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[The Illustrious Prince](#)

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This Book:  
[Contents](#)  
[Previous Chapter](#)  
[Next Chapter](#)

## Chapter 13 - East And West

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After the supper there were obligations which the Prince, whose sense of etiquette was always strong, could not avoid. He took Penelope back to her aunt, reminding her that the next dance but one belonged to him. Miss Morse, who was an invalid and was making one of her very rare appearances in Society, watched him curiously as he disappeared.

"I wonder what they'd think of your new admirer in New York, Penelope," she remarked.

"I imagine," Penelope answered, "that they would envy me very much."

Miss Morse, who was a New Englander of the old-fashioned type, opened her lips, but something in her niece's face restrained her.

"Well, at any rate," she said, "I hope we don't go to war with them. The Admiral wrote me, a few weeks ago, that he saw no hope for anything else."

"It would be a terrible complication," the Duchess sighed, "especially considering our own alliance with Japan. I don't think we need consider it seriously, however. Over in America you people have too much common sense."

"The Government have, very likely," Miss Morse admitted, "but it isn't always the Government who decide things or who even rule the country. We have an omnipotent Press, you know. All that's wanted is a weak President, and Heaven knows where we should be!"

"Of course," the Duchess remarked, "Prince Maiyo is half an Englishman. His mother was a Stretton-Wynne. One of the first intermarriages, I should think. Lord Stretton-Wynne was Ambassador to Japan."

"I think," said Penelope, "that if you could look into Prince Maiyo's heart you would not find him half an Englishman. I think that he is more than seven-eighths a Japanese."

"I have heard it whispered," the Duchess remarked, leaning forward, "that he is over here on an exceedingly serious mission. One thing is quite certain. No one from his country, or from any other country, for that matter, has ever been so entirely popular amongst us. He has the most delightful manners of any man I ever knew of any race."

Sir Charles came up, with gloomy face, to claim a dance. After it was over, he led Penelope back to her aunt almost in silence.

"You are dancing again with the Prince?" he asked.

"Certainly," she answered. "Here he comes."

The Prince smiled pleasantly at the young man, who towered like a giant above him, and noticed at once his lack of cordiality.

"I am selfish!" he exclaimed, pausing with Penelope's hand upon his coat sleeve. "I am taking you too much away from your friends, and spoiling your pleasure, perhaps, because I do not dance. Is it not so? It is your kindness to a stranger, and they do not all appreciate it."

"We will go into the winter garden and talk it over," she answered, smiling.

They found their old seats unoccupied. Once more they sat and listened to the fall of the water.

"Prince," said Penelope, "there is one thing I have learned about you this evening, and that is that you do not love questions. And yet there is one other which I should like to ask you."

"If you please," the Prince murmured.

"You spoke, a little time ago," she continued, "of some great crisis with which your country might soon come face to face. Might I ask you this: were you thinking of war with the United States?"

He looked at her in silence for several moments.

"Dear Miss Penelope," he said,--"may I call you that? Forgive me if I am too forward, but I hear so many of our friends--"

"You may call me that," she interrupted softly.

"Let me remind you, then, of what we were saying a little time ago," he went on. "You will not take offence? You will understand, I am sure. Those things that lie nearest to my heart concerning my country are the things of which I cannot speak."

"Not even to me?" she pleaded. "I am so insignificant. Surely I do not count?"

"Miss Penelope," he said, "you yourself are a daughter of that country of which we have been speaking."

She was silent.

"You think, then," she asked, "that I put my country before everything else in the world?"

"I believe," he answered, "that you would. Your country is too young to be wholly degenerate. It is true that you are a nation of fused races--a strange medley of people, but still you are a nation. I believe that in time of stress you would place your country before everything else."

"And therefore?" she murmured.

"And therefore," he continued with a delightful smile, "I shall not discuss my hopes or fears with you. Or if we do discuss them," he went on, "let us weave them into a fairy tale. Let us say that you are indeed the Daughter of All America and that I am the Son of All Japan. You know what happens in fairyland when two great nations rise up to fight?"

"Tell me," she begged.

"Why, the Daughter of All America and the Son of All Japan stand hand in hand before their people, and as they plight their troth, all bitter feelings pass away, the shouts of anger cease, and there is no more talk of war."

She sighed, and leaned a little towards him. Her eyes were soft and dusky, her red lips a little parted.

"But I," she whispered, "am not the Daughter of All America."

"Nor am I," he answered with a sigh, "the Son of all Japan."

There was a breathless silence. The water splashed into the basin, the music came throbbing in through the flower-hung doorways. It seemed to Penelope that she could almost hear her heart beat. The blood in her veins was dancing to the one perfect waltz. The moments passed. She drew a little breath and ventured to look at him. His face was still and white, as though, indeed, it had been carved out of marble, but the fire in his eyes was a living thing.

"We have actually been talking nonsense," she said, "and I thought that you, Prince, were far too serious."

"We were talking fairy tales," he answered, "and they are not nonsense. Do not you ever read the history of your country as it was many hundreds of years ago, before this ugly thing they call civilization weakened the sinews of our race and besmirched the very face of duty? Do you not like to read of the times when life was simpler and more natural, and there was space for every man to live and grow and stretch out his hands to the skies,--every man and every woman? They call them, in your literature, the days of romance. They existed, too, in my country. It is not nonsense to imagine for a little time that the ages between have rolled away and that those days are with us?"

"No," she answered, "it is not nonsense. But if they were?"

He raised her fingers to his lips and kissed them. The touch of his hand, the absolute delicacy of the salute itself, made it unlike any other caress she had ever known or imagined.

"The world might have been happier for both of us," he whispered.

Somerfield, sullen and discontented, came and looked at them, moved away, and then hesitatingly returned.

"Willmott is waiting for you," he said. "The last was my dance, and this is his."

She rose at once and turned to the Prince.

"I think that we should go back," she said. "Will you take me to my aunt?"

"If it must be so," he answered. "Tell me, Miss Penelope," he added, "may I ask your aunt or the Duchess to bring you one day to my house to see my treasures? I cannot say how long I shall remain in this country. I would like you so much to come before I break up my little home."

"Of course we will," she answered. "My aunt goes nowhere, but the Duchess will bring me, I am sure. Ask her when I am there, and we can agree about the day."

He leaned a little towards her.

"Tomorrow?" he whispered.

She nodded. There were three engagements for the next day of which she took no heed.

"Tomorrow," she said. "Come and let us arrange it with the Duchess."

Prince Maiyo left Devenham House to find the stars paling in the sky, and the light of an April dawn breaking through the black clouds eastwards. He dismissed his electric brougham with a little wave of the hand, and turned to walk to his house in St. James's Square. As he walked, he bared his head. After the long hours of artificially heated rooms, there was something particularly soothing about the fresh sweetness of the early spring morning. There was something, it seemed to him, which reminded him, however faintly, of the mornings in his own land,--the perfume of the flowers from the window-boxes, perhaps, the absence of that hideous roar of traffic, or the faint aromatic scent from the lime trees in the Park, heavy from recent rain. It was the quietest hour of the twenty-four,--the hour almost of dawn. The night wayfarers had passed away, the great army of toilers as yet slumbered. One sad-eyed woman stumbled against him as he walked slowly up Piccadilly. He lifted his hat with an involuntary gesture, and her laugh changed into a sob. He turned round, and emptied his pockets of silver into her hand, hurrying away quickly that his eyes might not dwell upon her face.

"A coward always," he murmured to himself, a little wearily, for he knew where his weakness lay,--an invincible repugnance to the ugly things of life. As he passed on, however, his spirits rose again. He caught a breath of lilac scent from a closed florist's shop. He looked up to the skies, over the housetops, faintly blue, growing clearer every moment. Almost he fancied that he looked again into the eyes of this strange girl, recalled her unexpected yet delightful frankness, which to him, with his love of abstract truth, was, after all, so fascinating. Oh, there was much to be said for this Western world!--much to be said for those whose part it was to live in it! Yet, never so much as during that brief night walk through the silent streets, did he realize how absolutely unfitted he was to be even a temporary sojourner in this vast city. What would they say of him if they knew,--of him, a breaker of their laws, a guest, and yet a sinner against all their conventions; a guest, and yet one whose hand it was which would strike them, some day or other, the great blow! What would she think of him? He wondered whether she would realize the truth, whether she would understand. Almost as he asked himself the question, he smiled. To him it seemed a strange proof of the danger in which a weaker man would stand of passing under the yoke of this hateful

Western civilization. To dream of her--yes! To see her face shining upon him from every beautiful place, to feel the delight of her presence with every delicious sensation,--the warmth of the sunlight, the perfume of the blossoms he loved! There was joy in this, the joy of the artist and the lover. But to find her in his life, a real person, a daughter of this new world, whose every instinct would be at war with his--that way lay slavery! He brushed the very thought from him.

As he reached the door of his house in St. James' Square, it opened slowly before him. He had brought his own servants from his own country, and in their master's absence sleep was not for them. His butler spoke to him in his own language. The Prince nodded and passed on. On his study table--a curious note of modernism where everything seemed to belong to a bygone world--was a cablegram. He tore it open. It consisted of one word only. He let the thin paper fall fluttering from his fingers. So the time was fixed!

Then Soto came gliding noiselessly into the room, fully dressed, with tireless eyes but wan face,--Soto, the prototype of his master, the most perfect secretary and servant evolved through all the years.

"Master," he said, "there has been trouble here. An Englishman came with this card."

The Prince took it, and read the name of Inspector Jacks.

"Well?" he murmured.

"The man asked questions," Soto continued. "We spoke English so badly that he was puzzled. He went away, but he will come again."

The Prince smiled, and laid his hand almost caressingly upon the other's shoulder.

"It is of no consequence, Soto," he said,--"no consequence whatever."