

**Princess Fiaki's Birthday**  
A TALE OF OLD DAYS IN JAPAN.

IT WAS winter and very cold, and the palace of costly wood carved with art and wealth of detail, had the air about it cold around the room in which he sat.

Maximilian had robes lined with ermine and surrounded with attendants all in the same rich, costly, and beautiful attire. He sat in a room of state, with a view of the garden and the palace.

Without a word the ministers fled immediately from the palace. In less than an hour there was not a palace but a house in the city nor a village in the country where the inhabitants were not tracing flowers, and if one had looked that night from the emperor's palace he would have seen thousands of lanterns bobbing about among the trees in every direction.

The next morning, as her women finished dressing her, Fiaki heard the sound of sweet singing and many instruments around her window.

"Ah! it is my birthday today," she said with a smile. "Why are the gods so cruel as to cause it to fall in the winter time?" Her women pulled aside the curtains from the window.

"What a beautiful day, mistress," they said.

"Yes, as if it too were a creature," she said, looking out.

Fiaki, or Nay of Sunshine, sat on a bed of cushions in the hall of her own private chamber. The robes of her women were all lined with ermine and she had a view of the garden and the palace.

The garden was a garden of flowers, and the palace was a palace of flowers. The garden was a garden of flowers, and the palace was a palace of flowers.

As the prince entered, Fiaki hid her face for an instant in the long sleeves of her robe, thus greeting her father with a tender and modest salute. The damio smiled with pleasure at the grace and beauty of the child whom he adored. He overwhelmed her with caressing names, asking her if she was happy and if there was nothing she desired.

"An illustrious prince and father," cried Fiaki, clasping her hands sorrowfully, "how can I be happy while the earth suffers? How can I smile when the skies weep? Ah, the gods are cruel to have created the winter season! I feel like a poor little exiled plant, barely alive, and yet unable to die!"

"It is certain there is nothing she desires so much as springtime," thought the prince to himself, once more back in his little room.

He frowned fiercely at the gray clouds outside. Suddenly he commanded the presence of his chief minister. Nai-da-tsin hastened to learn the wishes of his illustrious lord, but the minister's heart sank at the sight of the prince's somber face.

"To-morrow is my daughter's birthday," he began, coldly. "I desire, do you understand, I desire that by day-break to-morrow the trees and bushes of the park and the entire country surrounding the palace shall be covered with flowers, as in the first months of the springtime. You may go."

"Your will shall be obeyed in all things," murmured the minister, bowing himself out backward.

Once outside, he clutched his hands in the protecting sleeves of his garment.

"It is exile, it is death!" he thought, bitterly. "What can I have done that should disgrace me?"

He examined his conscience severely.

"Nothing," he said at last. "The prince really desires that the spring should come to his daughter. Well, I will not trouble about death. But is there no other way?"

A sudden inspiration came to him, and he ran swiftly to his own palace, noting with terror that the short winter day was nearly ended. Gathering his colleagues around him, he told them of the extraordinary demand of the prince.

"There is only one thing to be done," he went on, noting the fright-

ened faces about him. "Listen! We may yet be saved.

"Everyone within three leagues around, men, women, girls and boys, nobles, merchants and peasants, must set instantly to work with silk, velvet, satin and paper, and make scores of flowers. Let them cut up their clothes, their hangings; let them make use of their fans, cushions; everything they have.

"Then, before daybreak, all these flowers must be tied, fastened or glued to all the trees and bushes of the park and all the country near the palace. The gods have best bestowed a palace and the poorest the fairest away. All the painters and artists must superintend the decorations.

"Take the army, take the hospitals, take the prisons. Every one must work, no one must sleep to eat or drink to-night. Go and remember that your very lives depend upon your success."

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