

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers I*, 1885 – 1886 Oct 3, '85 to May 29, '86) The original is very badly faded.

Budget – Hinkle editor
April 24, 1886

A Japanese Ghost Story

“Sharper than a Serpent's tooth is a thankless child.” Don't think from this beginning, my patient auditors, that I am going to discourse to you on children. To such crusty old bachelors as the nautical members and myself, all children are at times too sharp. –As I was carving my chin and neck with conventional geometrical designs the other day, I thought of the old adage and paraphrased it “Sharper than a Serpent's tooth or a thankless child, – is a dull razor.” A dull razor is always too ready to cut were it is not wanted to cut, but never seems to cut the hair. However, the razor in this instance was sharper than the one wielding it for hair, and the near approach to death at my own hands, that resulted from the dullness of that razor, made me feel that I was in danger of committing hari kari. Thereby hangs a tale, – a Japanese tale of love, death, and ghosts.

Ko Chang, a young man of Nagasaki was very much in love with the fair Chu Lu, the daughter of his next door neighbor. Chu Lu was as fair and almond-eyed a maid as ever the sun of Japan or the son of Ko Chang's father, for that matter smiled upon. And the son of Ko Chang's father had smiled upon the lovely Chu Lu very often, but, alas, in vain. Many a time had he beseeched his true love to take the many (sic) Ko Chang to her bosom and household; but Chu Lu merely squinted at him out of her off eye, and called his attention to the fact that the hue of green was absent from that optic. She even told him that he was not worth the black tooth-paste which did so much to enhance her pure Japanese beauty. Ko Chang was in despair. He kicked holes through the paper walls of the paternal mansion in his anger, and even went so far as to threaten hari kari. At this the fair Chu Lu weakened. That anyone should be willing to give such a signal proof of his love, as to offer to sacrifice himself on the altar of his affections, melted her hitherto unyielding liver. (I believe, with the Japanese, the seat of the affections is in the liver). Her liver yearned to him, and conquered the dictates of her heart. (With the Japs, the heart is the seat of intellect). Such a beautiful corpse, too, as Ko Chang would make, would lend honor to her family grave-yard. So, at length she called the melancholy Ko Chang to her side, and said: Ko Chang,

dear, do you love me still?" "Why do you ask me such a foolish question? Although you are never still, I have always loved you, you must know that I love you still or not still." "Oh, Ko Chang, my love you do not understand me. Did you not say that if I did not love you, you would commit hari kari?" "Yes; and I will." "Well, Ko Chang, since you are so devoted, I will be kind to you. My liver, too, warms to you, and I have finally decided that we shall unify and fructify on one condition." "Oh, happy am I," cried the unsuspecting Ko Chang. "I am the happiest man in Japan!" "But you do not inquire the condition," pursued the wily maiden. "What care I for the condition; what is it?" "I will marry you after you have committed hari kari." "What! marry me after I am dead; liverless maid, you are toying with my young and innocent affections." "Why, you are unreasonable, man; you just said you would commit hari kari if I did not love you, and now when I tell you I will love you if you do commit hari kari, you become angry, and call me liverless. Oh, I have misjudged you. I have allowed my liver to conquer my heart. Farewell; I shall see you no more." With this the fair Chu Lu rushed into the house of her ancestors bewailing her lost lover, and even refused to blacken her teeth in time for the evening callers.

Ko Chang, on the other hand went to his own vine and fig tree, and sat under his father's porch and wept. Finally he dried his tears and began to think it all over. True, he had threatened to end this miserable existence in case his Chu Lu refused his true love, for what was life without Chu Lu? And now Chu Lu said that if he should hari kari himself off, she would marry him. What good would it do him to marry her when he was loafing round the landing on the sacred river, looking for a boatman to take him across for nothing. It was too much like the "fire-works in the evening" to celebrate the death of our friend Nanki Poo. Finally a bright thought struck him, and he retired to the well of his father where he was engaged for a long time in conversation, seemingly with himself. Chu Lu, who, in the meantime had been watching him through a hole that she had punched in the paper screen that formed the wall of her ancestral residence, was surprised to see him approach her back porch with a smile on his face. She went out to meet him. "Have you come back to accept my offer, or are you going to try to make me change my mind? Do not try that, I warn you; for you know a woman never changes her mind." "No, my beloved Chu Lu, I have resolved to accede to your terms. I shall commit hari kari; but you must promise to marry me afterwards." "What, you consent to kill yourself with the idea of marrying me after you are dead?" "Yes, loved one, that was your own proposition, and I accede to it."

The fair daughter of the father of Chu Lu was thunder struck. She had never supposed for an instant that the son of the father of Ko Chang would accept her proposition. Her liver was moved, and she began to try to persuade him “But, my dear Ko Chang, my lolly-pop, more dear to me than a Satsuma peachblow, for I confess that my liver is warm towards you, – consider; how can I marry you when you are dead?” She paused to note the effect of these masterly words this wily daughter of her father. But the brave Ko Chang was not unworthy of his “primordial” ancestry. “You imposed that condition upon me, and I should be a craven if I refused to accept it. Tonight, at sunset, I commit hari kari. You cannot dissuade me. I die; and after my death you are to marry me. Do you promise?” “Yes, yes, I promise. But you must not die. Of what good to me will be your beauteous corpse, however much it might charm the family undertaker.”

“Enough. Farewell I am gone until this evening at sunset.” At sunset, Ko Chang, emerged from his ancestral walls with the two swords in his hands, that are the inseparable companions of every true Japanese son of his father. Chu Lu rushed to his side, and embraced him tearfully, but he remained firm. “No,” said he, “I shall carry out my contract. Immediately after my death cast my beautiful corpse into the family well, here, and await me at your house. I shall be there to marry you.” There was a strange glitter in his eye as he spoke, and a clammy perspiration about his body that frightened the fair Chu Lu. He seemed to lack that fire that she had seen in him before. However, although distracted with grief and fear, she proceeded to carry out his wishes. It is not worth my while to detail you the particulars of the hari kari. They are well known to you all. –

Immediately after the ceremony the body was, by the directions of the liver-broken Chu Lu flung into the family well, despite the protests of Ko Chang's paternal, who feared that the water would be spoiled. Almost immediately afterward Ko Chang himself, alive and hearty, though a little damp emerged from the hole, and claimed the startled Chu Lu for his bride. I shall pass over the astonishment of all the onlookers. – – –Ko Chang won his bride, and there is nothing left for me to say but that Ko Chang had persuaded the bogie of the family well, – there is a bogie to every well in Japan who can personate any body he desires, – to personate the illustrious son of Ko Chang's father, and commit hari kari, in order to enable the ardent lover to gain the almond eyed Chu Lu. —Such, gentlemen, are the effects of shaving in the morning with a dull razor, after having breakfasted before

going to bed the night before on a Welsh rarebit.

Charles Theodore Greve