

Wisteria on Silk

by Sumi Watters

Many years ago, in faraway Edo-Japan, there lived a young samurai named Masa. While his peers admired and respected Masa for his bravery and loyalty to his daimyo, Lord Fujino, he had a reputation amongst the townsfolk for being somewhat of a ladies' man. Despite what you think you know about the women of Masa's time, not all were as chaste as you've been led to believe. Women threw themselves at his feet whenever Masa strode past and flashed one of his beaming smiles. They couldn't help it. He was ever so handsome and charming. It shouldn't come as a surprise, then, to learn that Masa was never short of lovers eager to fulfil his most carnal desires. He was often seen about town, socialising and having his way with one (or more) of his many winsome companions.

One spring, Lord Fujino's daughter, Kinu, returned to her father's castle after having spent seven years in Kyoto's most prestigious finishing school. Kinu was still a child when Fujino sent her away, but she had returned an elegant young lady, sophisticated beyond her age. And what a beauty she was! Her satiny, black hair shone like polished ebony, her pale complexion—flawless as alabaster, and her full lips shimmered the shade of peony blossoms in May. Fujino intended to offer Kinu to a powerful Shogun, for only a true noble was worthy of his daughter's hand in marriage.

Masa first laid eyes on Kinu during the Wisteria Festival celebrations that same spring. Kinu strolled past him dressed in her finest silk kimono, which had embroidered delicate lilac wisteria flowers cascading down the front panel. Masa had never seen such an exquisite beauty in all his life. Needless to say, he was instantly smitten and vowed he would never bed another woman if the lovely Kinu would have him. Kinu, too, had glimpsed Masa amongst the crowd and felt her heart might burst under the weight of her lustful longings. The moment their eyes met, the die was cast—they fell madly in love. Night after night, Masa and Kinu met in secret under the avenue of wisteria trees on the castle grounds. From there, they hastened to Masa's lodge outside the walled fortress and spent the night away entwined in each other's arms.

When Lord Fujino learnt of his daughter's clandestine visits to his vassal's home, he was furious. How dare Masa tarnish his precious Kinu's purity! The scandalous affair must be stopped at once! But Masa was a loyal and courageous warrior—one of his best. So instead of ordering his execution (as was the custom in those days), Fujino sent Masa

away on a mission to the bleak landscape of Japan's northernmost island. Before he set off, Masa pledged his devotion to Kinu and promised that when he returned, they would run away together and make a life for themselves.

A year passed, and true to his word, Masa remained faithful to his beloved Kinu. On the evening of his return, he visited the avenue of wisteria trees with his heart hopeful and his groin full of desire. What joy he felt when Kinu appeared from behind the trees, dressed in her wisteria kimono! She looked as lovely as ever. Naturally, the lovers soon found themselves at Masa's lodge, where they made passionate love under the full Flower Moon.

A nosy neighbour happened to walk past when he heard moans coming from Masa's garden. He peered through the bamboo trees and what he saw chilled him to the bone. Masa lay on the ground with his arms wrapped around a young woman's corpse swathed in a tattered silk kimono! The terror-stricken neighbour immediately sent for the priest. To his horror and despair, Masa soon learnt that shortly after his departure, Lord Fujino had betrothed Kinu to a mighty Shogun in the south of Japan. In defiance, the heart-sore Kinu had hanged herself from one of the wisteria trees along the avenue where she and Masa had met and fallen in love.

The priest set to work at once, hanging talismans and scrolls at all doors and windows of Masa's home to ward off Kinu's unsettled spirit. Despite his efforts, Kinu's ghost appeared in the garden night after night, pleading with Masa to allow her entry. He resisted at first, but his grief soon got the better of him. He ripped apart the scrolls and tossed the talismans onto the street so that Kinu may enter his home. The reunited couple once again spent the night in a passionate embrace.

When the priest visited Masa's home the following morning, he discovered Masa was missing. He sent out a search party to look for the handsome samurai, but he was nowhere to be found. Masa had vanished without a trace. On a hunch, the priest sought Lord Fujino's permission to open Kinu's tomb. And there, wrapped in Kinu's decomposed arms, lay Masa, lifeless, but with a contented smile upon his lips.

THE END