SWORD OF THE SAMURAI

Fushi Columbo and the Colonel Differ on a Question of Honor

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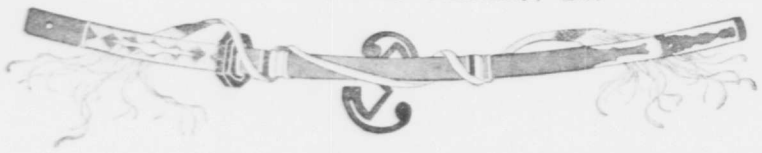

FUSHI COLUMBO swung to and fro on the gate. The early twilight of a winter evening fell fast. Everywhere the snow, new fallen, made a beauty of its own. Overhead the sky drifted gray; in the west a long crimson wave crested the hills. Down the long avenue the electric lights flashed up one by one and hung like stars in ever-receding tiers.

The house stood alone, with an iron fence and swinging gate. It was here that Fushi hung, his chubby hands clasping the spikes, his small round chin just visible above his muffler. He was ten years old, but looked seven. His overcoat came down to the tops of his yellow-leather leggings and the collar went up with the muffler to meet his fur cap; in the opening between one discovered his face, a small but perfect oval, a clear pale olive except where extreme cold had tipped his nose and chin with unaccustomed red. His eyes, the bright oblique eyes of the Japanese, were keen and twinkling, the lids folding up and inward like a wax doll's. His expression told nothing, for his little Oriental soul was tightly folded in like his eyelids.

His father, an enthusiastic admirer of America, had called him Christopher Columbus; properly therefore his name was Fushimi Columbus Christopher, but no one called him so. He had come to be Fushi Columbo in the American household where Fate, that singular dame, had dropped him much as a bur at the touch of frost drops a chestnut.

His mother had died in the land of cherry-blossoms, and his father, bringing the child to the United States for education, had left him with friends in Washington when he was called back to fight in Manchuria. Fushi had become as one of the American family, and he had two strong sentiments: he adored "the lady with the fluffy yellow curls," whom he had named in his fanciful way "the Lady Kiku," which signifies the Lady Chrysanthemum; and he abhorred "the lady with the cap," her mother, who had discovered Fushi in unguarded moments when the little Oriental fell from grace and ate the mince-meat.

As there were only two in Fushi's horizon, the lady of the curls and the lady of the cap, his creed was simple. At least there had been only two until the week before. Since then the soul of Fushi Columbo had been in deep waters and that winter evening found him grappling with a big resolution. Outwardly, however, his face was calm, smooth and even smiling, but the oblique eyes glittered with watchfulness as he swung on the gate.

After awhile his patience was rewarded by the appearance of a tall man with his greatcoat buttoned to his chin and his hat low over his brows. He looked up at the house as he passed, but took no heed of the chubby figure hanging on the gate.

Fushi watched him, and his almond eyes narrowed. Then, when the man's figure disappeared in the snowy distance, he left the gate and climbing the steps opened the front door softly. The house was still. The staircase ascended to his right and opposite loomed an old-time clock. To the left the crimson portieres covered the drawing-room door. The wide space between that and the clock was ornamented by a collection of Oriental weapons. Fushi knew everyone of those weapons by heart; but they were just beyond his reach. He tried a chair that was not high enough, then he tried the table that was still too low, and the clock ticked furiously—Fushi felt sure, in his guilty soul, that it was calling to the lady with the cap. He got down from the table and faced defeat, his finger in his mouth, his chubby legs set well apart. Then with great difficulty and some noise he lifted the chair to the table, climbing on that: lithe as a cat, he set up the chair, mounted, and behold—his heart's desire!

Behold—His Heart's Desire!

It hung within his reach—a short narrow Japanese sword used for a peculiar purpose by the Samurai. Fushi Columbo, knowing that purpose as well as his ancestors, took it down and opening his overcoat buttoned the sword inside against his chest. Then the little Jap drew a long breath and pattered out into the street. It looked white enough to reach to the New Jerusalem; but Fushi did not think of that, his religion being curiously mixed, a kind of vaudeville of heathen traditions, Sunday-school lessons and drastic instructions from the lady with the cap, who had been bred a blue Presbyterian and did not view Fushi as one of the elect.

"I Like Verra Well What They Eat in My Country."

The child trotted as fast as his little yellow legs could carry him, and though the distance was not great he panted slightly when he finally paused in front of a tall apartment-house and eyed it with distinct disapproval. A great resolution had carried him so far; but now in the face of the lighted entrance and the possibility of bell-boys who would call him "heathen Chinee," Fushi paused. However, he was stolidly determined, and after a moment walked up the wide steps, pushed open the swinging glass doors and entered. Knowing his way, he trotted ahead up two long flights of stairs. There was a number—305—fairly in front of him, and placing one plump finger on the electric button, he kept it there with sublime faith in obtaining his ends.

A tall man, he who had passed the gate, opened the door and gazed with unfeigned astonishment at his small visitor. "Why, Fushi Columbo!" he exclaimed. "What in the name of all the powers has brought you here?"

Fushi looked up—he had to bend his head back to do it—and drew a deep sigh. He admired height, and the six feet of manhood in front of him smote his soul with envy. "I have come to see the Lord Colonel," he announced.

"The Lord Colonel is honored," said Colonel Enton, a quizzical expression in his gray eyes. "Walk in, Fushi, and make yourself at home. I thought all you people had finally cut my acquaintance."

The little Oriental walked slowly into the room and stood surveying it with oblique eyes.

Colonel Enton gravely tendered a chair to his visitor and took one himself. A sudden hope stirred in his bosom. "Have you a message for me, Fushi?" he asked.

Fushi gravely inclined his head and unbuttoning his overcoat drew out a short cruel Japanese sword, while his host looked on in intense bewilderment. Then he walked up to the table in front of the American and laid the sword upon it, bowing across at him like a little figure on a tea-pot.

"Thank you kindly, Fushi Columbo," said the Colonel; "but why this gift?"

Fushi regarded him with an immense unwinking surprise. "It is the sword of my ancestors," he said. "I bring it to you because you make the Lady Kiku to cry. You hurt her feelings verra much, Lord Colonel, and Fushimi Columbus brings you the sword."

"Oh!" exclaimed the Colonel in sudden deep enlightenment, "I make the Lady Kiku cry, do I? Well, I don't think I'm sorry she cares. Does she care very much, Fushi?"

The Oriental gazed at him in deep displeasure. He pointed his chubby finger at the weapon. "In my country," he said gravely—"in my country men know verra well how to die."

The Colonel had a flash of fuller knowledge. "Oh, I say, not really?" he exclaimed. "Why, Fushi, you don't mean that I'm to kill myself? Is that for hara-kiri?"

Fushi nodded solemnly.

The Colonel broke into a little annoyed laugh. He flushed and stared at the sword.

Fushi regarded him with patient endurance. "In my country it is done," he remarked.

"Look here, Fushi, did she send you—did Mrs. Enton my wife send you?" demanded the officer fiercely.

Fushi shook his head. "No," he said. "I bring you the sword—it is right if you do it. You will do it, Lord Colonel?"

Colonel Enton laughed bitterly enough. "I'll consider it, Fushi," he said. "Your methods are simple."

"It is done in my country," repeated Fushi, and buttoned up his coat; then he replaced his worsted mits.

"You do not care to stay to witness it?" mocked the Colonel.

Fushi shook his head. "We have dinner at halve past seben," he remarked with a delicious little drawl, for he could never conquer half and seven. "The lady with the cap is verra cross."

"She is, confound her!" heartily agreed his host.

"I go home to dinner," said Fushi cheerfully.

"You cold-blooded little beggar!" exclaimed the Colonel.

Though he hurried as fast as his fat legs could carry him, Fushi was late getting home. Happily, however, the latch was still down and he slipped in unnoticed. From the drawing-room came the voices of two women, one soft and slightly depre-