

The story of Tornai and Princess Tsune was widely known in Europe in the twenties and thirties, though Tornai's name was never actually used. It first appeared in 1914 under the title 'Princess Tsune and the Lovesick Hungarian,' a single chapter in a slim, scandalous book entitled *Tales of the Japanese Emperor's Daughters* that was published in Paris and caused an immediate sensation. The chapter about Princess Tsune was itself a narrative pastiche of Japanese newspaper accounts and local gossip. Most likely Josef acquired a copy of the book either during or directly after the Great War. But it is also possible, however unlikely, that he had read a translation of the childhood diary of Princess Tsune's younger sister, Princess Fumi. The romance smitten Princess Fumi had devoted seven pages to the affair between her sister and Tornai. How this diary became a part of the public domain, avoiding oblivion and making the strange, elliptical journey from private property to cultural artifact, is still something of a mystery. Somehow it found its way into a box of personal letters and important historical documents that belonged to the Imperial family. The box mysteriously vanished during the confusion that accompanied the death of Emperor Meiji in 1912. But seven years later, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of September 1919, which was a bright, sunny Saturday by all accounts, the contents of the box, including Princess Fumi's diary, were presented to the world by Émile Étienne Guimet, the famed French industrialist and collector of anything Japanese. M. Guimet never said how he had acquired the box, but his face lit up mysteriously whenever he was asked the question. The diary and the other documents were later returned to the Japanese government in 1954, but from 1919 to 1926, they were part of the Japanese collection at the Guimet Museum in Paris. The diary itself was translated into French by the scholar and noted linguist Serge Éliassév and published by Librairie Ancienne Edouard Champion in 1924.

So to begin this Oriental tale of tragic love. From 1880 to 1901, Gyula Tornai lived and worked in Morocco, and then Algeria, and traveled extensively up and down the Barbary Coast. He became adept at painting scenes of Moorish opulence. Titillations without footnotes. Some in fact would have called him degenerate. But his paintings were, from what this chronicler has seen, a blend of humanity's fascination with all things of the flesh coupled with an insatiable appetite for understanding the significance of all human endeavors. The world he depicted was a blend of human desire, intellectual curiosity, the quest for love (which to Tornai was equivalent to erotic sex), and war and violence.

In 1882 he painted *The Harem*, depicting a black Sultan and a white slave girl contemplating their reflections in a pool of water.

In 1890 he painted *An Arms Merchant in Tangiers*, depicting somber, faceless Berber warriors purchasing swords.

In 1891 he painted *Nudes with Tortoise*, depicting three women in all of their God-given glory sitting on a stone bench contemplating with existential serenity the movements of a tiny tortoise making its way across a white marble floor.

In 1892 he painted *The Connoisseurs*, again depicting Berber warriors, but in this painting they were contemplating a painting within the larger canvass depicting Berber warriors like themselves who were examining various pistols.

And in 1896 he painted *The Favorite of the Harem*, depicting a beautiful white-skinned girl with a smile like the petals of an orchid unfolding, an unparalleled vision of femininity stretched out on a richly decorated bed, her nipples erect, her hips turned slightly in lascivious fashion, a bearded Sultan looking on, a servant rummaging through a box, searching for an appropriate string of pearls to offer this girl whom no man on earth could resist.

But in 1899, Tornai, apparently bored with North Africa, decided to head east in search of what he said were more exotic subjects to paint. Was he being truly honest with himself about his reasons for leaving Africa? Had he exhausted the creative potential of harems in the desert? Who can say? Was he at long last descending into that ambrosial sea of madness often associated with artists whose creative imaginations can no longer wage war against the pain of being? Did he finally realize that outward nakedness is but a physical manifestation of an innermost atom, but if that atom remains concealed, then what does it matter if one is naked or not? Or was he making one last ditch effort to reclaim the spotless purity of his soul before vanishing without a whimper into the abyss? We will never know precisely what was going on in his mind except for the paintings he left, and on the subject of why he left for the Orient they remain understandably mute.

All we know is that in 1901 Tornai made his way south by southeast to Swaziland and the port city of Maputo, where he caught a cargo ship to the volcanic island nation of Mauritius, which was then a French colony. According to a copy of a passenger manifest housed in the archives of the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, England, Tornai boarded the passenger ship *Ikhona*, which provided service from Mauritius to Calcutta. During the next two years he traveled about India, painting as the spirit moved him. Then in August 1903 he departed India for Japan. He had been hired by an official of the Imperial Japanese court to paint the portrait of the young and vivacious Princess Tsune, whose fifteenth birthday was that September. Why Hashimoto Gahō, the official Imperial Household Artist, did not paint the princess is not known. Tornai was hired instead, his reputation as an artist of harems notwithstanding. Thus began a series of events that ended with speculation that the princess had been infected with syphilis (a tempest in a teapot that filled the pages of the scandal sheets for a few months, but which has since been erased from history), Tornai narrowly escaping execution (and by narrowly we mean dramatically, in the way that Hollywood movies from the 1940s are dramatic through the clever use of suspenseful music, suggestive dialogue, odd camera angles, and unexpected reversals of fortune), and Japan rushing pell-mell into a war with Russia that had been brewing for years. The story had the feel of a Shakespearian tragedy rewritten for the silver screen by Dashiell Hammett.

The rumor that Princess Tsune was infected with syphilis began one month after Tornai had painted her portrait, when the princess, who normally reveled in impromptu public appearances, much to the annoyance of her mother, suddenly was whisked off into seclusion by

those in charge of the Imperial household. The whisking away of the Princess was all the more suspicious because it occurred at the beginning of the month known among the superstitious as the 'Month of the Absent Gods.'

The official reason given by a spokesperson for the Imperial family was that the princess was ill with fever and the doctors were taking no chances, but everyone assumed the government was lying, and soon several unofficial reasons had gained quasi-official status. The most salacious of these was provided by an anonymous source claiming to be an assistant to one of the Imperial doctors who had first examined the princess. The informant's tale of a lovesick princess and her desperate doctors set against a backdrop of palace intrigue and deception appeared in dozens of unscrupulous scandal sheets printed by anonymous printers and then circulated willy-nilly throughout the underbelly of Kyoto.

The story began, as you might suspect, with a head-to-toe description of the various lesions and chancre sores that had mysteriously appeared all over Princess Tsune's body. Then it went on to describe the range of emotions experienced by the princess (rage, surprise, indifference, denial, panic, regret, paranoia, despair) and speculated who might have given Princess Tsune this terrible scourge, which the British called the Black Lion's Head. But it was the last part of the story that captured everyone's attention, for it catalogued the battery of treatments that the Imperial doctors had employed in the furious battle to save Princess Tsune's future reputation. Here is the actual verbiage taken from the very first scandal sheet to make the rounds:

**'First, Doctor Fujio injected salts into the Imperial urethra using an elongated syringe [Note from chronicler: Most likely a normal sized syringe attached to a catheter] in the hopes of drawing out the disease through the Imperial bladder. Then the nurses bathed the Imperial Princess in a bath of herbal lotions [Note from chronicler: Most likely wild pansies and Japanese honeysuckle] and after gently dabbing dry Her Imperial Highness' thoroughly soaked body, a process which took a quarter of an hour to avoid even the slightest possibility of bruising, they applied a balm of carbonate of soda mixed with sulphate of iron to cure the Imperial itch. Finally, Doctor Fujio applied a caustic mixture of mercury and oil to the Imperial skin and placed the Imperial Princess in a hot box in an attempt to sweat the disease out of the Imperial bloodstream.'**

The story was reprinted the following week, and every week after that for the next several months, though each reprinted version differed in creative and subtle ways from the original. In one version the initial examination took place in the Princess's Imperial bedroom, which had a spectacular view of a meticulously kept garden complete with plum trees and a narrow red bridge going over a small pond. But in another version it was a small windowless room with white walls and a floor and ceiling composed of dark wooden planks. It was as if the Princess had suddenly been transported to a small chalet in the Alps. Along one wall of this

tiny Alpine room were various cabinets filled with bottles containing crushed herbs or brightly colored potions or powders, and bowls for mixing medicines. In the center of the room there was a polished chrome examination table covered with a white sheet, and a smaller table overflowing with futuristic surgical instruments. High up on the wall opposite the cabinets, where one would have normally expected to see a clock, one saw instead a loudspeaker that produced only static.

Usually Dr. Fujio administered the treatment, but once in a while Dr. Fujio was called Dr. Shimizu, and in the later versions of the story the doctor and his twin, who both for some reason always wore wrinkled samurai robes from a century earlier, were replaced by a German doctor in a crisply ironed white lab coat. The German doctor was given various names as well, names which approximated various personality types, including Hans (tall, blond hair, energetic) or Georg (dark hair, a goatee, melancholy) or Schroeder (silver-haired, quite stiff, no sense of smell or humor), and in every scene where a German doctor took the stage, so to speak, he was assisted by a strange, slightly nervous, dark-complected man who spoke neither German nor Japanese.

The publishers of the scandal sheets sat back on their unscrupulous haunches and raked in the profits.

Eventually, of course, which is to say by March 1904, the scandal sheets stopped printing the story of the princess and her treatment. For one thing, they had turned their attention to the war with Russia, which had just begun. But it was also no longer necessary to feed the public's hunger for Imperial innuendo. The rumor had taken its place in the subconscious minds and presumptive hearts of the citizens of Kyoto, an unassailable stone monument to human frailty, the diva-dame, and though no one mentioned Princess Tsune and syphilis in the same sentence ever again, it is unlikely that anyone ever forgot the tale, except perhaps when they passed into the delirium of death years later, that abyss of forgetfulness, which awaits us all. It is also worth noting that the identity of the informant who had aroused so much public interest was never made public.