

Report of Meeting with Mr. Shinzo Shirae

by

Ambassador Agnes Tsumanu una .

Day- January 17, 1933.

Time- 4.00 P.M.

Place- 68) Fifth Avenue, Yamanaka Store.

Manner: With more or less diffidence; call made because husband wishes.

Store beautiful as ever-- lamps, lamps, lamps. Soft flattering glow over all. Doorman in uniform admitted me. Several *dumb* looking blond salesclerks were standing around. I asked to see Mr. Shirae. but he was busy with a customer, in rear of store, trying very hard to sell a string of pearls to a customer--- and succeeded. ( She wanted some pearls added *for* additional length) Good day's work, Mr. Shirae!

Mr. Shirae , when at leisure, was told I was waiting.

He did not know me at first. He expressed great pleasure to see me (my spirits arose accordingly) We went upstairs to his conference room and I sat on a deep comfortable divan. Mr Shirae sat on other side of table, *which was placed between us.*

I met a new Shirae--a human Shirae--and some of my old regard and liking returned. For this reason, as nearly as I can remember, I am writing this report for you. You can read it *at* your leisure.

To begin with, I was shocked to see how he has aged and whitened at the temples. Very briefly I told him of our plan-- of your progress, and returning strength, and he was very glad. I wanted to reassure him at once that I had not come to borrow money. Thus relieved, the old basis of trust and friendship returned.

It seemed to be an enormous comfort for him to talk so freely to me--so confidentially. I was amazed that he would talk so. He said: "Look at me--I look like an old man. I can't sleep. Three years of this I have had to suffer and worry. It is terrible. Night after night after night, I sit here, trying to solve some way to save us. Then he quoted figures, relating to enormous expenses on this side--<sup>\$</sup>12000 a month (doesn't seem possible) and he has to ask them to send over from Japan at present rate of currency, 50,000 yens. "Its impossible! It can't go on," *he said.*

"But you have an annex. That looks as if you were making making money,"

"O, Mrs. Tsumanuma, that's Vantine's old store. They let us have it. We sell goods there at sharply reduced prices. To have such sales here would hurt the ~~xxxx~~ <sup>the</sup> tone of our store, so we send these things there. (While I was waiting for Mr. Shirae, I overheard a conversation. A clerk suggested her customer going to the annex. "O no, I don't want to go there. Everything has something|the matter with it, a broken ear or a broken tail.) I had to hide a smile.

"And, " continued Mr. Shirae, "Even these beautiful things, I have to sell at a sacrifice," *indicating contents of cabinets.*

"Surely headquarters would approve of this," I ventured.

"Indeed they do not. They disapprove, but I feel ~~feel~~ I must turn things into cash. I must have cash."

"Isn't there anyway of shrinking?"

"We have been doing just that. our <sup>San Francisco</sup> store is gone ~~store~~ ~~Shinagawa~~ ~~store~~ ~~I~~ ~~had~~ ~~in~~ ~~Xi~~ ~~I~~ ~~have~~ ~~Florida~~ ~~the~~ ~~correctly~~ ~~in~~ (There are three

our Chicago store is gone and next our Florida store will go. (there are three stores involved. I think I have named them correctly.) I haven't even anything put aside for my old age. My salary goes right back into the store, and if I lose my job, it will be very difficult for a man of my age to get another position. ---O, Mrs. Tsumanuma, ~~please forgive me for telling you all my troubles, when I haven't seen you~~ please forgive me for telling you all my troubles, when I haven't seen you for eight years. Forgive me. But it seems to make me feel better and easier to talk of it to you."

"I feel honored that you have such confidence in me and would talk so freely. There is nothing to forgive."

"I see very few Japanese now- I scarcely ever go to the Nippon Club now, but when I do, and on one occasion I met Mr. Midzutani, we always talk of you. We Japanese admire you so much. We honor you for your noble brave spirit. You have gone through so much, for so many long years. We think you hold Mr. Tsumanuma's life in your hands. Without you, he could not get well. But with you fighting for him, he will conquer this sickness."

"But Mr. Shirae, any wife would do the same for such a good, good husband, as I have."

"O, no, Mrs. Tsumanuma, very few would do as you have done. You have some noble Japanese spirit in you."

"I deeply appreciate your words, Mr. Shirae. There is something in me when trouble comes, makes me want to fight. I refuse to be conquered."

"That is Japanese spirit. That is just what I am trying so hard to apply to my business troubles, night after night, as I sit

*here*  
 trying not to let these troubles conquer me."

~~eee~~  
 "And now Mr. Tsumanuma is writing for the newspapers. That is good. I enjoyed very much, tho I don't play. You know I was the one who encouraged him to play first (news to me, but I didn't say so) and then later he wanted me to play.

I asked Shirae the name of the bird or rather the two birds in mythology which share one wing. I had forgotten the name. "I know the beautiful meaning of these birds but I cannot think of the name. I am not a poet like Mr. Tsumanuma."

"It is wonderful, Mrs. ~~T-~~ *Tsumanuma*, we are all getting older looking, and you never change. In fact you are younger looking, and yet you have so much to worry you. My wife is getting old looking. You know we have two boys now--all the wealth we have now. My big boy is ten years and the baby is one year 2 months old. it is good for mother to have two to think about--even we feel we cannot afford two."

"I know as we are placed, it is fortunate we only have one, whatever there is, it is all for George. Of course it is different for you."

"No, no it is not different for me. Are you going to send George to College?"

"Eventually, yes. But there is no money for that now but it may be that George will come down to N.Y. when he graduates and work in an architect's office for a year or so and gain practical experience, and with whatever help I can give him with what I earn, and besides him working his way through College to cover tuition and board, we will get him through."

Mr. Shirae asked for my address and wrote it down in his book. Of course long ago, I had made a move to go, but he said, "No, I am not busy. Please do not go yet."

During conversation, Mr. Shirae offered me cigarettes, of course. Everyone does, wherever you go, even Kamoi, and I refuse with thanks. I know that is what you would want me to do, Iwahiko mine. You are always right beside me.

As we were going to the elevator, Mr. Tanaka appeared and greeted me boisterously. Then at once Shirae became so dignified in his manner.

"Mr. Tsumanuma, he makes a joke about me, and my golf Ha! Ha!Ha!Ha!"

"What did he say?"

"Oh, he said I was a terrible player. Ha!Ha!"

"But you must be expert by now. In ten years you must have made wonderful improvement"

"Not much. I still dig up the ground."

Both send very best regards to you.

Mr. Shirae, of course went with me to the door, and made me feel like a princess (really) before customers, clerks and doorman. He took my hand in both of in a friendly clasp, and said:

"I shall see you again." and bowed nearly to the ground.

"Goodbye. Goodbye."

I hope you have enjoyed reading this little story..It is full of mistakes, but I think you can read it. If you love me, do not mention to anyone, anything what I have told you about Shirae of Yamanaka Store. Please! Please! *It was told in confidence.*

*He is so glad I have such a nice position and treat me with such courtesy.*

of course I thanked for our Christmas  
gifts.

a rainy day - and I spent afternoon  
typing this. I shall write soon, very soon  
to you and Georg -

Much love to you both,  
my dearest ones,  
Agnes.

Return this, if you so wish -