Japan, a major lord.

I'm looking at my Dad, mid-forties, wearing a flannel shirt against the November chill, and somehow a lordship doesn't fit. He's just a dad at work, providing for his family. I wonder how he'd react to

Sachiko.

I wondered how Sachiko would react to my family. What would Sachiko at the farm even look like? All I had to go on was that one flash, early on, of Sachiko dressed in a traditional Japanese kimono.

Dad and I small-talked our way back to the house, hitting the back door just as Sam – Samantha, younger sister by seventeen months – came zipping in through the front door hollering “Is he here?!?”

“No,” I hollered back, “he’s in Guatemala counting butterflies in the biosphere.”

We collided in between the kitchen and the living room – big hug, kiss. “I miss my big brother.”

“I miss the impediment in my goal of being an ‘only child’. What’s up, Sam?”

“Oh, gee, Bud,” she smiled. “Eighteen and a high school senior. My life is a rainbow of laughs and opportunities. But you...”

“I seem to be getting better at this college stuff. GPA’s up.”

“I note that you didn’t bring home some bimbo to scandalize Mom and Dad.”

“Frighteningly bimbo-free...”

“What about the goth chick?”

“Sybil? Didn’t match up very well.”

“I can see Mom assessing the nose ring...”

“I never sent Mom pictures.”

“And I had the good sense not to show her.”

Nothing like a traditional family dinner. Well, it’s OUR tradition – pots on the stove, serve yourself, go sit at the table, actually talk with the people around the table.

Afterward, family time. Yeah, TV’s on. No, nobody’s paying much attention to it.

And then it’s time for a shower and reacquainting myself with my old room.

In the dark, a stirring. And, “My Robert, I am here.”

Chapter 6

Softly, "My Robert, this is the room of your youth."

"Yes, Chiki-san."

Her giggle pealed. "Oh, so now I am 'Chiki-san'? Do you understand what you say?"

"Only that it is supposed to be a term of honor. You deserve my honor, my lady."

"Titles are very important where I come from. I do not know if I deserve..."

"I love you. I cannot give you as much as I think you deserve. I would live my whole life..."

"... And I would be the honored wife of Robert, son of Lord Raymond, _daimyo_ of Kaplan."

"I only wish to see the look on the face of my father and mother when you tell them that..." I paused. "How do you know where we are?"

"Silly. I am sent. I open my eyes to where I am sent."

"And I came here. You are here."

"It is my duty." Her laughter rang in my head. "So strange. 'My duty to be where you are.' So much like a faithful wife, to live and die with her husband ... Before I was sold to Lady Sakura, I would have become wife of a peasant like my father. When I was sold, my duty became to Lady Sakura. Now my duty is to something in The Void." She kissed me softly. "I want my duty to be to my Robert."

"How do we fix this, Sachiko?"

"I do not know, Robert. I am commanded..."

"I don't want you to stop, but I do want to walk with you in the sunshine, I want us to sit at meals together, to feel the winds together, to share the sunlight..."

"Somehow, Robert. Perhaps. Or, perhaps this is our fate, that we have each other like this. I would rather this each night than to have nothing."

"Now that I have you..."

The next day the cat showed up.

"Odd," Dad said. "Used to be more cats around, but since the coyotes started taking them..."

"I know a guy who shoots coyotes," I said. While I was talking, the cat jumped from the porch deck to my lap.

"Looks like a friendly little thing," Dad said. Dad was an appreciator of cats. Barn cats are useful around the place, keeping control of rodents and pests around the place.

I didn't tell him that I KNEW this cat and that its her appearance here just validated an idea I was forming in my mind. "Hello, kitten," I said. The cat reacted by insinuating herself snugly into my lap. Having reached a conclusion that the young female cat in my lap had some sort of connection to the young female in my dreams, I lavished her with caresses and tickles and scratches. She reveled in the attention, balling up, playfully raking my hands, nipping, purring like a small chainsaw.

Sam came out to join me and Dad. "Mom's starting the dishwasher."

"You should be the dishwasher," I said.

She stuck her tongue at me in derision, noticed the cat. "Yeah, that's YOUR speed. Derive your joy from interacting with lower lifeforms."

"Oh, hold up there, girlie," I laughed. "I've seen some of the guys YOU date ... And cats are interdimensional beings, connecting the physical and spiritual. And some are excellent judges of character."

The cat reacted by intensely and smugly staring at Sam. "See?!?" I said. "She judges you."

"Cats usually LOVE me," Sam whined.

I was surprised. The cat jumped down, jumped into Sam's lap, nuzzled her with her nose, then returned to me.

"She says she forgives you but you're advised to treat your brother with proper respect." The cat lounged back against me. "See?!?"

We watched the sunset over the fields. It's a tranquil time. The cat disappeared, though, when I stood up to go inside. Everybody looked. No cat.

"I hope she finds someplace safe," Mom said. "Could've left her out

something.”

TV with the family. Mom and Dad argued over a movie, then we all watched it together.

Bed time had me listening to Sam whine about the dearth of hot water for her shower. She sneered at me in the hallway. “You’re the one who probably needs cold showers.”

I retired to my old familiar bed, read for part of an hour, then turned out the lights and closed my eyes.

Sachiko.

“Chiki-san, there is a cat...”

“Cats have a very respected place in my culture. They bring good fortune.”

“What do you know of a small little girl cat that shows up everywhere I go?”

She averted her eyes demurely. “Perhaps if a maid cannot go places herself, there is a way somebody might be her eyes and ears.”

“So the cat Is not actually YOU?”

“The kitten is parts of me. It is how I begin to see YOUR world, to see YOU in it.” She sighed. “To find out that I love you even more because you are the same person out there as you are when you are here with me. The kitten is me when I cannot be there.”

“So you’re with me at times during the day?”

She smiled. “I am only beginning to understand what I can and cannot do.”

“I love the kitten, but how do I get THIS Chiki-san out into my days?”

“I do not yet know. I am to understand that there are fences, but I am beginning to understand that for every fence, somewhere there is a gate.”

Kisses. Talking.

“Your family – it is different than the life I knew – any of the lives I knew, the one back at the village, the life after I was sold to Lady Sakura.”

“I worry about that, Chiki. A thousand years and a vast ocean

separates the life you had with the lives we're living now."

"I have thought as well, my Robert. First, though, I was commanded to find you. Second, something is not correct in my summoning. You were supposed to die. Instead, you live even more. Third, I was not the correct one to be sent. You must understand as I have told you – I am virgin. Never have I lain with a man. A correct succubus would have ... All I can learn is that my status and your status, both of us un-mated, that is not the usual thing."

"What does that mean? Chiki-san, I want..."

"I know what you want. I also want. But there is something I do not know. I do know that the barrier is strong and I do not know what lies on the other side. I fear that if we break that barrier, I am no longer the one summoned. Robert, between your world and mine, we have each other. I always want to have you."

"You are beautiful and wise for your age."

"I am fourteen. Plus eight hundred years."

"My Sachiko. To fill my eyes and my heart and my years."

"I would like that. I liked being your kitten, sitting on your lap in the evening with your family, Robert. Your mother could be my mother and your father could be my father. And I would sit with you in the evenings and we would watch the sunset together."

"How would you fit in this world, my Chiki?"

"It is ... I cannot explain. I come here from the Void and I already know how to care for the things I need to do to collect your essence, as I was commanded. But it seems that I was not restrained, was not bound to that knowledge only. Others who were summoned, they seldom converse with their, mmm, victims."

"You never made me feel like a victim."

"When you opened your eyes to see me the first time, Robert ... I knew that I was not a succubus, not like the others. You looked into me, Robert. And I looked into you."

Like all the other nights, we loved each other gently, and as has become the nature of our loving, we orally gratified each other, first me savoring her femininity to the point of her whimpers of orgasm, her body curling around my head like she was holding me at her center, then her on me, not the simple, quick actions I experienced at first, no, this was her playing with me, giggling, teasing, nipping, love talk continuing between us until finally ... And Sachiko is gone.

And Robert is lying there as completely physically satisfied as he has ever been in his life. I assessed. Yes, that's a true statement. Also true now is that I won't be complete until our bodies are completely mated.

The next day after breakfast I headed out with Dad to attend to the chores. When I stepped out of the back door, the cat was there.

"Guess she found a safe place," Dad said.

"Cats'll do that," I said. I bent over and picked her up. "C'mere, Chiki."

"Oh, now you've named 'er."

The kitten purred loudly, pushing her head against my cheek. "I like this cat."

That afternoon I was packing my car for the trip back to college.

"Where's your cat?" Mom asked.

"Dunno," I said. "Chiki? Are you coming?"

I don't know exactly how she does it, but she showed up in the middle of the yard, sauntering towards us. I hugged Mom and Dad, told them to tell Sam that I'd see her at Christmas, then turned to the car. The cat was inside.

Well, that's closer. Maybe it's supposed to be baby steps.

And now I'm talking to the cat. "You'll know a lot more about my world than I know of yours, Chiki-san."

Purrrrrr.

"You don't mind me talking when you can't talk back?"

Purrrr.

"Okay." And I did my best 'stream of consciousness' commentary on the way back to my apartment, landmarks, things that have changed, new things, old things, and she was on her hind legs, paws on the window ledge, taking it all in. We finally pulled into the drive at my apartment. She jumped out, followed me as I hauled my bags up the stairs, checked into each of the rooms, then ... She wasn't there. I called her name. Nothing. I don't understand everything about this relationship.

Late afternoon. I wonder what's up at the Student Union, a short trip that takes me past Madame Ramona's. Okay, talk with HER about Chiki and the revelation.

"She admitted this to you?" the lady said incredulously. "That does not seem like the interactions I expect."

"Sachiko says she loves me, and Chiki is her way to see my world for herself." I told her of the time spent at Mom and Dad's.

"Dad first thought she was one of the feral barn cats, but when she attached herself to me, he changed his mind. When I left to come home, she jumped into the car with me and listened to me talk while she looked outside."

She retrieved a deck of cards from her sleeve, dealt four onto the counter, turned the fifth one. She gazed at it, then me. "Changes are afoot, young Robert."

"I feel that."

Another course of cards. "People from outside are being drawn in. Nothing will happen while Sachiko remains on her side of the Veil."

I caught that. "So there is a way for Sachiko to cross over?"

"What do you think the cat is, Robert?"

"I don't quite get a handle on the cat. This whole little..."

"Robert, you do not see the whole, and because Sybil did not understand what she set loose, it is not little. You have some responsibility in this..."

"How so?"

"You reacted to Sybil's attempt by meeting it with innocence, then love. Sachiko appears to me to be greatly unprepared for the traditional end of her summoning, and now the two of you twine together across The Veil."

She furrowed her brow in thought, causing the blaze of white hair above her right eye to shimmer, then she laid out another pattern of cards.

"If the cards are to be believed..."

"I'm learning to accept..."

She smiled. "As well you should. These show me turmoil with

contentment arising. The turmoil first. One of you has to cross a line that has been made plain to the other."

"I never laid a limit on Sachiko."

"Interesting. Then it is HER line."

Another pattern of cards. "Passion. There will be passion. These things I speak, they are so."

"You sound confident and that worries me ... Turmoil is a test of things."

"Indeed it is. Your resolve is tested, as is your faith. I know you profess to be Christian and the things that have enveloped you in the past weeks lie outside your understanding of your beliefs. I am telling you to not waver in your faith. You prayed, believing. Sybil indeed prayed as well. Her prayers were meant as a curse and she only believed for as much curiosity and entertainment as she could derive."

"I didn't think Sybil was ever anything more than skin-deep. Just in it for the attention and the thrills."

"Does Sachiko thrill you, Robert?"

"Sachiko fills me with joy and calm."

"That is a difference. Your side is serious. Sybil's side was a whim. You will benefit." She paused, gazed at the cards, then at me. "And for whatever reasons the universe holds, Sachiko will benefit. There are things to be revealed. The cards show me that news will come from unexpected quarters. They are not specific, so guard and be prepared."

"And the cat?"

"It's a cat. Love it. Even if it isn't Sachiko. Which it is."

After I left Lady Ramona, I went to the Student Union. There's usually some sort of direction for a meal there – snacks, maybe soup or chili in the kitchenette, a group heading to a local eatery. And there's companionship.

I wasn't surprised to find Chiki purring at my side.

I griped about Harrison's chili. It's expected. And I ate two bowls, sitting in a chair, talking to him and a couple other people. Chiki was on the arm of my chair, watching me eat. CLOSELY watching me eat. I caught a thought, offered the next spoonful to her. She sniffed, then her pink, raspy tongue extended, gathered a sample, tasted it.

I wasn't the only one observing that move.

Haughton, a fellow student, observed. Chiki licked her mouth, shaking her head. "Brother Harrison, the cat can't stand your chili!"

"She's not used to those flavors, most likely," Darcy observed. Chiki looked at Darcy and let out a little mew.

"I think Darcy's right," I said.

"At least she didn't lick her butt to get rid of the taste," Haughton countered.

"Haughton!" Darcy squeaked. "You don't say 'butt' in mixed company! We're civilized here!"

"Excuse my French!"

"Oh, sure! Jump right out of profanity and straight into xenophobia!" I cawed.

"I can't sneeze without offending somebody," Haughton huffed, feigning outrage.

"You can't. The rest of us do okay," Darcy laughed.

"Jesus loves me."

I laughed. "The rest of us think you're an uh ... never mind."

Mediocre chili and good friends. And Chiki taking another taste.

Time to go home.

As is now standard, Chiki disappeared before I left.

When I got home, I organized clothes and books, straightening the apartment. Then shower, read, and sleep.

"My Sachiko."

"My Robert." She smiled. Her hand touched my face, transmitting a feeling of love.

We kissed. "I taste chili."

"Chiki tried the chili. I don't think she liked it."

"Chiki could learn to like it. It is more interesting knowledge of your world."

"I would like to know more of yours."

"I was taken out of my world, Robert. Perhaps I was taken from there to find my place here."

"But I lose you every night. Even now that I know Chiki is you, I cannot be the mate of a kitten."

Her lithe, nude body formed itself against me. "What about this kitten, Robert?"

"This is the kitten I want. I love this kitten..."

"... this kitten loves you. There will be a way..."

She smiled. "I listen to you and see you with your friends. Would Sachiko fit among them?"

That's actually something I've thought about. I have a lot of questions, but I love this girl and that part of my thinking keeps telling me that love will find a way. "Sachiko would be yet another friend to them. They would regard you as interesting and exotic."

"They would know I was with you?"

"Sachiko-san, you are beautiful and I would make sure that they knew we were together..."

"Because you want no other man to take me?"

"Exactly. I want you to be mine. As I am yours."

"But that other girl with the yellow hair ... She seems very friendly towards you."

"Blonde. That's the word for that hair color. That's Darcy. I have known her for a year. She is my friend, but she is engaged – committed to marry another man."

"But you held thoughts..."

"Darcy is pretty and she is smart, and those are things I find attractive, yes. But she belongs to another and she is happy with that. And I formed those thoughts before Sachiko came in the night to take my heart."

Her giggle puts me in her complete control. "I was sent to take your essence. I did not know your heart would come with it."

"You got me."

"And you have me, Robert. Now, can we talk about your family farm?"

We talked for a while of the things she saw through the eyes of a cat.
"And you are in school so you do not go back there?"

"I don't know what the future holds. Dad's going to live a long time.
Maybe the future is for me to go somewhere and start my own life."

"In my world, sons usually follow their fathers. A first son is expected to stay ... Do you not want to?"

"It's a hard life."

"I was raised in a small village. My father was a porter. He hauled things every day. But in the spring, all of us went into the fields to plant. Even me, in the field with the others, pushing new rice plants through the water into the soil. It was the life of the village, all made around the life of rice."

"I understand that. But we have hired help. Dad directs them, oversees. But he gets his hands dirty too, keeping up the equipment, making sure the fields are irrigated, drained when the rice is mature, watching it for the right moment to harvest, worrying about weather and equipment and prices."

"I really see you there, Robert. It's a way that my world meets your world. A little way, but a way."

"I've thought about it. Dad has a corner of the land, an old homestead with trees. A good place to build a house."

She smiled, rolling sideways off me, pulling me atop her, my erection trapped between us. A long kiss, then a small voice. "Robert. I will be your wife. That is where we will live."

"You sound confident."

"I know things," she said. She kissed me, thrust her hips upward, insisting I make room for ... My dick flipped downward between her legs, its head seeking heated moisture. She was slick. We'd rubbed ourselves together like this before, both coming with our mouths welded together, but she'd always refused penetration.

This time she wiggled like her pussy was searching. The head of my dick found where it was supposed to be and lodged there. Only the utmost self-control kept me from driving forward into her.

"Robert?"

"My Sachiko..."

"I love you, Robert. You love me. It is time..." I felt her pushing her hips up so I countered by pushing downward into her. Very tight. She whimpered as I pushed past resistance, then straight into nirvana.

Her mouth clamped onto mine as we were both enveloped in white light.

I woke that morning, having slept through the alarms.

Chapter 7

I sat on the edge of the bed for a bit while I cut through the fog. I know what happened. The evidence is there on my bedsheet, a spot, semen, tinged pink.

The pink is not mine.

Two virgins started the evening. A man and a maid mated. I felt a disturbance in my head and in my heart. Wrong. Or was it? I know the conventions of modern society and the conventions of the contemporary church and both of them pronounce significance to what I know happened last night.

My situation, though, lies outside those venues. Two creatures of flesh and blood, the deed is common. I've never heard of a mating across The Veil.

I muddled through a bowl of cereal for breakfast, dressed, noted the time, elected not to go to class and walk in late. A cup of coffee at the Student Union, maybe a little time alone to meditate and read my Bible, those presented themselves. Okay.

I walked down the stairs, waved at my great-aunt, greeting her, got into my little car, and off I went. Harrison makes a good cup of coffee, and today's his day to take the early shift. He splits the schedule with a couple of volunteers from local churches, but half the time he's there from open to close anyway. Says it's just his ministry.

I park in back and walk in the back door. One of the regulars is in the kitchenette.

"There's a girl here to see you?"

"Who?"

"Never saw her before. I'd remember."

I've heard the term 'hackles rose on the back of my neck'. Now I've had it happen. My pace quickened as I walked up the hall to the reception area.

"There he is," Harrison said, directing her towards me.

The little form was dressed in athletic shoes, jeans, and a concession to the brisk morning of an unseasonable cool snap, a bulky coarse-knit brown sweater, turtle-necked up to her chin. The hair, the eyes, the PRESENCE was unmistakable.

"Sachiko!"

"Robert. Here you are!" She smiled demurely, eyes laughing, bowed from the waist.

I mirrored her.

"So formal," Harrison said.

"I know. This is what I WANT to do," I said, opening my arms wide. Sachiko stepped inside them, forming herself to me.

"For heaven's sake, introduce me," Harrison said.

"Sachiko, this is Harrison Beadle. He's the minister for this place. Harrison, I present Kaga Sachiko, or American-style, Sachiko Kaga. Kaga is her family name. This is my Chiki."

"And this is my Robert. I am honored to meet you, Harrison."

"I am also honored."

I grasped Sachiko's tiny hands, backed away from her to look at her in the light of day. She's exquisite, creamy complexion, the delicate eyebrows above sparkly, intelligent eyes, her hair short, framing her face. The bulky sweater concealed her shape but her jeans accentuated the long, slender legs I knew.

She looked down. "I feel guilty not removing my shoes, Harrison."

"It's not done here."

"My last home, _tatami_, rice straw mats. Very good for feet. Not good with shoes."

"I've heard of the custom," Harrison answered. "The shoes..."

"_Geta_. Easy to remove. These shoes, very nice. Feel good. Not so easy to remove and put on."

"I'm surprised you're here, Chiki-san," I said. "It was a long trip."

"Yes. Perhaps I can tell you of it?" She flicked her gaze between me and Harrison.

"We can do that."

"I am very pleased to have met your friend." She smiled at Harrison. "I'm sure we will meet again."

I led Chiki to one of the lounge areas. She shook her head. "So sorry, Robert. This is not private. For the things we must speak of."

"I know a place where we can go." I was thinking of a little coffee shop.

"I do also. Your home. Where I first met you."

"Uh, Chiki..."

"It is proper, Robert. I am YOUR wife."

"It's like that."

"It IS that, Robert. We married across The Veil."

We drove back to the apartment. She watched the neighborhood passing by.

"It is all so different. I am glad I was the kitten. I saw. I learned."

I'm thinking how much learning I'd have to do to jump eight hundred years in time and half a world in geography.

"Chiki, how did you learn English?"

"It was given to me, Robert. Many things are given to me. I cannot begin to understand. Just know that many things were given."

"What kind of things?"

"I do not know all of them. Look at these clothes. I have never had clothes like this. Do I look correct?"

"Very much correct."

"It is what other girls might wear?"

"It is, but it seems like it was made for you."

"I could not appear in kimono and _geta_, Robert. I don't know how I got these, but here I am with them."

I pulled into the driveway at the apartment, noting that Aunt Doris and Uncle Gene's car was gone. We walked together up the stairs to the apartment and went inside.

"It is our house," she said.

"It is." And I kissed her.

"You still wish to kiss me?"

I kissed her again, holding her close.

Smile. "You do. I know your heart, Robert."

"Chiki, I love you. I will be yours forever. But I don't even know where to start. In this world, you have no ... birth certificate. Identification. You're real to me, but the world doesn't even know you exist."

That range of thoughts frightened me. I want to marry this girl, but I can't even get a marriage license if she doesn't have documentation.

She smiled sweetly, serenely, and my cellphone rang. I would have thought that the whole concept of a cellphone would be a surprise to somebody from eight centuries before, but there she was, smiling.

I put it to my ear. "This is Robert."

The voice at the other end, somewhat accented, asked "Robert Richard?" He pronounced it "Richard", the common pronunciation, not 'REE-shard', the Cajun surname.

I corrected him. "Yes, it is, How can I help you?"

"I am sorry for the mispronunciation, Mister Richard. I am Sochiro Takamura with the Japanese Consulate in Houston."

Didn't see that coming, did you, Bud?

"Yessir. How can I help you?"

"I am looking for a Japanese citizen, Mister Richard. Her name is Sachiko Kaga. I am told that you know of her whereabouts."

"I do. Uh, she's right here next to me."

"May I speak with her?"

This completely baffled Cajun boy handed the phone to her.

I know absolutely NO Japanese and what transpired over the next few minutes was in Japanese, a rapid-fire two-way conversation.

Finally she handed my phone back to me. She was still smiling.

"Yessir?" I said.

"Mister Richard, I need an address where we might send a package for Miss Kaga."

"How will it be sent?"

"Fed-ex," he said. "Signature required."

I gave him the address of the Student Union along with Harrison's name, as well as mine, and of course, Chiki's. "One of us will receive it."

"Do you mind me asking how you know Sachiko?"

"Most unusual. A flurry of documentation by electronic means, with instructions that she was in immediate need for it."

"That is a true statement, sir," I said.

"She will have the documents in hand tomorrow afternoon."

"Thank you, sir."

"Have a good day, Mister Richard."

I looked into the bright, expectant face of my Sachiko. It foretold a very good day.

"Daylight," she said. "We can see each other in daylight."

"I know. You are even more beautiful."

She stepped close. I took that as a sign, taking her in my arms, bending to nuzzle her neck just below the short hair.

She squealed. "Oh, you so much DO like that!"

"I like everything about you, my lady."

She took my hand, gently leading me toward the bedroom. "Us ... on the bed in the daylight, Robert. Like last night."

Except last night I could not see well enough to luxuriate in her nakedness, her slender form alluring in ways my imagination never could envision.

"You are manly, Robert. Your chest..." little bites. "You need to be eaten, like my meal..."

"Chiki, you have eaten me..."

Melodic titter. "Indeed I have. It was a horrible job I was given, but from the very first ... I loved it. I knew you were ... Not the victim ... First time, I was loving you..."

"You were a very bad succubus..."

She grinned. "I know. You were an equally poor victim. And when I found out you were never before with a woman and I was never before with a man, I am told that it set up conditions. I knew, Robert. I knew that us tearing my virginity would tear the veil that kept us separate."

"You KNEW?"

"I did. I am a bad wife, then, that I did not tell my husband..." she faked sadness. "Of course YOU think that I was not yet your wife. I became your wife with our mating."

"Why would I be angry? I wanted you, Chiki. I wanted you so much..."

Her hand wrapped my erection. "You want me now. We have only mated once. We will mate many times."

She kissed me, pushing me flat on my back, then straddling me, her knees beside my hips. I enjoyed the view--perfect little coquettish face, tip of her tongue protruding just a bit between her lips. Her breasts were small but perfect, slightly rounded, the nipples hard. I let my hands course up her sides, then cupped those breasts.

Now she was playing, rising up, coming back down with my erection trapped between the lips of her neat little pussy. Wet. Hot.

"It is made for joy for us, Robert."

"It is, Chiki-love."

"You know I love you, Robert," she said, sliding herself back and forth, sliding her wetness up and down the length of my shaft.

"You're killing me..." giggle. "I know from long experience that making you come is not going to kill you. I was sent to try." Giggle. "I am so very glad that I failed."

"You failed horribly."

She was biting her bottom lip now, pushing concertedly with each stroke. Her head tossed back, eyes squeezed shut. She let out a whimper. I could feel her pussy spasming on my dick. She's coming, and that's when I gave up fighting my own. spurts of my semen shot up my belly as she shook.

Finally... "You must know that I feel every time you squirt, Robert. Look at yourself. I never before let you make like this..." she slid down my legs. "I must clean up ALL this." She licked. "Mmmm. Your essence..."

"I need yours, Sachiko..."

"Oh," she giggled. "Now I am Sachiko, from whom you need something..."

"I will need Sachiko until the day I die."

Her mouth worked on me, draining a stray drop from my dick, then slurping, kissing me free of the tracks I'd just spewed.

"Turn around, you," I said. "You should not be the only one who tastes..."

I have to arch my neck and back to get her if she's got my dick in her mouth. It's a sacrifice I make. The reward is very tasty. Chiki likes it, too, gasping, "How can I do this when ... ennnnghhhhhh!!!"

Then we're lying in each other's arms, free hands caressing, exploring...

"You are ready again, my love," she says. "I like looking down at you. I want to look down at your face with us mating."

"Making love."

"Yes. It is..."

The next second she was speared on me, riding hard. "You fill me. It takes you for me to be whole..."

"My beautiful one..."

She went from sitting up to lying prone on me, her butt bouncing, working about two inches of me in and out of her pussy, showering me with little kisses, giggling.

"Chiki-- can't stop..."

"You are not supposed to stop." Her mouth covered mine. She captured my tongue, sucked it, her own tongue teasing mine inside her mouth. There's never been a girl who kissed me like this. Second time in less than an hour. She sensed, partially sat back so I was all the way inside her, the agile walls of her youthful pussy squeezing like a milking machine.

At about my second surge, hers began. I pulled her against me, feeding on her sighs. We remained like that until I softened enough to fall out of her.

"This is the way it should be, my Robert," she sighed. "We mate in love."

Speaking of mating... "Chiki-love, you can get pregnant..."

"I know you will worry about that, Robert, but it is not time..."

"That's not a very good way for birth control..."

"Birth control?"

"Yes, what a couple does so she will not have a baby at the wrong time..."

"Ah, yes. No, Robert. It is not time for you and I to have babies. I heard your mother talk of grandchildren. I watched your face."

"You know an awful lot for a small young cat..."

"I had to be with you to learn, to make sure that I was supposed to be with you. Your face told me that you wished children. We will have children when the time is proper."

"But right now..."

"Right now? I am not going to have children. It is one of the things I was given. You and I will be married as it is done in your world – OUR world now – and when the time is proper, we will have children."

I kissed her, letting the kiss tell her that I accepted her answer.

"Now, let us see how we bathe in this world. And then we must meet

someone.”

I’d never showered with a partner before. It’s a delight.

Post-shower, we went through several towels to get Chiki’s hair dry. I’m making a list. A guy doesn’t need a lot in the bathroom. A girl does.

Her clothes? We need to go shopping and I’m quick to admit that I’m not in a position to give advice to a girl about what she might need. That’s only one hurdle. The other is that I have a limited pile of money. Okay, quick run-down, I can get her fixed up with a few changes of clothes and the necessities for a girl’s life in the 21st century.

“Now, who is this person we’re supposed to meet?”

You could’ve knocked me over with a feather when she said, “Lady Ramona.”

“Huh?”

“She has been your guide, am I correct?”

“Yes, but...”

“This much I know. I need to see her. It is part of understanding things.”

“I’m really confused.”

“I also am. It’s as if I were going to a place where I know nothing but expect to find things as I go.”

I held her hand. “I’m with you through whatever happens.”

“It is not that kind of worry, Robert. Let us go.”

Her confidence extended to a little kiss before we walked out the door.

Getting into the car, I opened her door for her, then as I walked to my side, Aunt Doris came out of the back door of their house. I waved at her, got in the car, and off we went.

“You knew of Lady Ramona?” I asked.

“Yes, in the last days, I have come to know of her. You will soon understand more.”

We pulled into the parking lot in front of the store. There was

another car there, likely a client, but as we neared the front door it opened and a girl dressed in one of those 'alternative lifestyle' modes exited. Compared to her, we're normal.

We walked into the store. It always takes a few seconds for my eyes to adjust to the low light levels. I guess 'dim' goes with the whole 'spiritual' shtick.

Lady Ramona watched, and as we got closer, she said, "Robert, introduce me."

"Lady Ramona, this is Kaga Sachiko. Sachiko, my friend, Lady Ramona."

Sachiko bowed deeply from the waist. "Lady Ramona, honored to meet you."

"You as well, Lady Sachiko."

"I am honored, but I am just Sachiko."

"Incorrect. You are the lady of my friend."

"Robert," Lady Ramona said, "Sachiko is a treasure."

"I know that."

By now, we were standing at the little counter display case. Sachiko looked down, touched a stack of Tarot cards, then looked to Lady Ramona. "These are your cards."

"They are."

"Let me think for a few breaths." Chiki's eyes closed, not squeezed hard shut, just closed. "May I?"

"Please do."

"I am ... There are things that are showing in my being," Chiki said. She extended the deck toward Lady Ramona. "If you would take a card, please."

The card was turned on the counter. I watched Lady Ramona. A look of surprise, carefully hidden. Chiki put the card back in the deck, carefully cut and recut, extended them to Lady Ramona. "Please, again."

High priestess.

"Robert was right to come to you."

Lady Ramona smiled slightly. "I am not a fraud. I know things. Surely you did not have these cards."

"My lady, Madame Sakura, dabbled in things. We had tiles with characters and pictograms on them. Madame Sakura often showed me. Unfortunately the tiles did not tell of the traitor hiding at the inn, and the swordsmen coming..." Chiki breathed deeply. "Now I have been given some amount of understanding. Choose again, please."

Lady Ramona gasped as she turned over another high priestess.

"That is who you are, my lady," Chiki said. She reshuffled the cards for some time. She turned one onto the counter.

"I think you call this the tower. It is a house, a thing already established, so these cards will now show you history."

Lady Ramona watched. "Interesting."

Chiki laid the next two cards. "A man and a woman."

"Emperor and Empress," corrected Lady Ramona.

"Man and woman," insisted Chiki. "The man is upright. The woman is not. They were together but not meant to be together. This next card..." She turned another high priestess. "You came in here after the man and woman would not be together." Next card. "The adversary, because the woman held evil in her heart."

I watched, her explanation resonating in my mind.

"This card – the wheel of chance, AFTER the adversary." She smiled. "Chance." Another card, this time the emperor, so she quickly drew a second, the empress, and they were properly oriented. "Then," she said, "only one possible outcome. Dramatically she drew the last card and turned it face up.

Lady Ramona gasped.

Sachiko smiled. "Lovers. Lady Ramona, I know I did not use proper names, but is the reading correct?"

"Yes, Lady Sachiko."

Chapter 8

I was wary. Something's going on here and I have no reference whatsoever. Yes, recent events, including the little Japanese doll

standing before me, have given me an understanding that there was more to the world than the physical, more to the world than the spiritual I'd learned in church. I have no clue as to limits, though.

Lady Ramona's eyes say she's learning more than she knew, too.

Chiki gathered the cards on the counter and added them back into the pack, deftly cutting the whole pack several times. She fanned them and extended them to Lady Ramona. "Please?"

Lady Ramona drew a card from near one end of the fanned deck, laid it on the counter.

"Tower. Something that exists. More history," Chiki said, an air of confidence in her tone. She quickly dealt from the top of the pack, arranging seven cards in a circle, then another with five in a star.

I know that the pentagram is supposed to be a big thing in what little I know of magic. Lady Ramona's eyes tell me she's really watching closely.

"Seven and five are auspicious in Japan. Good luck." She deftly flicked cards out of the seven-card arrangement. "This is Robert's schooling. He is very successful." She smiled at me. Real smile. Eyes and all. "I am proud. Some day a little Japanese farm girl might understand some of what he does."

Her next motions attended the pentagram she'd created. "I was summoned by an incantation. Here..." she pulled two cards from the pentagram, "... it seems that it was poorly done. Not strong. Very weak. Mistakes, omissions, exclusions, inclusions ... I have questions." Two cards. "Robert was strong in a way that was not recognized. This is one reason the spell went in a different direction."

She glanced at Lady Ramona, who was hanging on every word, then glanced at me. Smiled. "My Robert prayed for a mate, a wife. His prayers countered a weak spell."

More cards. "Release. The incantation, properly performed, would have bound the summoned one to the one who summoned."

"The circle in her incantation was broken. I saw that," Lady Ramona said. "Many mistakes. That was one. Sybil did not think details mattered."

"That may be the case," Sachiko smiled. "It may be that there was a greater power at work than Sybil and her poor spell." She gathered the cards again. First one down.

"The Wheel," Lady Ramona said.

"It is of things that are and will be..."

"You can see the future?" Lady Ramona asked incredulously.

"Only as through a fog," Chiki replied. "Some things ... good fortune ... She turned two cards.

Lady Ramona gave an almost inaudible gasp. "King and queen of pentacles..."

"Robert and I – his queen. We have good fortune..." She turned two more cards, pulling them from deep in the stack. She looked up at Lady Ramona. "Tell Robert what YOU get from these..."

"Seven of pentacles. Hard work, perseverance, diligence. Nine of pentacles. One shall enjoy the fruits of his labor." She looked to Sachiko.

"Good! We see the same thing. And seven and nine are auspicious numbers as well."

Our session was interrupted by the tinkling of the bell at the shop door. Sachiko put the deck of cards on the counter and stood beside me, a pretty good move because I walked Sybil.

I certainly wasn't going to be the first one to speak. After all, the impetus of her curse was to have me dead and damned just for having the temerity to break off a relationship with her.

Sybil's loquaciousness got her. "Hi, Lady Ramona. Hello, Robert," then to Sachiko, "I don't know your name. Sorry."

Sachiko. Inscrutable. "I am Sachiko Kaga. I am with Robert."

"Rooobbbberttt!" she gushed, "I hadn't heard you were even dating." Her eyes let me think that she was surprised, first that I was still physically capable, and second, that I was successful.

"I'm not dating," I said. "Sachiko and I are engaged. Just as well be married."

"That's fast," Sybil jabbed. "You and me..."

"It's like Sachiko was sent from heaven," I tossed back. Sachiko was standing close to me, looking like the most innocent creature in the world. And she KNOWS.

"I've never seen you on campus," Sybil observed.

"Like Robert said, it is like I tumbled down from heaven..."

"I'm sure..." then to Lady Ramona, "I sent you an email..."

"You said you would be in tomorrow. It is ready, though..."

On her way to the counter, Sybil brushed rather closer past me than the geography dictated.

That's when I noticed. Right ear, four little gold earrings. Left ear had only three. One missing. Interesting.

Sachiko and I stood aside while Lady Ramona completed Sybil's transaction.

Finished, Sybil turned to me. "How've you been, Robert? I've been meaning to look you up. Friends, you know..."

"Yeah, friends," I said. "I got a surprise introduction to Sachiko and we've been off to the races together. It's like she came to me out of the clear blue..."

"I'm sure," Sybil purred. "Well, nice meeting you, Sachiko. See you around, Robert."

"Yeah. Be careful out there," I replied lamely as she walked out.

When the door closed, Sachiko emitted a little snicker.

"She lost. You. One of her earrings..."

"You noticed that?" Lady Ramona blurted.

"Yes, Lady. I notice many things. She is a child without direction, neither good nor bad, just in need of proper attention to her schooling."

"Schooling?" I asked.

"Yes," Sachiko said. "To be trained in what it is to be a human. I was as a kitten. She is the same as a kitten. Only acting on what she sees in front of her, no thought of tomorrow. She did not see a young student and see a future ahead of him and her. She saw today. Maybe tomorrow. What is new. What is exciting. No thought to achieving peace and contentment."

"You see these things?" Lady Ramona asked.

"Indeed I do. I had a good teacher in Lady Sakura. The world I was learning, if one does not know how to achieve peace from within, life

is tragic and a veil of pain." She smiled. "Poor Sybil. Lost Robert. Her curse went wrong. And her car doesn't work."

"Her car?" I asked.

"Yes. Her little car. It does not work. Start? It doesn't."

I exchanged glances with Lady Ramona.

"You caused her car to... ?" Lady Ramona blurted, uncharacteristically animated. She's usually the definition of serenity.

"Noooo," Sachiko purred. "But somehow I know things ... I do not try to know things. They just come to me, as in 'this is a fact'."

I craned my neck to see out the window at the front of the store. Sybil was getting out of the car. She walked around it, examining it. I have no idea what that was for. She never struck me as having any mechanical knowledge whatsoever. Her next move was to pull her phone out, talk animatedly for a minute, then get in the car, try again. Apparently having no success she started back towards the door.

"Sachiko and I are heading out," I said.

Lady Ramona smiled. "Please, the two of you, come back tomorrow. We can have a cup of tea and conversation."

"I would be honored, Lady Ramona," Sachiko said.

We passed Sybil as she came back into the store. She looked grim.

"Syb," I said. "It's like this one fell down from heaven." We kept walking. I don't know if my comment had any effect at all.

Now comes a hurdle. What do I do to feed a Japanese girl who dropped in from eight hundred years ago?

"Chiki, are you hungry?"

"I am, Robert."

"I don't know what to feed you," I admitted.

"A hungry person does not worry over choices."

"We have a dozen places where we can eat in a five minute drive. I just don't know what you'd prefer. I mean, your life before..."

"Was my life before. Chiki the kitten observed you and others eating many things. Most of them were strange to a girl who lived as I did

before, in Japan. But I saw that you enjoyed, laughed, complained, but nobody here looks like the food is bad. So..."

"Nobody starving in 21st Century America," I stated. "Overweight, now..." I knew that there are horrible exceptions, but seriously, obesity is much more prevalent.

"Yes, that observation. Many..."

"So, without making you fat, what do I feed you?"

"Harrison's ... chili?"

"One of the few things he cooks," I said. "Let's call him and see..."

Phone call. Chiki paying close attention to the process. Chili's simmering for five o'clock serving.

"Your phone. I saw that as the kitten. I am amazed."

"I can imagine."

Harrison was happy to see us return, and even happier that Chiki was interested in his chili.

Chiki worked her way through a bowl, with beans, the heat level causing beads of sweat to glisten on her forehead.

"Too hot?" Harrison asked.

"I have never tasted anything like this," Chiki squeaked. "Robert eats it as if it is normal."

"It could be much hotter. This is actually a pretty good chili," I inserted.

"Thank you, Robert," Harrison grinned. "Would you put that in writing?"

We left for home, the weather deteriorating a bit, breezy, beginnings of misting rain blowing onto the windshield. That gets me past a little hurdle I'm not sure how to approach – I've never brought a girl to my apartment for the night. The weather, though, kept Aunt Doris and Uncle Gene from sitting on their porch where they might ask questions.

It's a hurdle.

We're home, up the stairs and into the apartment and Sachiko stands before me demurely, head bowed, eyes upturned looking at me.

"Is it proper now that I should want to kiss you, Robert?"

"Very proper. And here, you never have to ask. I'm yours, Chiki."

My phone rang. Caller ID said it was Uncle Gene. "Yessir. How're y'all doing this evening?"

"Great, son," he said. "Got a pretty good sized delivery here for you."

"Really?!? I wasn't expecting anything."

"It's here. Curious. Not another Amazon box. This one's addressed to Sachiko Kaga, care of Robert Richard."

"We'll be right down to get it," I said. "It's time you get formally introduced to Sachiko."

"Now I'm intrigued," he said. "Y'all gonna come in for a bit?"

"If Aunt Doris doesn't run us off."

"Why would she do that?"

"We'll talk."

Sachiko was watching, listening, smiling serenely.

"Uncle Gene has a package for you. It was delivered to their house. It's in your name."

"Let us go see what it may be," she said.

"While we're there, I want to introduce you to them. Chiki, I would introduce you as my future wife."

She giggled. "Robert, you can introduce me as your now wife. It is done."

"Aunt Doris and Uncle Gene are a bit old-fashioned. They might not understand it as we understand it."

Smile. Like serene Buddha. That is, if Buddha had the face and figure of a teen-aged Japanese girl.

"You're sure of yourself," I said.

"Robert," she smiled, "I am a poor little Japanese maiden who has been transported through time and space to be with YOU. People who love you

will see this."

"Then let's go."

"Yes. We go."

She stopped outside the door, looked down, giggled. "I was looking for my _geta_."

We went to the back porch of Aunt Doris's house, knocked lightly, were immediately met by Aunt Doris.

"Come in, come in," she said, her gentle smile in full glow. "Gene says you wish to introduce us to your friend."

"Best not to surprise 'er," Uncle Gene said from the kitchen table. "When you startle 'er, she's prone to nip."

"Gene!" Aunt Doris hissed. "First time we ever see this girl, and this is the impression you make."

Sachiko beamed that smile. "My impression is that my revered aunt and uncle are happy and comfortable in their marriage."

I think Aunt Doris was stunned. Time for me to step in.

"Aunt Doris, Uncle Gene, this is Sachiko Kaga, my..."

"... wife," Sachiko inserted, "In the tradition of my homeland, we have pledged so."

"But, church..." Aunt Doris blurted.

Sachiko in charge, now. "We will be married in accordance with your tradition as well. I know Robert. He is active in his church group. He believes. We will get married in his home church in your tradition, with family and friends."

"But you ... believe?" Aunt Doris asked.

"Of much I am ignorant. Robert is my husband. His god will be my god. I will learn and I will believe as he believes." She saw the expression on Aunt Doris's face. "In my heart, as I accept Robert, I accept his god."

"Good enough, Doe?" Uncle Gene asked, using Aunt Doris's nickname.

"So many young people don't care, Gene," she retorted. "And Sachiko, I think I understand. Let's sit in the living room."

Okay, moving to the living room. I'm parsing that as an upgrade.

We spent an interesting half-hour talking just a bit more seriously than the normal social niceties.

"My father was in transportation," Chiki said. "I was offered the opportunity to go to boarding school."

That's a rather expansive description of the background she'd told me, but how would you describe the work of a porter and being sold to the madam of an inn. I do think it left the old folks with a good feeling. Sachiko's tone, her deportment, her obvious ease and confidence, I only wish I thought I'd do half as good.

It was a good-sized box. We brought it home with us, opened it.

Clothing. For her, naturally. Informal, looked well-made, not flashy or obtrusive, something that when she wore it would let her form and face speak for itself.

"I was wondering about having to wash your clothes tonight so you'd have something to wear tomorrow."

"I knew something would happen," she said.

"Somebody told you?"

"I was given a feeling."

"What sort of feeling?"

"That I would be provided means as I became part of your world."

"Our world," I corrected.

She smiled. "Yes, our world. New for me. As seen through the eyes of a kitten."

I kissed her. "You ARE a kitten."

She looked at the clothing from the box. "And I will be a properly dressed kitten. Now it is time that you explain to me your bathing. I saw the shower." Demure and thoroughly lecherous smirk. "I need teaching."

I haven't had help in bathing since I was kid. This is nice. Sachiko naked is a vision. Sachiko wet and naked is unbounded joy. Alas, the hot water started running out, forcing us to end a very pleasant event.

While we were toweling each other dry, she said, "Very good. Nice. But I find I might miss a Japanese style bath. Have you ever experienced such?"

"No. We did tub baths when I was young, though."

"We will have a proper bath when we have a house, Robert." Emphasized with those glowing eyes.

She could've announced, "We will have a nuclear submarine in the pond," and I'd've believed it. I did note 'when we have a house'. Not 'if we have a house'. And I'm beginning to think she's in control of what's possible. Worst succubus ever.

I watched that pert little butt walk across the room, dip into the box, and pull out what looked like a bathrobe.

"_Yukata_," she said. "We must find you one as well. Civilized. You cannot walk around the house with that thing swinging free where I may see it. I am very tempted."

She donned the robe. As if she wasn't exotic and enticing enough already, she did a quarter turn, bent one knee, struck a pose, chin lowered demurely to her shoulder, dark eyes drawing me in like a hungry fish to the bait.

"Who is tempting whom, little princess?" I scooped her into my arms.

"Robert, we have nothing else to do but to love one another. The bed is right there."

The yukata fluttered to the floor, we hit the bed, hungrily kissing each other.

"Lady Sakura never said much about kissing. I don't think she regarded it as important." Her hands cradled my face, her lips walking along mine like butterfly footprints. "I think it is very important."

"And you are very good at it."

"I learn on you, Robert. My lips take lessons from yours. You make my lips come alive." Giggle. "And kisses make THIS come alive..."

I fought back bravely, twisting to get my lips on the back of her neck, feeling the tips of that black hair brushing against my cheek. She squealed happily. "My neck! How very Japanese of you."

"Because you have a perfect neck."

"I only wish that the first time I came to you, I had kissed you

first. I didn't. I kissed this thing..." she sighed, grasping my erection. "But I suppose that since I get so much pleasure from giving you this pleasure..." she slid down my body, stopping. She looked into my eyes. "You do like me here, do you not?"

"Adore you."

I decided to write off classes the next morning, instead showing up at the Student Union to wait on the overnight package I'd been promised by Mister Takamura.

We sat in one of the study rooms, talking, me trying to figure out how all this was working, mostly meaning that I logically figured that being translated from 12th Century Japan, the rush of the changes in location and society and technology would ... I'd be overwhelmed if it was me.

"I understand your concern," she said. "When I was released, I was sent forth with things in my head, things that before, I would not have understood. They gave me the time as a kitten, to see, to hear, to decide, Robert. I was already committed, though. I do not know how it happened, what happened. I was sent to you and I understand that I am perhaps not the first to leave The Void in this way, but what was given to me and to you is a very rare thing."

"You speak English like a native."

"I read English. And Japanese. Today's Japanese. And I understand many things that I cannot list because I do not know what they might be, but I was told that when a situation comes, I will find that I have understanding."

"Interesting."

"Yes."

I heard the interaction at the front desk when the Fed-Ex guy came in. We went to retrieve the package, returned to the study room. I opened it for her, spreading out the contents.

Top of the stack – Japanese passport. I have my own passport and it took me weeks to get it through normal channels. Sachiko had been on this side of The Veil for a day, and here it was. One word: Magic.

Next, an envelope labelled with Japanese characters. No way this Cajun's gonna read that.

"Paper that says I was born."

"Birth certificate. What date did they put?" A legitimate question, I think, since they couldn't very well say she was eight hundred years old.

"_Shunbun_. March 20—it is vernal equinox, middle of spring. An auspicious time. And I am now eighteen."

"Spring. Rebirth."

She grinned. "Why, yes, it is! Very good!"

"And you were fourteen."

"My time as a maiden. Now my time as a wife."

"With these documents, we can get the marriage license to allow us to be officially married."

"In your family's church, Robert. As is proper."

We kept drilling down through the documents. A statement from a Swiss bank. Huh?!?

Her name, plain as day, in both Western and Japanese. It's a statement, so there's a number at the bottom. The first digit is a two, then six more digits, a decimal, and two zeros.

"Do you understand this document, Chiki?"

"Statement of account. It is ... what belongs to me that others hold?"

"It appears so."

"And this number? Is enough for me to live?"

"Quite comfortably for a good while."

"Then we do not have to worry, do we?"

"We do not." I paused. "Sachiko, my little love, this is YOUR money. I have no claim on it."

"No, you have total claim on Sachiko, as Sachiko has total claim on Robert. Before you knew this, you said that all you had, you laid at my feet."

"I said that. I meant it, Sachiko. I will have the means to give us a good living."

"And I, Kaga Sachiko, lay all I have at your feet, Robert Richard. I said that to you before, when I had nothing. I say it again. Robert, let us be serious."

"Yes, my Chiki."

"I came through The Veil for one reason only – to become the wife of Robert. Do you accept that?"

"I do."

"Good! It is as done. Accept this as well."

Chapter 9

Mom called in the late morning. In retrospect, I'm surprised it took this long.

"I waited until when you say you have no classes, Robert."

"I skipped classes this morning, Mom. There's someone..."

"When were you going to tell me? Aunt Doris called."

"Aunt Doris found out because I have to go in her yard to get to the apartment. She doesn't miss much."

"A girl..."

"Her name is Sachiko. Her nickname is Chiki. And we're getting married."

"Aunt Doris says that, uh, Sachiko? Sachiko says you're already married in her custom."

"Yes, Mom. And we're getting ready to make a flying trip for you and Dad to meet her."

"I suppose we should, don't you think?"

"I think she needs to meet you and Dad, and she needs to meet the pastor."

"Pastor? You're THAT serious?"

"Of course, Mom. Do you think I'd lie to Aunt Doris and Uncle Gene?"

"Not the son I raised. But you've gone off to college..."

"And I was brought up right, Mom. So give Dad a warning. We're getting ready to get in the car."

"Mom, Chiki's the first girl I ever brought home for this. Be nice. I only get to do this once."

"Son, we trained you right. If she meets YOUR criteria, I'm certain she'll meet mine."

"Okay, Mom. I love you."

Chiki was smiling. "You love your mother."

"I love my parents. They're good people."

"You, your father would be a lord in Japan..."

"Maybe not today."

"Then," she said, "A man who produced that much rice? Rich. A man of importance."

"He's my dad. I could have done much worse. Just good people."

"You are a good son."

"I am bringing my mother and father a daughter-in-law."

"The wife of their son," Chiki said confidently. "The mother of their grandchildren."

"Yes."

"As is proper. We will have children in the proper time. We will have a house that will be a home, a place of family and honor and love."

I'm hearing these words coming from Sachiko's lips and I know some guys would be heading for the hills, all this talk of home and family and kids, yet I was a product of that. Sachiko, on the other hand ... where's it come from? I knew of her family, the sale of a daughter not being totally uncommon, her training at the inn of Lady Sakura. She'd told me of the expectations for a girl in her position, that her age of fourteen years, her virginity, would have commanded a high price.

I got that prize. Gave her one in return. I couldn't conceive of another female on the planet who would have done or understood as completely as she did of our mating.

"Japan is many mountains," she observed. "Here are no mountains. No

wonder – the fields are so very large. I can see where rice was grown. I see other fields, still full of water. What are those?”

“The government says how much rice we can grow. A farmer may choose to grow other things. Those fields are growing crawfish.”

“I haven’t learned of this crawfish.”

“You will learn. Dad has several fields of them. It is not time for harvest yet, but they are another crop. He also has soybeans.”

“We have soybeans. From them we get many things. Miso. Shoyu. Rice. Soybeans. Green things. Fish. A little meat.”

“We eat a lot of meat,” I said. “Which brings us to eating at Mom and Dad’s. You don’t have to eat what they serve if you do not wish to. It may be strange to you.”

“Is it strange to you, my Robert?”

“No, it’s what I ate, growing up.”

“It is not bad food then.” She smiled. “I have not touched the body of a poorly fed man.”

I shivered. “When you talk of touching my body...”

“I have married you. Touching your body is something that I have lived for. I have enjoyed, far more than I was told. Lady Sakura told me of many women who endured, found no joy in a man. She told us that if we found joy, we should note and relish as a gift from the Divine.”

“The Divine,” I repeated. “What you answered Aunt Doris...”

“I told Aunt Doris the truth.”

“I can’t see how we’ll meet Mom and Dad and the subject won’t come up again. We’re serious about religion...”

“When you say ‘religion’ you mean ‘Christian’ and you are trying to be gentle with me, Robert.”

“You know this...”

“I’m your wife. I will spend my life in your heart and in your head, as you will with me.”

“And you know how you will answer?”

“I do. As I did with Aunt Doris. The truth, simply spoken in respect

and love. It is the way we will do it.”

“It’s a serious thing to my folks.”

“As it should be. Very important for parents to choose the proper wife for an heir,” Chiki said, a hint of a smile when I glanced sideways at her.

“I thought we chose each other.”

“It is a truth. You chose me. I chose you. Now, your parents will make a choice for you as well. Of course, we present them with only a single choice, but we trust that they will see as we see and choose correctly.”

We drove through small town and rural Louisiana, finally pulling off the road into Mom and Dad’s yard. I didn’t expect Sachiko to be surprised. After all, Chiki the kitten had done ‘barn cat’ duty here. Now she discussed.

“Bigger and more spread out. This house is suitable for the family of a _daimyo_. Much land is unused. In my Japan, every bit of flat land was growing something that could be eaten, because just a short walk and the land turned upward into mountain and was much work to make into cropland.”

“I’ve seen pictures of terraces for gardening. And rice. Perhaps we might travel back there to see?”

“Japan, yes. But my Japan is eight hundred years ago. I am Sachiko, wife of modern American Robert. Now, let us meet my new parents.”

Mom hit the front door just about the time that Chiki got her door open. This wasn’t going to be one of those ‘June Cleaver waiting on the steps’ moments. Mom’s healthy and agile and now, motivated. And arms spread. I’ve never seen Sachiko hug another human besides me, so here’s the first test.

“You’re Sachiko. Welcome home!”

Not ‘welcome to OUR home’, rather ‘welcome to your home, just like everybody else here.’

Sachiko dove right in. Hug. Release. Demure downturn of her head when Mom said, “You’re beautiful!”

“She is,” Dad said, having made his way out the front door. “Y’all come in!”

Mom and Chiki led the way.

I could smell the aroma from the kitchen before I hit the door. Another hurdle. Sachiko's background makes me nervous about how she'll react to Cajun home cooking. Since Chiki the kitten hadn't gone indoors on her visit, Sachiko walked into the house being very observant. Mom keeps a neat house. It won't warrant a spread in Southern Living but it is homey and tastefully decorated, pictures on the wall of family, neat furniture, the things you'd expect.

"Where's my sister?"

"She's in school, just like you expect. Should be home soon, though." Dad grinned. "You're gonna get 'er with this move, though."

Mom saw the query on Chiki's face. "His sister thinks she has the final say on anybody who marries her big brother."

Chiki smiled. "It is so in every family. Brother and sister are at odds to care for each other."

And then the questions started, gently, of course, Mom taking the lead, Dad watching, listening.

After a few minutes, "Aunt Doris says you are not Christian, but you will be."

"It is only correct. I am Japanese. I know of Buddha. Everybody Japanese is Shinto. It is who we are as a people. I have only begun to learn of Christian."

"I thought Shinto believed in many gods," Dad spoke.

"That is but one way of looking at things," Chiki said softly. "We believe that a spiritual world exists in parallel to our natural world, and that we should be mindful of it. I am not sure that believing in many gods is necessary to believe that there is a spiritual dimension to the world we live in. I think it is being sensitive to things we cannot see."

"But you pray to..." Mom started.

"We pray in the presence of places and things that are special to us. I know that you pray at the graves of your ancestors, correct?"

"Well, yes..."

"Then is it an incorrect step to pray at the places where your ancestors lived and found joy and peace, or to pray at the place where a bad thing happened, for nothing bad to happen again?"

"I don't guess," Dad said.

"That is what I know of Shinto. I am finding, in what I am learning of Christianity, that there is a god who is above all and He listens to prayer and cares about things in this world..."

"We learn as little children that He cares if a single sparrow falls," Mom said.

"So I learn of this god who is above all, and that He sent His Son. Your idea of sin is different from the one I heard as a child. But the great teaching to do to others as you would have done to yourself, in that, there is sin defined. I have failed at times in following that teaching, therefore, I have sinned. So Robert tells me of a loving God who makes a way..."

"So you accept..." Dad said.

"Indeed I accept. In my heart, and in my head. I married Robert in the ways of the simple beliefs of where I started. I will marry Robert in the tradition of this, my new family. And his god shall be my god because I see in his heart and in his head and it is right."

"But you believe in your heart, not just your head." Mom.

"In my heart. As I determined before I told aunt Doris."

"You and Robert have talked much of this?" Dad asked.

Chiki nodded. "Enough for me to know and to begin to understand. He knows where I come from and what I did to get here and I recognize his place as well. We match together in ways that I only slightly understand but with which I am completely happy."

"And you say you are married, then."

"Yes, my mother."

I watched Mom's face to see how that little phrase set on her. She glowed.

"In the tradition of rural Japan from the beginning, a man and a woman were married when it was entered as so in the public record. Robert has a Bible. It is HIS record, and we entered our marriage in it."

"That was sufficient to Sachiko and to me, Mom. Dad. We will see to the greater public record as soon as you two..."

"Three!" chirped my sister, walking into the room. "Hi, Sachiko. I'm Sam. Samantha."

Apparently Mom let the cat (or kitten) out of the bag when Sam got out of school. That explains why Sam came directly home.

"You are then and now my sister," Chiki said.

"As I was saying before Sam interrupted me for the millionth time, when we get family approval, we'll talk to the pastor, have a little wedding, and it will be done."

"Forever," Chiki added.

"Well, you're quite different than I expected Robert to marry," Sam said.

"Different? In a good way?" Chiki asked.

"It would seem so. You don't appear artificial. Bud wouldn't have chosen a dumb one."

Chiki's eye twinkled. "Oh, you think he had a choice?"

"He didn't?" Mom asked.

Chiki rolled her eyes heavenward. "I cannot begin to tell you the forces of heaven and earth that worked to get us together. It is an eruption of fate. God Himself watched over Robert and saw to it that I met him."

"Well, if you think enough of 'im to think that God got involved, I think you oughta keep 'im."

"And I intend to."

Mom got up to tend dinner. Chiki followed. "I must learn how to feed my Robert."

Dad looked at me after they were out of earshot. "Son, this just seems sudden."

"Kinda, but not. We've known each other for a while. Things took place..."

"She's not pregnant, is she?" Sam blurted.

"Oh, crap, Sam! No. And what's that got to do with things anyway?"

"Well, you know how you are around girls. Kinda gullible."

"The girl recites poetry in Japanese and translates it to English. She

reads and writes two languages. She's intelligent and wise, and yes, there's a difference."

"And she's exotically cute. Pretty." Dad said.

"Thank you, my father," Chiki chirped. "I'm just a little Japanese girl. Not special, maybe, except to the one meant for me, and for his family which becomes my family."

"You weren't supposed to be listening," Dad said.

"Listening to what?" Mom questioned as she entered the room.

"Dad says Sachiko's a hottie," Sam chuckled.

"SAM!" Dad blurted. "I said Sachiko is pretty."

"Well, I can buy that. Sam ... Stop stirring stuff."

"Yes, Motherrr..." Sam sassed.

"Mom, how much longer till dinner?" I asked.

"Half an hour. Why?"

"I'd like to take Sachiko around the place."

"He's runnin'," Sam tittered.

"You know where the key is to the four-wheeler," Dad said. "Take her AROUND the place."

Dad's two-seat ATV resided in the nearest equipment shed. The key hung on a nail nearby.

When we walked out the door and off the front porch, Chiki noted, "Robert, you're sweating!"

"I'm nervous as a cat."

"Chiki the kitten was not nervous. Why do you say that?"

"I bring my life's true love here into the unknown..."

"You know them. You know me. What could go wrong?"

"In a good world, nothing..."

"Breathe deeply. Smell the land. This IS a good world. I never worried, Robert. When I told your mother and father that heaven and

earth worked to bring us together, was that not the truth?"

"It is the truth."

"Then with heaven and earth for us, who can be against us?"

I swirled her into my arms and kissed her.

"Yes. Like that. You and me. Here. Together."

We got in Dad's four-wheeler. I guess there might come a day when I introduce Chiki to something that will make her jaw drop. I think that if I came from eight hundred years ago, I wouldn't be able to keep my eyes in my head over technology, but Chiki swung her shapely little butt into the seat of the four-wheeler like she'd been doing it all her life.

We took off around the perimeter of the nearby rice fields. They're all stubble now, harvested a month or so back. Running up the dirt road past the rice fields we come to the fields flooded for crawfish production. It's still too early for the harvest to begin. That might be December or so. What that gives us, though, is an aviary of marsh fowl – egrets, herons, white, black and red ibis, and glowing pink roseate spoonbills.

Finally got her. Her hand touched my arm. "Stop."

I stopped.

"This is magical. All the birds. So colorful."

"And they're all eating our crawfish."

"A price to pay for beauty."

"Some beauty is worth great price."

"Is it, Robert? Great price? I want to live here. I want a tiny corner over there under those trees where we will have a small roof under which we sit for viewing..."

"A gazebo?"

"I think that is what it is in English. In Japanese it is _kangetsuda_, moon viewing pavilion. It is perfect for viewing ... The water. The birds. The sunset. Very Japanese for my very perfect husband."

"Only I don't think the Japanese dealt with Louisiana mosquitoes. Screens are needed."

"Screens. Sliding walls. I have a picture."

While we were discussing a a little flock of ducks peeled out of the sky and landed a hundred yards out in the flooded field.

"Yes. Magical. We will see this place. Every day things will be revealed, as I was told in The Void."

And I'm thinking of how I can reconcile my future as an engineer with Sachiko and me sitting here on the edge of this pond, feeding her serenity, building mine.

We continued on. I showed her the irrigation wells, the canals, the lift pumps, the BIG equipment barn with the million-dollar tractors and combines that make modern farming possible.

"Not real. Farming. Every spring, everybody goes to the field. At harvest, everybody goes to the field."

"Well, Mom stays in the house and cooks. Sometimes she brings lunch out for the field hands."

"I don't think yours is the same as mine," she said.

"You'll get to see," I said. "I'm expected to show up for some of this."

"Only some? Robert, son of your father? This land is his?"

"It is."

"It was his father's?"

"It was."

"It will be yours?"

"It will, between me and Sam. We are both heirs. We will both own it."

"And you left this home to be something else?"

Why is it that when SHE says it, it comes out different than a not-too-long-ago conversation with Dad?

Completing the perimeter of the fields took us down a fenced treeline between Dad's place and the farm next to us. I got Chiki's jaw to drop one more time. First armadillo. No, you can't get close to one, but I spotted it from enough distance so that we could stop while I pointed it out.

She watched it snuffling around, nose down, foraging. "What do they eat?"

"Insects, mostly. Anything small and on the ground."

"Are they dangerous?"

"No. But they will dig up a yard looking for food. And they're not very smart. Hundreds of them get killed on the roads every year, run over by cars because their instinct when endangered is to freeze, then to jump straight into the air when attacked. Good move if the attacker is a dog. Less good if it's a car."

"Poor things."

"Life's little tragedies. Are you wanting to open the Sachiko Armadillo Rescue?"

"No, but Sachiko would take time to observe and appreciate one in her view."

Back home. Top off the tank on the four-wheeler, then wash hands at the outside sink. Into the house. Dinnertime.

Uncharacteristically, we were eating at the table. Yeah, about that – we're a completely Cajun family and while we usually dine at the table, we serve ourselves off the stove and kitchen counter. Not today.

"Mom pulls out the stops when her little boy comes in," Sam snickered.

"Sam!" Mom chided back. "Observe a little decorum."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Ray," Mom directed, "the blessing."

As we always did as a family, heads bowed. Dad intoned a little prayer of thanks. I noted that Sachiko was not caught off guard.

"This is standard fare for us, Sachiko," Sam said.

"With rice. As I grew up, rice was at every meal. We always had something with it – pickled vegetables, a bit of fish, perhaps some meat, although that wasn't as common as fish."

"Rice with something," I said. "All over the world."

"And this is the way of my new family," Chiki said. Mister Ray, yes, I

am thankful.”

Chapter 10

We stayed until dinner was over, full bellies settled, conversations were had.

I watched Chiki around my family. She answered questions politely, quickly, sometimes skirting around things, cloaking what I knew to be the truth.

Because how does a son tell his family that he’s marrying a succubus?

Her explanations of her childhood were suitably charming, building an image of life in an alien landscape, dismissing 800 years of time gap. Her years as a ward of Lady Sakura were couched in the framework of a special girls’ finishing school.

Me? I keep my mouth shut.

Chiki was also rather effusive about her connection to rice farming as it was done in Japan on small farms. “You must understand that I saw these things through the eyes of a child, but everybody in my village went to the fields in the spring to plant and in the autumn to harvest. It becomes part of who we are.”

I think her words connected with Dad more than anybody else. “My great-grandfather bought this land. I am the fourth of his line to farm it.”

Okay, I see the light dawning. Chiki smiled. “Robert will be the fifth. He and our children.”

Sam couldn’t pass that chance up. “And you just THOUGHT you’d be an engineer.” She’s my sister. I love her, but I think ‘torment your brother’ is part of her job description.

Chiki’s fingers laced into mine. That’s assurance, right here. “I could do worse. I’m young. Not like I made too big a commitment.”

“Things you learned are always yours,” Chiki said. “And you do not decide today.”

I beg to differ. Thinking of Sachiko seated under the shade of that little grove of trees, watching over OUR fields, Blocks were being unstacked from one plan in my head and being rearranged in another, and it looked suspiciously like what I imagined a farmhouse would look like for Chiki and me.

We left to go back to our apartment amid hugs and happy words and promises (from Chiki) of our soon return.

"Did I do well?" she asked.

"I think I am proud of how well you did. I am also surprised. You want to be the wife of a rice farmer?"

"It is a good and honorable thing. But Robert, if I spoke out of order, I am happy to be the wife of Robert the Engineer. But I see inside you, Robert. Son of your father and his fathers before him."

"It never tugged at me like today, my Sachiko. It is like..."

"... like we are destined. That little grove of cypress trees. Robert, they called to me through time and space. I saw us there..."

"Since you came into my life, Chiki, I have a sense of time and place that I did not have before."

"You had it. You needed me to see it with you."

"You're so right..."

"I hope so, Robert. Now, how do we make this marriage satisfactory in the eyes of your family?"

"First, I had to present them with a suitable wife. I think you made that plain. Mom loves you. Dad thinks you're cute and smart, and Sam thinks you're suitable."

"I am suitable."

"To be my wife."

"I waited eight hundred years. I am half a world and eight hundred years from my home. It is suitable for me to find my home here. I love you, your blue eyes and brown hair and white skin and the ways we connect that make me sing songs like a bird in spring."

"I love you for being that bird."

"We will build OUR house. It will be our home, a place of happiness and love and laughter, but I want that kangetsuda among the cypress trees."

"Dad will give us the land for the house. We can borrow..."

"We may talk of money. In Japan, the wife is concerned with the

money.”

“It’s between the two of us, Chiki. In America, the man is supposed to be the provider.”

“Then provide, man. Your wife will manage. I worked with Lady Sakura. I know numbers and records. And we already have money.”

“I have a little.”

“I have – you said it was a lot. Enough for a home for Robert and Sachiko?”

“More than enough.”

“With a proper bath. And a kangetsuda?”

“Yes.”

“And you will become a successful farmer like your father.?”

“I can lease land to farm on my own.” And people who farm can seldom work on a full college schedule. Where’s that going to fall out? Dad didn’t raise a quitter. Is this quitting? Or WAS it quitting?

She rested her hand on my arm, fingers gently stroking. “We have eaten. We have talked. There is little to do when we get home.”

“I know,” I said.

Her giggle disassembles me. “Perhaps there is time for a man and a maiden...”

“Are you still a maiden?”

“I suppose that I am not. The maiden was in The Void. When she was no longer a maiden, The Void released her.” Giggle. “Now I am a woman and I want womanly things with my husband.”

Aunt was letting her little dog out for his evening constitutional when we pulled in. We waved at her and went into our apartment. When the door closed behind us, Sachiko was in my arms.

“Now, my Robert...”

“What is your wish, my angel?”

Titter. “From succubus to angel. Quite a journey.”

Miles.

"When will you teach me to drive a car?"

"Shoulda gave you your first lesson in Dad's four-wheeler."

"I thought of asking. There are many things. Your device. Phone."

"You need one."

"I will not always be right next to you. Tomorrow."

"Yes. Tomorrow. I have things I must do on campus."

"Classes?"

"No, I think I will be shedding classes. I – we need to see how we're going to live on the family farm."

"Robert, do not make a rash judgment."

"You ARE my rash judgment."

"Your rash judgment desires that you bathe with her and accompany her to your bed."

"Excellent idea."

We can successfully operate a shower even when we exceed the expected occupancy count and I'm really liking Sachiko's physical attributes now that I get to see them with all the lights on. Okay, make that the bedside lamp.

"Do I demand too much?" she asked, gently pushing my head downward.

"No. I'm glad you're interested."

"Interested? It is like first, I breathe. Second, I eat. And third, I desire my husband to make my body ring like bells at the temple."

"What did I ever do to deserve you?"

"A question I ask myself, Robert. Come. Bed."

Tiny thing. Like a feather. Kisses like butterflies landing on my lips, then a push to fuse her mouth to mine, her hands cupping my head.

"Always this part," she whispered. "Lady Sakura never mentioned..."

"Maybe it was left for you to discover..."

"We discovered each other, Robert."

"Yes we did, my lady."

She wiggled. "We still learn."

We fought over kissing each other's face.

"We will learn when I am great with our child." Kiss. "In due time. Our son will grow up on the land of his fathers."

"You might have a daughter..."

"No, I will give you a son first." She nestled her body against mine, mobile pelvis searching, then "Ahhhhh..."

"I do so much love this, Robert. I love it all. You pleasuring me with your mouth." Giggle. "And me with your ... It was the way I was told to pleasure you, except maybe it wasn't supposed to be pleasure, but there you were, dreaming, and I could not find anything but the desire to pleasure ... I tried to obey completely, but you were so sweet, so innocent ... And so was I..."

"You're still sweet and innocent."

"And wanton and hungry..."

"I like that."

The soft coupling took on an insistent, driving movement, she battling for primacy against me, yet the embrace continued.

Comes the burning bright joyous explosion...

Sachiko's turn:

Robert and I have made joyous love, first in the ordinary fashion. I think that him holding me atop him is as normal as him atop me, between my thighs, thrusting lustily into me as I welcome him.

Then we loved each other with our mouths. That was the first way I loved my Robert, and today I find it a special way that I show him my love for him. And I quite enjoy it. Lady Sakura told me that a woman who properly attends to her man had more control over him than all the chains in the kingdom.

That may be entirely true, but with Robert it is also the chains that happily bind me as well.

"Robert?"

"Yes, little love?"

"I am very happy, Robert. I am accepted by your family."

"You are."

"It is good because I have no family here."

"You and me, we become a family. And of course, my family is your family."

"Do you see Robert the Farmer?"

"I never quite saw it before. Today I saw Sachiko sitting beside me in our kangetsuda under the cypress trees, looking over the ponds, over our fields. I was there. There was peace."

"It was us. Robert, sometimes there is no peace for a farmer..."

"I know. I listened to Dad and his father as well – pests, drought, rain at the wrong time, prices, equipment..."

"Those will all be ours. I will be beside you, Robert."

"You know this?"

"I am confident of this. It is as it should be. Your father is a man of success. So should you be, if you do the things he does. Why would it be different?"

"Sometimes things get messed up."

"Like careless simple women toying with powers they care not to understand?"

"Sybil?"

"Yes. So many things that were errors in her summoning are treasures in my being here. She used Japanese _nori_, I am Japanese. She used gentle, easy to get waters, you get me, Sachiko, of whom my mistress said _kazuya_, "peaceful one". I would have been named that as a lady, much as Lady Sakura took her name as she became a young woman. When she was a child, she was _Emiko_, 'beautiful child'. She became _Sakura_, 'cherry blossom'. Cherry blossoms are very beautiful but they do not stay long on the earth. Sadly, Lady Sakura did not stay long on the earth. She died in the courtyard with me.

"Sybil did not close the circle, setting me free. Sybil dropped an

earring of gold. I come into this world with money.

"And Sybil thought she had cursed a man, a man who had done no more wrong than to choose not to be with her. That was her curse. Me. On her victim. Robert."

"I never wished bad for Sybil. She was just not right for me."

"Sybil may come out well but there will be trials. If she grows, changes ... It becomes a tranquil path..."

"Sybil never struck me as the tranquil type."

"She will learn."

"Some don't," he said.

"Sadly true. But I think Sybil will."

"And some guy will end up with a tranquil wife and wonder what went through her head to get those tattoos."

"Perhaps a tranquil Sybil would interest you?"

"I had about as much of Sybil as I could stand. I could never see those tattoos and not harbor thoughts of who she was with and how high she was to lie there and let a stranger work over her body. And that's just the tattoos I could see. I never approached..."

"You were a good boy. It took ... me..."

"I do indeed take you, my Chiki."

Smile, as I nestled into him for sleep. "We take each other."

The next morning was my first day in this world without Robert beside me, that is, if you don't count my appearance that first day, the first day I met, saw, touched him as real person. That was a brief time. I remember it. When I was sent – released – into this world, I was given much knowledge of how things are, but seeing them the first time, I heard Lady Sakura's admonishment – "In new places, keep your wonder inside yourself. Outwardly calm, that others see. Excitement, nervousness, keep inside you."

He's got things to take care of with the school administration, things that aid his sudden decision to change from Robert the Engineer to Robert the Farmer.

"I am going to leave you with my friend Darcy. I trust her. Whatever you wish to do..."

"I may ask her to help me buy things."

"Let me give you my credit card. It's like money. You choose things you want to buy, give them the card, maybe sign your name ... Darcy will help."

Darcy is 'American Girl' pretty. She is blonde, has blue eyes, white skin, breasts larger than mine, and she is taller than me. I've seen her before and even exchanged a few words with her. I asked Robert about her.

"Darcy's smart and sweet and beautiful, but she's not my Sachiko," he said. "We talk, we flirt a little, but she's engaged to be married, so she's off the table."

"But you thought..."

"My Chiki, I thought many things about many girls, then one night YOU appeared. My mind was erased. Wiped clean. I wondered how I could want anybody but you."

I know to be demure when compliments are given, or to giggle like I'm embarrassed. Or ... I threw my arms around his neck and kissed him.

"Just so you are not putting me next to Darcy so you can better make your choice."

"No choice. MY Chiki, first, last and always."

I went with Robert to the Baptist Student Union to meet Darcy.

"Be good to Chiki," he said to Darcy. "Tell her all my good points."

"There's a minute gone to waste," Darcy laughed. "C'mon ... Hey! I thought your name was Sachiko?"

"'Chiki' is my little name for friends and family."

Darcy smiled. "'Cheeky' is a good word in English. It means sassy, forward, bouncy."

"She's that way with me," Robert said. "And I like it."

"As well you should," Darcy said. "Chiki's a MUCH better match than, uh ... never mind..."

"I know about Sybil," I said.

"Yeah, then. Sachiko's much better for you."

"Well, after a day running the roads with you, that may change."

"Nope," Darcy smirked. "You're forever caught."

Robert and I kissed. It is daylight, and it is in the public, and the kiss is sweet and pure and loving. In private places and times, we lock together with hunger sometimes. That is fit and proper for those places and times. This is fit and proper for now. Robert did not get an ignorant girl with no manners.

Robert left to do the things he needed to do.

"C'mon, let's go get some coffee," Darcy said.

"They have coffee here," I said.

"Something kinda fancy," Darcy smiled. "Let me treat you to something good."

We found the coffee shop easily, stood patiently in line, time that we put to good use with Darcy describing different choices. I listened intently.

"I thought they had coffee shops in Japan," she said.

"I come from a small village in the mountains," I told her, not really lying except for that '800 years ago' part. "We had no coffee shops. Tea was served. And sweets; we didn't have choices like this."

"Let me then introduce you to my weakness."

Sachiko has met the sticky bun. The emperor, The Son of Heaven himself, never had THIS. The sweetness of that bit of heaven clashed with the sweetness of my choice in coffee, one working against the other.

Darcy watched me, smiling. "Something you might do again?"

"I will drag Robert..."

"I allow myself this one day a week. It has to be special, and Sachiko Kaga makes it special for me this week."

"I am flattered."

"You, new friend, are a curiosity. NOBODY knows you. Usually somebody knows something about a new face."

"I just showed up for Robert. He and I..."

She filled in the answer for me. "Long distance thing?"

"Yes," I said, relieved. I really get uncomfortable lying and Darcy seems like the kind of person that doesn't deserve lies, but how do you explain what Robert and I know to be the truth?

"I've heard of a bunch of those. You're the first one I ever knew personally."

"Robert and I connected from the beginning. It's like something across time and space." Really true, right?

Darcy smiled. "Robert's my friend. I'm very happy he's got you." She paused. "Not like I mean you're a possession or anything like that..."

"I think that between two people mutually agreeing to be each other's possession is proper."

"Not to SOME people around campus. But I agree with you. Me and my fiancé, we're like that. Mom and Dad are like that. I think it's the way that marriage is supposed to be. Well, there may be other ways, but I like this one. Is it like that in Japan?"

"It is much different and it is the same. The man is head, has, well, in days past, HAD life and death control over a wife. Some were like that but you and I know that love changes things. Feelings soften rules and laws. In some households in my homeland, everybody recognizes that the husband is the man, with all the status and control, but his wife is his partner, not equal, but more than equal. She makes his house a home where love lives."

"Where love lives ... I like that."

"Where love lives, it is easy to be rich or poor, healthy or not."

"But ... Robert's dropping OUT?"

That is the question I expected. I begged Robert to pray about this. The Robert I met was going to be an engineer. The Robert who came home with me after introducing me to his parents, THAT Robert wanted to be a farmer.

"He decided to follow in his father's path, to be a farmer."

"I understand that his father's a success at it. I thought Robert was escaping the farm."

"I hope I'm not causing him to make a decision wrongly, Darcy, but for a son to follow his father's path, that is a thing of honor in my

country.”

“In many cases it is, here, too. Family tradition ... Something for sons.”

“In my part of Japan, daughters were not expected...”

“Here, too. I’m doing pre-law. Nobody in my family is a lawyer. My dad is a middle level manager for one of the big companies in this area. Mom’s a bank manager. My brother, he’s two years older, he’s a lieutenant in the army. So I don’t really have a path laid out for me.”

“And your family thinks you have chosen well?” I am thinking that it would have been rare for a girl to choose her path like this.

“They think so.”

“And the man you are to marry?”

She smiled. “He will be beside me. Same plan. Law school together.”

“Robert and I, a farmhouse on the family farm, we found this corner on the edge of the fields that sings for a quiet place in the Japanese style, a place for tranquility and dreams. I saw it, before I drew my breath to say what I saw, Robert’s eyes told me that his thought was already there in his mind’s eye.”

“I understand that farming is hard work, there are risks.”

“It is as I understand it. But what part of life is without risk? Darcy, I see us, Robert and I, and I see our children raised as Robert was raised, honorable life as a farmer.”

“And you? You have no ambition?”

“What better ambition is there for me than to be the wife to my husband and the mother to our children? To honor his parents as they grow old. Darcy, I see all these things in my future, which is OUR future.”

“And how soon before you and Robert marry?”

“Before the next full moon.”

Chapter 11

Still Sachiko’s turn:

"Do you worry about rushing things?" Darcy asked me. "You've only been here a week, right?"

"It is a short time, but then Robert and I have been together across time and space for much longer – time for us to learn of our love," I said.

"I hope you're right, Chiki," she replied. "So many people consider marriage to be disposable."

"Throw away," I said. "I know of such. I know of many who consort outside of marriage. It is almost normal, I think. But I know my Robert and I know Robert's Sachiko and those things won't work. We will marry..."

"In his church?"

"In front of his friends and his family and his god." I paused to watch her eyes. "You will be there."

She smiled. "That is a fact. I will be there. With my fiancé. God? You are Christian?"

"I knew nothing of 'Christian' before Robert. He has explained. I have accepted. It is as it should be. In the old ways, his god will be my god..."

"But Christian, it means to follow, to believe..." Darcy said softly. "There are things ... Baptism..."

"It is not something that Robert says I will hang around my neck. It is not a sign, a ... label. Robert says 'in my heart', so I take it in my heart. But also as in the old ways ... his god is my god."

"He told me of believing, and accepting, and being baptized. The water symbolizes dying, am I correct?"

"It does."

"I cannot explain, but I think baptism means more to me. I am here talking with you in America. I have a new life already. I understand and accept. To go from obeying the old ways to believing, I do not think it was difficult for me. I was raised much different from you and Robert, but I understand faith and I understand duty."

"Neither of them seems important anymore," Darcy sighed.

"It is always like that in every place and every time. We sometimes think we're different from those before us, but we're not." Inwardly I

knew that she would not understand that I died 800 years before and was reborn, released, into this new world.

"I guess you're right. Still, sometimes it makes me uncomfortable."

"Yes," I told her, "as it does to me, but we can look at the world with wonder and do as we know to do."

I ate another bite of that sticky bun. "And this thing is decadent."

"Isn't it, though? I don't do this often, but it is an indulgence. So what are we shopping for today?"

"I think I need informal clothes like you wear sometimes – the short pants and the tops."

"A selection?"

"I should have brought some," I said. Little lie again. I don't know how the clothing I own appeared at Robert's apartment, but it did. I begin to think that the selection was enough to get me presentable and that getting more clothing was intended as part of my finding my way in Robert's world.

"What are you wearing for your wedding?"

"I am not sure. It is to be a small thing – formality, really. What do you think?"

"Oh, you can go all over the map on weddings –small to extravagant."

"Extravagant. Huge. Ostentatious," I said, words appearing in my head as I spoke, a strange feeling because little Japanese girls from country inns aren't supposed to know words like that in Japanese, much less American English.

"So probably NOT any of those," Darcy replied. "Who's planning it?"

"I do not know."

"Robert's mother, perhaps?"

"Perhaps."

"Do you mind if I call her and offer my assistance?"

"You would do that for me?"

"Certainly. You're my friend. Robert is my friend. This is what friends do." Darcy smiled. "Shall we call her together?"

"Let's do that," I said. I thought 'why not?' Am I not going to be her son's wife, her daughter-in-law?

It's a cellphone, I've learned, and has memory for Robert's parents, both of them. I select to call his mother.

"Sachiko!" she chirps. Yes, when Robert gave me the phone, he showed me many things with it, and we called his mother so she had me in her phone as well.

"Hello, Mizz Richard. It is me. I have my friend Darcy here. We are talking about the wedding."

"Hello, Darcy."

"Hi, Missus Richard. Chiki and I are shopping and we want to know your thoughts on the wedding."

"Robert and Sachiko said it would be simple."

"Robert has a suit," I said. "I have seen it at our apartment. I need a dress."

"She needs a dress," Darcy repeated.

My new mother-in-law talked about a special dress for the wedding, to be worn once.

"That would be wasteful," I said.

"Lots of people do that, Chiki," Darcy said. "They spend thousands for a special dress for the wedding."

"I don't want to spend thousands for a dress I wear one time," I said. "In Japanese households, the wife is the money manager. I am starting now. A simple dress that you and I think is pleasing, and I will wear it to be married and then I will wear it at special times for my husband and our friends."

"My boy's really getting something," Mizz Richard said.

"Did I say something offensive?"

"No," Mizz Richard said. "It's good to have an opinion."

"Does it make you unhappy? A dress I wear many times?"

"No, no. Chiki, I see weddings for the children of my friends and I find that often there is a lot of money wasted."

"She's right, Chiki," Darcy said supportively. "I need to show you some pictures."

"Darcy, don't sell her that other kind of wedding," Mizz Richard chided.

"Oh, I won't. Chiki's, well, the more I find out, the more I think Robert gonna have to step up his game to deserve her."

"Darcy, darlin', they NEVER do enough to deserve us."

Darcy laughed at the joke. So did I. I'd heard similar words for Lady Sakura. I think women are still the same over eight hundred years and half a world. In Lady Sakura's case, the man that didn't deserve her was captain of one of the daimyo's regiments, his position in life was not compatible with hers. They could never marry, but they could be friends and lovers, beautiful to behold for such a brief time, just like the cherry blossoms for which she was named. Robert and I, we met at a point in time, but from that point, our marriage will be as eternal as heaven can make it.

By the end of the day I had new clothing, including a very nice, simple dress. Darcy had shown me examples of some wedding gowns. I looked at her. "You may look beautiful in a dress such as this..."

"You would, too, Chiki," Darcy smiled.

I smiled back. "but I desire something simple."

"I'm not going for that, either," she said. "Mom switches back and forth when the moon changes. One day she's thinking that she's losing the chance for me to be a princess and the next, she's telling me that she admires my sense of frugality."

"Frugality. That is what a wife should practice with the family money."

"Yes, but all you ever see is these grand spectacles tossed up like it's the normal thing. Or if it's not the normal thing, it's the thing us normal people should aspire to reach."

My new friend. I am rapidly understanding her thinking, which is to say, her heart. Guileless.

"Neither you nor I are normal, Darcy. We can be, we can do as our hearts desire."

When Robert showed up to take me home, I hid the wedding dress and I told him how happy I was to make a new friend. Of course...

"What's in the box?"

"The dress I will wear for our marriage ceremony."

"Darcy did that?"

"Yes. We talked with your mother. They have it planned. I am being treated well by them. We will have a small traditional wedding. And you and I need to meet with your minister tomorrow."

Darcy smirked over my shoulder. "You got yourself one that's gonna take care of you."

Robert's turn:

I'd spent the day taking the steps to roll myself as gracefully out of college as I could.

And I called Dad.

"You're serious, son?"

"Yes, Dad."

"That little girl's not making you do something you'd rather not do?"

"I dunno if she knows the difference between being the wife of an engineer and being the wife of a farmer."

"We've talked. Engineering might be a lot easier."

"But I'm the son of a farmer and I had that in the back of my head. You know how you and I talked about it. Sachiko says that a son should follow in the steps of an honorable father."

"I'm an honorable father."

"Sachiko used that term. And when I talked about how many acres we own and how many we lease, she said that in feudal Japan you would have been a major lord, a _daimyo_, but you need a couple hundred samurai to back up your title."

"Son, she seems very intelligent. You telling me things like this, that makes me think she's got more of a sense of family and history than I expect from somebody her age, and that includes you."

"That's just it, Dad. Ever since I met Sachiko, I feel like she makes me into a better person."

"Well, I can tell you that your mom's beside herself with the idea about you coming back here."

"Good or bad?"

"Good. She's the one who demanded that we put you and Sachiko up in one of the rent houses here on the farm. We have one vacant and it's just been remodeled."

"We'll take it. For the time being."

"Oh, I guess you have some idea of future plans, then?"

"We always talked about great-grand-dad's old place..."

"Yeah, that place is too far gone to renovate. You know that."

"I know. But when I showed it to Sachiko, she said 'This is the right place'."

"I thought sons wanted to get away from their families and strike out on their own."

"You don't know how I wrestled with that idea, Pop. But when I showed Chiki the place, we went to the cypress corner. She saw the birds, that little swampy corner, said we needed to make that part of our lives."

"Gonna cost a chunk to build out here, you know."

"Chiki's got some money. I have my savings. I'm not going into debt for a college degree, not now."

"We'll come up with a compensation package, Son. You're going to get paid for the work you do."

"I WILL work, Dad."

"I know you will. I didn't raise you to lie around waiting for life to be given to you."

"Dad, I'm coming home and I'm bringing a new member of the family with me."

"Son, you're doing just fine. So when are we going to move you?"

"Ain't gonna be much of a move. Our apartment's furnished here, so no big stuff. Uh ... How about after the wedding? That way we can use my old bedroom until we get the new place furnished."

"Good thinking, but if you need to be here sooner..."

"Wedding's weekend after next. We can stay here until then."

"Who's gonna pick up the furniture?"

"Hadn't given it much thought. I suppose me and Chiki..."

"Don't do that, Son. You probly don't have any more sense of fashion than I do, and a woman should feather her own nest. Let your mom go with 'er."

"Good point, Dad."

"I have 'em every now and then," he laughed.

"Well, as of today I'm out of classes, so we're gonna visit a lot."

"C'mon. Your mom's dyin' to be with her new daughter-in-law."

"Chiki tells me that traditionally, wives are subservient to their mothers-in-law. Mom'll LOVE that."

"Yeah ... You give your mom a new buddy, especially like Chiki, who's gotta start with _Cajun 101_. That's right up 'er alley."

"I hope so."

"Plus, the rest of the family gets to meet 'er."

I mused over the implications of that statement. I've got the standard mix of family – a few normal ones, and a lot of "I didn't think he'd do THAT!" ones. "I'd be at her side for the battles."

"Well, MY side of the family, they'll be okay with 'er."

We talked a bit more. This year's harvest was already in. The workload, though – equipment to be inspected and repaired because Dad was NOT one of those 'run it 'til it breaks' people. There were miles of levees between the rice fields that needed to be checked and repaired. It was a good time to clean out the lateral canals that brought irrigation water from the main canal to the fields.

The little levees between the rice fields, that was mostly work with a hand shovel. Cleaning out the canals was trackhoe work, and I'd been sitting in the cab of a trackhoe since I was twelve. Farm kid, you know? Learned to drive on a tractor, then used to do my turn at driving a truck during the harvest, getting the load from the fields to dryers. Farm kids learn a lot of things really early in life.

They don't learn about cute Japanese girls and reciprocally, cute Japanese girls don't learn about Cajun boys.

"I worry that I'm without art," she told me as we were lying in bed together.

"Don't. I never ... before you..."

"Not I. Lady Sakura was telling me things, training me, but when I came out of the void, found you sleeping, all I knew was that I must get your essence, and the best way was..."

"Chiki, you know you are my first experience..."

"And you, mine, my Robert. That is why we can say we are already married. In two weeks, the fact that already exists will be a matter of public record." She planted kisses on my chest. "Now I am Robert's wife and we get to please each other like this."

Kisses on my chest, carefully avoiding my nipple. I sighed. "Chiki..."

She smiled a sweet, oh so innocent, smile, continuing the kisses. "My man's body. So much a joy..."

"I only hope I bring you as much pleasure, little love."

"You do. From the first time I came to you in the night. It was a task I was given. I did not know. No experience, ever. And yet, the very first time, I felt like I was connected to you, my task gave us both joy."

It is joy. I really don't have a lot of knowledge as to what is and isn't considered 'normal' sexual activities for a married couple. I know about things I've heard in conversations, I know what my instincts urge me to do, and I have Sachiko, who has been told things by Lady Sakura, but we're both inexperienced, except with each other.

I like experimenting with Sachiko. There's a mirror to that thought. Sachiko loves experimenting with me. By this stage of our lives together, though, there's little experimentation. We know where all the good parts are and how to deal with them. Every meeting doesn't always go straight to intercourse.

"I love this," she said, rubbing my head as I rested it on her thigh.

"I don't know what I like more – starting with a perfectly cleaned Sachiko, or Sachiko after she's come and I've come..."

"And you make me come again," she giggled. "I fear that Lady Sakura had much that she didn't teach me."

"Things we were made to learn from each other."

"That thing I do with my teeth." She giggled. "See! You like it! All I did was mention it and you're hard again."

I laughed. "Waiting on Chiki to bite me in places only she knows about."

She was already twisting around in the bed, urging me onto my side to give her complete and unfettered access to my balls. And dick. She started at the head, nipping, working her way down the shaft, nuzzling, loving my balls, and then to that place right there, right at the rear of my scrotum.

Teeth. Suction. I surged. Her hand stroked my dick, a fingertip finding juice starting to flow from the head.

She moved, licking my dick, her tongue gathering my flow, teasing, then... "Mmmmm." She popped up, eyes laughing. "I remember the very first time. I took this out of your clothing. I'd never seen one like yours, with no skin to cover the head, and I thought how beautiful that I had this task." Her head bobbed, stopping my breath. "And I found that it tastes oh so good."

"Put yourself up here," I commanded. "You aren't the only one who likes a tasty partner."

She doesn't weigh a hundred pounds and she's short and I have to curl up if we're both going to eat each other, but...

"Eeeee ... I die!"

"You're not dying. And I love raw things..."

A little of that and I'm still on my back but Chiki is straddling me, her knees at my sides, agile, mobile butt bouncing, working me in and out of herself, little squeaks from her as she urges us to climax. Happens.

"Maybe we are not as pretty as when we reach the heavens," she observes afterward. "I saw myself in the mirror. But afterward ... My Robert is peaceful and handsome..."

"And satisfied," I sighed.

"That, too."

"And my Sachiko looks like the gift she is."

She put a fingertip to my nose, grinned. "And your gift is thinking about food now."

The room was darkening. Getting dark outside.

"What do you have in mind?"

"Bowl of those noodles..." She thinks ramen is great. "And that drink?"

"Lemonade?"

"Yes."

"We can do that."

We bumped around the little kitchenette, making a rudimentary meal together.

"Tomorrow we go shop for food things."

"Yes we will." I'm thinking that my runs through the grocery store were mostly dashes to get ready-to-eat things, convenience foods. I get the feeling that...

"A proper wife prepares meals."

Yep! What I thought.

"I know some things I learned. We can do them. I can do them. You have shown me how things work in your American kitchen. I will show you what a Japanese girl can do."

You have to know we'd hit more than one 'Japanese' restaurant. Had to try. Was about as successful as trying 'Cajun' something away from the family kitchen.

"It is good, but I never had anything like this before," she'd said over a _katsu donburi_ bowl. "We did not cook like this. "Fried?"

Okay, Bud, you're a college student, and a quick Google finds out that frying showed up in Japan with the Portuguese a few hundred years after Sachiko.

"The rice is good. Very white. Rice such as reserved for the wealthy and privileged. Your mother served white rice. I thought it was because your family is wealthy."

Had to explain to her about how brown rice was considered a health food. She shook her head.

"No, to make the rice white is more work for people who already have much work."

"Here, it's not work. If you want brown rice, you have to pay extra."

She shook her head. "That is silly."

So that led to a little more research, videos of how rice was traditionally produced in Japan versus modern milling. She watched the videos, marveling at the parade of fifty-pound bags of finished rice, and the smaller bags for consumer use.

"Crazy world, my Robert."

"I'd be going crazy, Chiki. If I had to make the leap you're making."

"I am living with a gift of understanding of many things in this world, my love, and a sense of serenity for things I see new every day." She kissed me.

"I am beside you. It's our world, Robert."

Chapter 12

Robert's turn:

To be completely honest, before Sachiko came into my world I had resigned myself to the idea that in the event that I actually DID find a girl to marry me, we'd end up with somebody's church looking like Saint Paul's cathedral for a day, all the trappings, ranks of bridesmaids, groomsmen, yards of lace, you know, the thing that so many families do for weddings these days.

Nope. Family church on a Saturday.

Naturally Mom and Dad are there, Mom frantically dabbing her eye with a real handkerchief, Dad in his Sunday suit, looking uncomfortable as only a rice farmer can look while wearing a suit. Darcy was the maid of honor, her fiancé Sam standing as best man.

We had a few old aunts there, a couple of friends, and looking very nice, Lady Ramona.

"Honestly, Robert! I am a spiritual person. I've been in all manner of churches. Do you expect me to burst into flames?" she'd said when Sachiko and I personally invited her.

Uncle Pete stood in for Sachiko's father, to present the bride. He and Aunt Patricia had met Sachiko just one time at Mom and Dad's, heard the 'for public consumption' version of her story, and offered to stand in. "It's part of our wedding tradition, sweetie," Aunt Pat told her.

"It is an honor," Sachiko replied. "I have no family here and only the most distant relatives left in Japan. You honor me by becoming my family."

So, simple, but not too simple. Church-going Mom's admonition – "My son is NOT getting married in front of a judge!"

Our pastor's agreement came after he'd sat and spoken with me and Sachiko at length. He was concerned about her not being Christian. "We try to speak of a husband and wife being "unequally yoked", the Scripture says."

"I very much understand that," Sachiko replied. Then she unloaded "His god will be my god" and he was rocked back.

"You're serious? In your heart."

"Yes, in my heart," she said. "Just like my love for Robert. If he is a child of God, then I shall be equally. Head. Heart. I believe, and I will learn."

He looked at me. "Robert, have you read to her from the _Book of Ruth_?"

"No, sir."

"Sachiko, in our Bible are many books. One of them is about a lady called Ruth. She too left her people to live with her new husband and his people. She said what you have told me."

"Is it not the way I should be, sir? Robert explained to me of baptism, where the water marks leaving the old life behind. It will be so with me."

So it was, when Uncle Pete presented her, she stood beside me, and in front of the congregation of friends and family, we publicly made the vows that already existed in our hearts.

The church's multipurpose hall easily handled our reception, then Sachiko and I slipped away to a honeymoon, choosing a destination on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

Honeymoon. Sachiko and I were already lovers, but something about this lifted us to new heights in exploration of each other.

"Lady Sakura told me of many things I would be expected to know and to understand when I was sent with a man," she said. "Some sounded very distasteful. Others, I was curious, but knew that I dare not even think about them very much. I was sent to The Void before I was old enough to be sold. When I was summoned forth and given my task, I thought of those things, and I thought of Lady Sakura's gentle words given to me to endure the unpleasant."

Her little fingers toyed idly with my depleted dick. "I saw you. You were not like many men who found entertainment at the inn, men who needed to be clean, men who treated women as things to be used and discarded. You ... I could see you ... I knew what I was expected to do. It was commanded. It was a task. But the first time I took you it stopped being a task."

"You were something I couldn't ever imagine. I didn't know what to dream."

Sachiko's turn:

Robert says he didn't know what to dream. I was in The Void. Dreams were impossible.

Now we are in sunlight together in his car, driving to a little place some distance away for what I have learned is called a 'honeymoon', a time for a couple to be together after their marriage, free of cares.

I was free of cares, like a bird freed of winter, finding food and beauty and comfort and yes, a mate and a nest.

And yet there's this American custom, and we're staying in a beautifully clean inn. Robert says 'motel'. I remember Lady Sakura's inn, the one where I stayed. It was also meticulously cleaned and properly furnished. Lady Sakura, an astute businesswoman, owned another of much lesser class, catering to travelers lower in status. I accompanied her to make a visit to oversee her investment there. It was clean as well, but not as well furnished.

Robert assures me that this is not a high level of luxury, that this level of accommodation is within the reach of those of modest means.

I accept that and find it very pleasing, especially when there is a huge, exorbitant bed for us.

"You expect us to use this whole bed?" I ask my chosen.

"We'll start in the middle."

For a couple who were both virgin when we met, we have become artistic

and inventive. We used ALL the bed.

A lovely thing is this 'honeymoon'.

Somehow when I was released from behind the veil into Robert's world, my mind was given much knowledge of the modern world, but that knowledge did not erase the knowledge of my life before. The presence of two realities, two different times, in my head gives me much to marvel at.

Travel is magic. We are in Biloxi, Mississippi. We drove in an afternoon – over a hundred _ri_, two hundred and fifty miles. Such a journey would have been a major event, very expensive, and at least a week's time for anybody except the most important of messengers. Robert says it is a very normal thing available to all who can afford it, and he says that even he, a lowly student...

"You are the son of a very successful and powerful farmer."

"Dad loves it when you say that," he laughs.

This is a pleasant thing to me because I am bound by my upbringing to regard my elders with respect, especially so the family of my husband, so when I treat Mister Richard deferentially, he smiles and laughs. "Mister Ray ... Mizz Pat ... it is as I was brought up."

"It is getting rare today," Mizz Pat tells me.

"Robert is that way. Very polite."

"We raised him up like that," she said. "Still, it is getting rare. I love that he has chosen you, that you're as polite as he is."

So inside me will always be Japanese, but some things, politeness and respect, are not only Japanese, but revered here in Robert's America.

I observe as we are out and about and it is obvious that not all hold the same ideas of correct behavior and self-restraint.

Everything is easy. Clothing? I do not have to go with Lady Sakura to the tailor, have him take measurements, discuss the type of cloth, the color, then wait days for my new clothing. I walk into a shop, a girl greets me, we look, I try on things, as Robert tells me, 'off the rack', choose one or several. No small bag of copper coin to pay with. Credit card. Magic of the very highest order.

Food is the same. Places are waiting for us to come in and select and dine.

We have things to see. There was an ancient oak tree. It was just

across the road from the water, scarred, but still huge, still alive. I was awed. I clapped my hands twice and bowed deeply before it.

"What's that for?" Robert asked.

"In Japan we have many little shrines. Some say the shrine belongs to a _kami_, a spirit. I know now that I am Christian and there is one god, and that kami, well, God created this tree and he created us with spirit to enjoy this tree. I am acknowledging that His creation has moved me and I give a gesture of respect."

Robert clapped his hands and bowed.

I see a thing happening. I am fitting into Robert's world and he is fitting into mine.

We continue our walk, appreciating the things we see, talking.

"Maybe the tree was a powerful kami," Robert said.

"No kami. God. And he let us feel His presence in that moment. With a tree."

"I love the way your mind works, princess."

"No princess. Just a simple little girl at an inn."

"You were never a simple anything."

He charms me. He feeds me. He clothes me. He presents me to friends and family as if I were a rare and costly jewel.

We spent a week on our honeymoon, then it was time to return home.

Part of the morning the day after we got home, we spent in a bank doing things to get some of the money in MY account in Switzerland to a bank in Louisiana.

We then visited some people who will take some of that money and invest it. They say that the return will be a significant income, either for us to live on or to reinvest.

And part of it is to build OUR house, a place that Robert and Sachiko will call home.

Very near the corner where I wish to have my moon-viewing pavilion is what Mister Ray calls the old family place, once home to HIS grandparents, now decayed and falling down.

"If it were in a little better shape, I'd refurbish it," Robert told

his dad.

"Son, you could build TWO nice houses for what it would take..."

So, evenings we spent looking over house plans. It's hard for me to get an idea of what a house might look like from the drawings, but the books also have pictures and although I am very new to American furnishings, I am seeing and understanding.

Daytime, though, we're at that old home place. It's overgrown, but under the brush, I can still see parts of the lawn that once surrounded the house. I noted the large porch on the east side, the windows, and we risked a very careful walk inside to see the rooms.

"This is quite different than your parents' house."

"Different time, Chiki. No air conditioning. In the summer you opened the windows and hoped for enough breeze to cool the place. The porch was where you spent the evenings in the summer. Screens kept the mosquitoes out and let the breeze in."

"I do not remember mosquitoes, but I do know about summers and wishing for breezes. We will have a porch like this."

I also talked with Robert about Japanese kitchens and American kitchens and bathing rooms and many things that come from my old culture and the new culture that is now my life.

"You don't have to leave behind the things you love," he told me.

"Then perhaps like your dad's patio for cooking, except just a little Japanese..."

His dad has a barbecue grill. Much of Japanese cooking can be done on a grill. The cooks at the inn did so, over charcoal, with a place to put pots for soup and rice. In the high summer, this kept heat out of the inn. In the winter, a brazier in the center of the table made for delicious food as well as welcome warmth.

"We can do that. It will make it Sachiko and Robert's house."

"Buddy's house," I said. "What you are called here."

"I like the sound of 'Robert' when you say it. Nobody ever said it like you do."

"Robert," I said, "I came across time and space for you. I was brought here for you. You were here waiting for me. I know it. That is why we are married before the Creator."

"I will never leave you..."

"You had best not. My mind cannot begin to understand what would happen if, between me and God, we talked with Lady Ramona..."

"She'd send the correct demon..."

"I AM the correct demon. I have attached myself to you and we are inseparable." I kissed him. We are outdoors and Lady Sakura cautioned her girls not to display obvious open affection in public, but first, we're not in public, we're in this little copse of cypress trees, and second, I am not one of her girls, I am Sachiko Richard, wife of Robert, and this is MY world, not hers.

"Now, our _kangetsudai_. Here," I motioned, "with posts to frame this much of the view." Our presence frightened some of the birds into flight. Others moved away. "When we build it, they will see it as part of their grove and they will be happy here."

"We can use cypress and cedar..."

"Yes," I said, "but where can we find craftsmen?"

"I know some guys, Dad knows some guys. I'm thinking that if we worked with them, they could come up with something..."

"Very special something, something that makes itself and us part of this place."

Robert says we're 'making do' with our temporary lodging – the rent house the family holds for the farm workers.

In the world I came from – the world that is less and less real to me each day – this would be housing for peasants. Not the farmer himself, rather the poor who worked his farm. Of course in that day, EVERYBODY worked the farm at harvest and at planting, but there were peasants. They had places to live, all the family in one room, dark, often dirty despite efforts to keep it clean. Rice straw mats were outside the meager pay they received.

Mister Ray's peasants live like kings in comparison. I've been wandering around this new world for months now and I'm starting to get used to it, but sometimes it still hits me, as in this morning when I walked out my front door at the same time as my neighbor next door. Her husband is one of Mister Ray's workers, a good one that Mister Ray keeps year-round. There are others who come in for planting and harvesting, but then move on.

The man is Juan Herrera, and his wife stays home with her children, three of them all under four years old.

Juan works every day, often with Robert and Mister Ray. His wife is Isabella and she stays home to tend the children, so there are days when she and I sit together and talk of things and watch the children.

Isabella, like me, has black hair and brown eyes. Her skin is much darker, she says because her ancestry includes the Indian people of Mexico. I think that her children see me sitting beside their mother and think that I am like her, and I am happy that I end up with children who play and sit and hug and cuddle with me.

That, of course, brings up the question. "You and Meester Robert, you will have children?" Isabella asks.

"Of course we will have children. And he is just 'Robert'."

"He ees son of our _patron_. Meester."

"Mister Ray says that Juan and you are like family."

"You say 'Meester Ray'," Isabella noted.

"Yes. He is my father-in-law. That is a status. You and I are friends. Also a status. Mina likes me," I said, bouncing the nine-month-old girl on my knee. "That's a very important status."

Isabella's dark eyes sparkled. "So when you and M ... Robert gonna have one?"

"We may have several. When the house is built."

I don't know how I knew, but deep inside my head I knew that I could not conceive until Robert and I had a permanent home.

Our husbands came home at five o'clock after a day of working in the fields. They use machines, big, noisy powerful machines. I know of the work needed to keep up the levees around rice fields, and in my childhood I saw that everything was done by men, the power being the strength of their backs, the tasks going on for days.

Robert and Juan also use their backs for some small details of the work, but most of it is performed by the machines.

Robert still comes home dirty and tired. Sometimes we ride the short distance over to his parents' house and sit on the porch with his mom and dad, sometimes we gather under the trees behind our house with Juan and Isabella and the children.

Juan often has a cold beer. I have tasted beer. I don't think I like it. I've tasted _sake_ and did not care for that either. Robert does

like lemonade and I know how to fix it as he likes it, a lesson I learned in the kitchen of his mother.

"You make Japanese things for him, I know," Mizz Patty said to me.

I smiled. "I wasn't very much schooled on cooking. Cooking was done by the cooks. I watched, learned a little..."

"Your man will learn to like what you cook, and you will learn to cook what he likes." She smiled. "It is always that way. Ray still talks of his mother's cooking and I talk of mine. And we do not starve."

"I will not let Robert starve," I laughed.

As I said, food preparation was not one of the skills that Madame Sakura was teaching me, but when I was sold to her by my parents at the age of eight, I was given many duties around the inn, one of them being to bring food from the inn's kitchen area to the rooms where guests were entertained. The cooks were people of low status, like me, and we conversed.

I was a young girl, the age of many of their children, so I was treated well and when I asked questions, answers were provided.

That information came with me from The Void, and now, in the kitchens of my mother-in-law and my neighbor, I brought my little morsels of Japanese to insert into Mizz Patty's Cajun and American _"A little bit of everything" she says - kitchens.

My introduction of the Japanese way of pickling fresh summer vegetables turned out to be popular. "It's something like the cucumber and vinegar we grew up with," Mizz Patty told me, "but you add spices and flavors we never used."

Mister Ray smiled. "That pretty much sums up what Chiki does for this whole bunch. New spices and flavors."

I love the life I'm living now. Late one evening we're in bed. It's after Christmas, a winter holiday, something new for me where everything is new. Here, it's warmer than winters in Japan, no snow, for one thing, days of cold rain, clouds.

Perfect days for making soups and lying in bed to make love and dream of spring.

Bad days for the work on our new house, but progress is being made. We visit every day when the craftsmen are working, and often visit when they're not. Robert smiles when I stand in the spaces where our rooms are growing. I spread my arms and twirl, imagining.

We also spend time in the cypress copse where our _Kangetsudai_ will be. I'm more careful moving around, though. Japanese maidens know nothing of American alligators, and last fall I was introduced to one as long as I am tall.

"It's only a five-footer," Robert noted. "Two or three years old. I can have it moved."

"Is it dangerous?"

"Maybe if you stepped on one." Robert proved this by walking towards the thing. The alligator made a quick sprint for the edge of the water. "Or if it's a nesting mother and you get between her and her nest. But that's not a danger until spring, and I don't think this one's going to do it. She's too young. That's not to say she might not be pushed off by a more mature female."

I giggled. "Much as I have pushed off an immature female from my Robert's corner."

"I think Sybil was scaliier," he laughed.

But now it's winter in the grove. The cypress trees have shed their greenery, the marsh grass at the water's edge is brown, and when we walk up, most of the waterfowl fly away. It's only after we sit quietly, appreciating the scene, that they come back.

Robert puts his arm around me, drawing me to his side. "This, this little bit of tranquility, this is one of the riches you've brought to my life, Chiki."

"I only heard talk of a new Buddhism in my life, Robert. I know Buddhism is not the same as Christianity, but the desire for peace, for stillness, to be one with God, that is part of our Christianity. We can see, can appreciate this beauty and know that God exists and He loves us and puts us in this corner of His creation."

"I find that when I sit here, I have to say a prayer of thanksgiving."

I rose, clapped my hands twice, and bowed in a very Japanese prayer. "Like this!" I said. "Thank God for this place and for putting me and my husband in it."

Chapter 13

Robert's turn:

Life back on the family farm. It's different this time. Before, I was

always in school. Spring – the plantings, and fall, the harvest, I was in school. After high school, it was college.

And now I'm back, and the cycle of life changed for me, matching the one I watched with Dad and his father before him: winter – preparation. Spring – planting. Summer – watching. Autumn – harvest. And doing it again next year, and the year after that, and what changed in my mind and my heart that I suddenly saw that as where I was supposed to be – what I was supposed to do, instead of getting my engineering degree and going off into a different world with different patterns and cycles.

The answer to that question was in the left seat of the all-terrain side-by-side four-wheeler. Driving did not come naturally to Sachiko. Nothing existed in her world that was anything like it. Me, typical American kid, had been riding and steering things since I was old enough to walk. Sachiko, though, was a fast learner.

Turning over the wheel of the ATV to her was part of the process I came up with to transition her to driving on public roads.

An “Oh, I missed that turn...” followed by a bit of jockeying and finagling the ATV out of the mud was immensely preferable to pulling my car out of the ditch or explaining a fender-bender to an attentive cop.

Today, we're well into the process, though, and I relax and let her navigate up the paths between the blocks of rice field. On one side of us was rice field, stretched for half a mile off into the distance before fence and treeline blocked the horizon. On the other side was the raised levee that marked one side of the irrigation canal, the artery that supplied the water to flood the fields in the spring and summer.

Our task today was to check the work others had done, overhauling the big sliding gates that we would use to let water out of the canal and into the fields when the time came. This stop was atop a culvert because this gate flowed water into a lateral canal that actually distributed it to fields going off to the north on both sides of the lateral.

It was dry, essentially – water puddled in low, grassy spots down its length.

I did a visual examination of the gate valve. It showed signs of being worked on.

“Let's give it a try,” I said, then, “You can sit here...”

“I will not,” Chiki asserted. “You work. I work.”

One of us on each side of the big handwheel had it spinning. It was obviously worked over. A season in the rain and sun and these things can freeze up tight. This one? Lots of turns of the handle, but the gate was coming up. As it started moving, water made its way under the valve seat, and the higher we got, the more water flowed.

We opened it all the way, then closed it.

"Call that one good," I said.

Chiki stripped off her gloves. "In our fields, where water did not flow from the hills, we had pumps that were powered by men who used their legs, all day, for days, stepping up from one step to the next as the waterwheel picked up water from the stream and lifted it to the fields. You push a button. Something turns, water comes out..."

We'd done the checks of our irrigation pumps, some electric, some diesel, some from the nearby bayou, others from wells. Brown water from the bayou, that didn't faze Chiki, but when I pushed the button on the deep well and clear cold water came tumbling out of a twelve-inch pipe, she was taken aback.

The flow from that well quickly filled the weir with gate valves leading to canals in three directions.

"This is beautiful water, Robert," she said, drinking from a cup I'd handed her.

"Wait'll late spring when we're irrigating. This is THE place to take a swim."

"We must do that. Cold water. Very invigorating. Good for you."

"Yeah," I said. I was imagining her ... I'd been swimming here since Dad used to bring me when I was a kid. As a teen, it was respite from a hot day's work, and, well, clothing-optional. As in skinny-dipping. And here I am imagining this lithe thing knifing off the edge, diving naked into the pool.

She saw my face.

"Robert, you are having those thoughts..."

"Yes, my dear, I am. I am married to the most exotic of beauties and I am having those thoughts."

I don't know if she had to cultivate that giggle, but there it was, coupled with laughing eyes. She looked around. "There is nobody..."

"No, not today..."

"In Japan, maybe a quick swim – no clothing..."

"The water's very cold."

"Good for us." She was undoing her shirt.

We plunged in together. The water was COLD. Reverse sauna. Almost heart-stopping, but we clasped each other, made a few splashes and rubbed the dirt from ourselves, then OUT.

"Shut the pump off and let us go home..." as we hurriedly redressed.

Oh yeah, she's really driving pretty good.

A woman who can reassign my thoughts to see myself back on the farm riding on the tides of eternity is also a woman who can take me to galaxies uncatalogued. The whole range of Sachiko in a playful mood, the giggles, the laughing eyes, the curiosity, the eagerness – My boyhood imagination was woefully lacking.

Just a little bit longer than a quickie but not nearly as long as some of our sessions. For a creature sent as a curse, she fails horribly.

I still have duties to perform, but an afternoon siesta is often in the plans anyway, so nobody gives my temporary absence much thought.

I've brought Sachiko to a little rural farming community. I harbored fears that her otherness, being definitely, beautifully, exotically different, would be a hurdle, a cause of distress.

Wrong.

The solution was in response to my responsibility as a farmer with Dad. We were out, he and I, every day of the week, including Saturday if needed, often early to beat the sun and because sometimes the work didn't fit in neat nine-to-five chunks.

I worried about Sachiko being bored. I wasted that worry. Between Mom on one side and Isabella on the other, Sachiko is not alone during the day.

Mom has the daughter-in-law she wanted and Sachiko stepped right into a 'My Mom' relationship. Mom wanted a helper and a daughter to teach again, and Sachiko wanted to learn.

Learn? Two-way street. Cajun meets Japanese in the kitchen and in the garden, to the benefit of us all.

Same thing happened with Isabella and her kids. I know that when Chiki is tending to those kids with their mother, she's planning for our own.

"When?" I asked her one day.

She smiles. "When we are in our new home. Our son will learn his home from the womb."

"And you KNOW this?"

"It is the time allotted for these things, Robert. A period of time for you and me to learn each other, a period of time for me to fit into this world given to me. Then we will be a family within a family within a village. Our son shall follow his father as you follow yours."

"Just a son?"

She kissed me. "A son first, then a daughter."

"You haven't told Mom and Dad this yet, have you?"

"They would not understand how I know with such assuredness. When we are in the new home, we will announce our pregnancy."

"Our pregnancy?"

"Surely, Robert, nothing between us is more ours than pregnancy."

"True."

We're keeping a close eye on the progress at our homesite. The various contractors are used to us. First, they're people our family has dealt with for generations. Second, we're not there asking stupid questions and making ridiculous demands. Third, we seldom show up without goodies, anywhere from cake and cookies to a big pot of gumbo.

Today it's some rice cakes that Chiki makes. Before her, I'd never eaten anything of the sort. I mean, Dad's a rice farmer. I was raised with rice on the table every day, but aside from the occasional rice pudding, we Cajuns didn't have any sweets made with rice. Sachiko changed that, adding sweetened bean paste to our diets, as well. "these are the sweet things we had," she explained to mom and Dad. "They were a rare treat for special holidays. I think I got them right. I hope you like them."

Mom and Dad liked them. They became something that showed up often when Sachiko and I met with friends and family. And today a tray of them went to the construction crew. I think we're getting extra care

and attention because they all smile when we show up.

Six months.

Late summer. Dad and I made our rounds of the fields, now drained, the stalks golden and heavy. Assuming we don't get destructive weather – rain right now would not be good, and heaven forbid, it's hurricane season as well – we'll start harvesting our fields next week. We'll be in one of our neighbor's fields later this week, the first to cut (harvest) in the area.

Six months. We said good-bye to the transient worker house we'd been occupying, moving into our new (and if the pattern holds true as it has for a few generations) and last home. It's mostly American-style, but there are a few changes

In the bathroom there's a generously-sized shower, but there's also a Japanese-style ofuro and the whole of the bathroom floor is tiled as a drain. Sachiko gave me my first-ever Japanese traditional bath. Of course she could've washed me in the equipment shed with a bucket of cold water and a scrub brush and I'd've been happy, but her request and specifications for our home's bath gave me a little corner of paradise. I enjoyed it after many a hard, hot, dusty day in the fields.

Another Sachiko feature was an alcove off the living room.

"A four-and a half tatami room, my reminder that I am Japanese as well as American," she said. And so it was. When Mom and Dad came to view the finished room, Sachiko pointed out that the mats were made of rush and rice stalks, per tradition, showing that our lives were tied to our land and livelihood. She also made a point of showing her version of a tokonoma, the art feature being a blown-up black and white print of great-great grand-dad's original home place.

All that, when dumped on Mom and Dad, means if I ever wronged this oriental jewel I'd brought into their family, I'd be the outcast.

So it was, one hot summer day, that we were home together. I'd just showered a day's grime off me, Sachiko laid out comfortable clothing, let me get dressed, then kissed me.

"Tomorrow I must go to the doctor," she said.

"Are you sick?"

"No, my Robert, the very opposite of sick. Today I did a little test. Tomorrow, the doctor will do another, but he can only tell me what I know in my soul. You and I shall have a son..."

If you enjoyed the story, take time to email me at
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