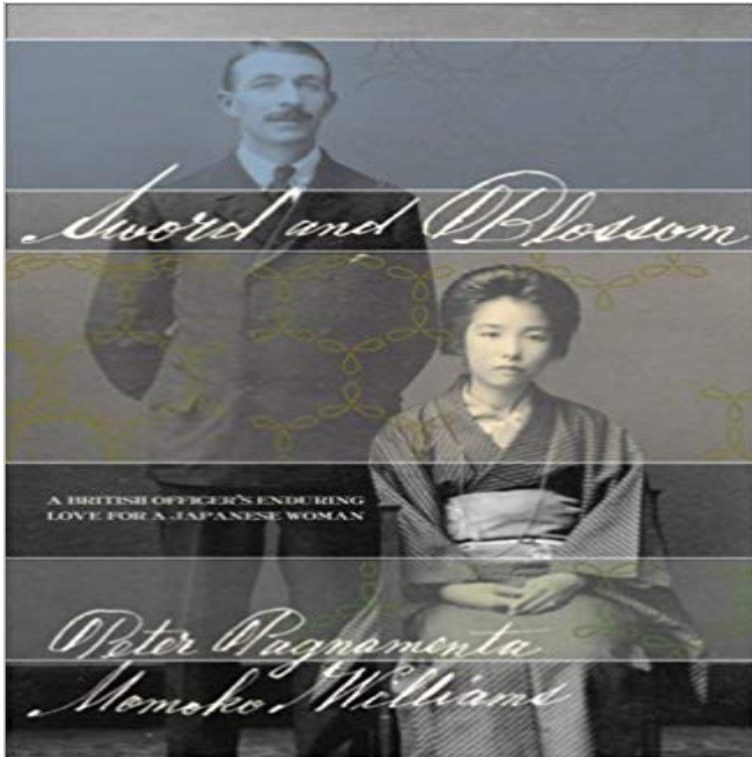


Sword and Blossom: A British Officers Enduring Love for a Japanese Woman



In 1904, when thirty-four-year-old British Army captain Arthur Hart-Synnot was sent to Japan to learn the language of his country's new ally, romance was the furthest thing from his mind. At least five generations of the Hart family had served in the British Army—his father, grandfather, and uncle had risen to the rank of general, and the ambitious young officer expected to keep up the tradition. Arriving in Tokyo on the eve of the Russo-Japanese War, Arthur met Masa Suzuki at the Officers Club and tested out his first few words of Japanese on her. Masa had grown up in the working-class section of Tokyo, amid small-shop keepers and craftsmen. The sixth in a family of seven, she had left school at age fourteen to work in a shop. She was a dutiful Japanese daughter—when she helped her mother serve meals, she would kneel at a respectful distance while her father and brothers ate. Arthur and Masa fell in love quickly and powerfully. Throwing convention to the wind, they lived together in Tokyo until orders came for Arthur to return to England. For the next decade and a half, the two unlikely soul mates attempted to make a life together, testing the limits of racial and cultural tolerance in their countries and in themselves. Separated for years at a time, they stayed in touch through long, deeply affectionate letters they wrote to each other in Japanese. The great love affair sustained Arthur through some of the most horrific battles of the First World War, and even when the relationship came to an end, in a way that neither could have foreseen, they continued their correspondence. They wrote to each other through the troubled interwar period, as Arthur's family estate was caught up in a civil war in Ireland, as the great earthquake of 1923 ravaged Tokyo, as the militarists seized control of Japan and took the country into a brutal invasion of China, and finally, in a bitter twist of fate, as the once-allied Britain and

Japan faced off against each other in the Second World War. Her letters to him were lost, but she saved every one of his, more than eight hundred in total. The authors use this treasure trove of letters to describe a story of great love and great loss and of destinies etched amid the conflicts of the first half of the twentieth century.

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