



# *The Sad Story of the Yaoya's Daughter*

Green Willow And Other Japanese Fairy Tales

Japanese

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*Easy*  
*6 min read*

There was a wandering ballad-singer who came to a great house in Yedo where they wished to be entertained.

“Will you have a dance or a song?” said the ballad-singer; “or shall I tell you a story?” The people of the house bade him tell a story.

“Shall it be a tale of love or a tale of war?” said the ballad-singer.

“Oh, a tale of love,” they said.

“Will you have a sad tale or a merry?” asked the ballad-singer.

They were all agreed that they would hear a sad tale.

“Well, then,” said the ballad-singer, “listen, and I will tell you the sad story of the Yaoya’s daughter.”

So he told this tale.

The Yaoya was a poor hard-working man, but his daughter was the sweetest thing in Yedo. You must know she was one of the five beauties of the city, that grew like five cherry-trees in the time of the spring blossoming.

In autumn the hunters lure the wild deer with the sound of the flute. The deer are deceived, for they believe that they hear the voices of their mates. So are they trapped and slain. For like calls to like. Youth calls to youth, beauty to beauty, love to love. This is law, and this law was the undoing of the Yaoya's daughter.

When there was a great fire in Yedo, so great that more than the half of the city was burned, the Yaoya's house was ruined also. And the Yaoya and his wife and his daughter had no roof over them, nor anywhere to lay their heads. So they went to a Buddhist temple for shelter and stayed there many days, till their house should be rebuilt. Ah me, for the Yaoya's daughter! Every morning at sunrise she bathed in the spring of clean water that was near the temple. Her eyes were bright and her cheeks ruddy. Then she would put on her blue gown and sit by the water-side to comb her long hair. She was a sweet and slender thing, scarce fifteen years old. Her name was O Schichi.

"Sweep the temple and the temple courts," her father bade her. "'Tis well we should do so much for the good priests who give us shelter." So O Schichi took the broom and swept. And as she laboured she sang merrily, and the grey precincts of the temple grew bright.

Now there was a young acolyte who served in the holy place. Gentle he was and beautiful. Not a day passed but he heard the singing of O Schichi; not a day passed but he set eyes upon her, going her ways, so light and slender, in the ancient courts of the temple.

It was not long before he loved her. Youth calls to youth, beauty to beauty, love to love. It was not long before she loved him.

Secretly they met together in the temple grove. Hand in hand they went, her head against his arm.

"Ah," she cried, "that such a thing should be! I am happy and unhappy. Why do I love you, my own?"

"Because of the power of Karma," said the acolyte. "Nevertheless, we sin, O heart's desire, grievously we sin, and I know not what may come of it."

“Alas,” she said, “will the gods be angry with us, and we so young?”

“I cannot tell,” he said; “but I am afraid.”

Then the two of them clung together, trembling and weeping. But they pledged themselves to each other for the space of many existences.

The Yaoya had his dwelling in the quarter of the city called Honjo, and presently his house was rebuilt which had been destroyed by the fire. He and his wife were glad, for they said, “Now we shall go home.”

O Schichi hid her face with her sleeve and wept bitter tears.

“Child, what ails you?” said her mother.

O Schichi wept. “Oh! oh! oh!” she cried, and swayed herself to and fro.

“Why, maid, what is it?” said her father.

Still O Schichi wept. “Oh! oh! oh!” she cried, and swayed herself to and fro.

That night she went to the grove. There was the acolyte, very pale and sorrowful, beneath the trees.

“They will part us,” she cried, “O my dear heart’s desire. The dear gods are angry with us, and we so young.”

“Ah,” he said, “I was afraid.... Farewell, dear maid, O little maid, sweet and slender. Remember we are pledged to one another for the space of many existences.”

Then the two of them clung together, trembling and weeping, and they bade farewell a thousand times.

The next day they bore O Schichi home to Honjo. She grew languid and listless. White she grew, white as the buckwheat flower. She drooped and she failed. No longer was she numbered with the five beauties of Yedo, nor likened to a cherry-tree in the time of the spring blossoming. All the day long she brooded silently. At night she lay awake in her low bed.

“Oh! oh!” she moaned, “the weary, weary night! Shall I never see him? Must I die of longing? Oh! oh! the weary, weary night....”

Her eyes grew large and burning bright.

“Alas! poor maid,” said her father.

“I am afraid ...” said her mother. “She will lose her wits.... She does not weep any more.”

At last O Schichi arose and took straw and made it into a bundle; and she put charcoal in the bundle and laid it beneath the gallery of her father’s house. Then she set fire to the straw and the charcoal, and the whole burnt merrily. Furthermore the wood of her father’s house took light and the house was burnt to the ground.

“I shall see him; I shall see him!” shrieked O Schichi, and fell in a swoon.

Howbeit all the city knew that she had set fire to her father’s house. So she was taken before the judge to be tried for her wrong-doing.

“Child,” said the judge, “what made you do this thing?”

“I was mad,” she said, “I did it for love’s sake. I said, ‘I will burn the house, we shall have nowhere to lay our heads, then we shall take shelter at the temple; I will see my lover.’ Lord, I have not seen him nor heard of him these many, many moons.”

“Who is your lover?” said the judge.

Then she told him.

Now as for the law of the city, it was hard and could not be altered. Death was the penalty for the crime of the Yaoya’s daughter. Only a child might escape.

“My little maid,” the judge said, “are you perhaps twelve years old?”

“Nay, lord,” she answered.

“Thirteen, then, or fourteen? The gods send you may be fourteen. You are little and slender.”

“Lord,” she said, “I am fifteen.”

“Alas, my poor maid,” said the judge, “you are all too old.”

So they made her stand upon the bridge of Nihonbashi. And they told her story aloud; they called it from the house-tops so that all might hear. There she was for all the world to look upon.

Every day for seven days she stood upon the bridge of Nihonbashi, and drooped in the glare of the sun and of men’s glances. Her face was white as the flower of the buckwheat. Her eyes were wide and burning bright. She was the most piteous thing under the sky. The tender-hearted wept to see her. They said, “Is this the Yaoya’s daughter that was one of the five beauties of Yedo?”

After the seven days were passed they bound O Schichi to a stake, and they piled faggots of wood about her and set the faggots alight. Soon the thick smoke rose.

“It was all for love,” she cried with a loud voice. And when she had said this, she died.

“The tale is told,” said the ballad-singer. “Youth calls to youth, beauty to beauty, love to love. This is law, and this law was the undoing of the Yaoya’s daughter.”

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