



MURASAKI
SHIKIBU

THE TALE OF
GENJI

• UNABRIDGED •

TRANSLATED BY
DENNIS WASHBURN

Murasaki Shikibu

The Tale of Genji



TRANSLATED BY *Dennis Washburn*



W. W. NORTON & COMPANY
NEW YORK | LONDON

Contents

Introduction

- I *Kiritsubo*: The Lady of the Paulownia-Courtyard Chambers
- II *Hahakigi*: Broom Cypress
- III *Utsusemi*: A Molted Cicada Shell
- IV *Yūgao*: The Lady of the Evening Faces
- V *Wakamurasaki*: Little Purple Gromwell
- VI *Suetsumuhana*: The Safflower
- VII *Momiji no ga*: An Imperial Celebration of Autumn Foliage
- VIII *Hana no en*: A Banquet Celebrating Cherry Blossoms
- IX *Aoi*: Leaves of Wild Ginger
- X *Sakaki*: A Branch of Sacred Evergreen
- XI *Hanachirusato*: The Lady at the Villa of Scattering Orange Blossoms
- XII *Suma*: Exile to Suma
- XIII *Akashi*: The Lady at Akashi
- XIV *Miotsukushi*: Channel Markers
- XV *Yomogiu*: A Ruined Villa of Tangled Gardens
- XVI *Sekiya*: The Barrier Gate
- XVII *E-awase*: A Contest of Illustrations
- XVIII *Matsukaze*: Wind in the Pines
- XIX *Usugumo*: A Thin Veil of Clouds
- XX *Asagao*: Bellflowers
- XXI *Otome*: Maidens of the Dance
- XXII

- Tamakazura: A Lovely Garland*
- XXIII *Hatsune: First Song of Spring*
- XXIV *Kochō: Butterflies*
- XXV *Hotaru: Fireflies*
- XXVI *Tokonatsu: Wild Pinks*
- XXVII *Kagaribi: Cresset Fires*
- XXVIII *Nowaki: An Autumn Tempest*
- XXIX *Miyuki: An Imperial Excursion*
- XXX *Fujibakama: Mistflowers*
- XXXI *Makibashira: A Beloved Pillar of Cypress*
- XXXII *Umegae: A Branch of Plum*
- XXXIII *Fuji no uraba: Shoots of Wisteria Leaves*
- XXXIV *Wakana: Early Spring Greens: Part 1*
- XXXV *Wakana: Early Spring Greens: Part 2*
- XXXVI *Kashiwagi: The Oak Tree*
- XXXVII *Yokobue: The Transverse Flute*
- XXXVIII *Suzumushi: Bell Crickets*
- XXXIX *Yūgiri: Evening Mist*
- XL *Minori: Rites of the Sacred Law*
- XLI *Maboroshi: Spirit Summoner*
[Translator's Note]
- XLII *Niou miya: The Fragrant Prince*
- XLIII *Kōbai: Red Plum*
- XLIV *Takekawa: Bamboo River*
- XLV *Hashihime: The Divine Princess at Uji Bridge*
- XLVI *Shiigamoto: At the Foot of the Oak Tree*
- XLVII *Agemaki: A Bowknot Tied in Maiden's Loops*
- XLVIII *Sawarabi: Early Fiddlehead Greens*
- XLIX *Yadoriki: Trees Encoiled in Vines of Ivy*
- L *Azumaya: A Hut in the Eastern Provinces*
- LI *Ukifune: A Boat Cast Adrift*
- LII *Kagerō: Ephemeralids*
- LIII *Tenarai: Practicing Calligraphy*

LIV *Yume no ukihashi*: A Floating Bridge in a Dream
[Translator's Note]

Introduction

DURING THE first decade of the eleventh century Murasaki Shikibu, a woman born into the middle ranks of the aristocracy in the Heian period (794–1185 CE), began writing a fictional narrative that was recognized by her contemporaries as distinctive and remarkable even as it was being composed. Expansive in form, compelling in its delineation of character, sophisticated in its representation of ethical concerns and aesthetic ideals, *Genji monogatari* would come to occupy a central place in one of the world's most important literary traditions. Over the past millennium readers from vastly different eras and social backgrounds have discovered in its depiction of the culture of the imperial court a profound understanding of human experience that simultaneously resonates with and challenges their own.

One measure of its achievement as art is that, like the Homeric epics or the tragedies of Shakespeare, *Genji monogatari* has been able to inspire multiple interpretations over a long period of time. Yet the history of the work's critical reception also raises questions about how contemporary readers should approach the narrative. Does prior knowledge of its privileged place in Japanese culture help or hinder our understanding? Can we ever fully appreciate a text that chronicles the concerns of a society so radically different from our own? Is it possible to read with an open mind a text around which so much scholarly, ethical, and even political discourse has accumulated?

The canonical status of any work of art is the outcome of an ongoing evaluation of the ways an artist utilizes the possibilities for expression intrinsic to his or her chosen medium. This means that such status is dependent on the extrinsic values and agendas of particular readerships at different historical moments. Widely accepted judgments made in one era leave their traces in some form or other in the next, affecting the evolving discourse a culture has about

itself. Quite often these judgments acquire institutional, ideological, or pedagogical force, especially when knowledge of a work is imagined to be a vital part of cultural literacy and thus essential to the formation of ethnic or national identity. Yet to read *Genji monogatari* with a critical mind-set that does justice to the text *as a work of art* requires a skeptical attitude toward its privileged position. Readers who come to it through a translation such as this one must recognize (at least in the abstract) that its perceived cultural significance depends as much on the many layers of annotation and interpretation that surround the original text as on its purely literary qualities. In addition, readers must situate the history of the reception of the work in a comparative context—one that accounts for the social and cultural conditions that have produced not only past interpretations but also contemporary expectations and tastes. Simply assuming the canonical status of the work—that is, being lazy or indifferent readers—provides an excuse to ignore the parochial limits of our own aesthetic preferences. Of course, we can never completely step outside the ideologically determined values and literary conventions that ground our interpretations; but if we at least remain attentive to questions about how and why *Genji monogatari* has achieved canonical status, then through such critical reflection we can open ourselves more fully to the challenges and pleasures presented by Murasaki Shikibu's art.

Readings and receptions of *Genji monogatari* in Japan

TO GET a sense of the importance of reading with a critically open attitude, with a willingness to negotiate between the cultural assumptions that shaped the text and those that shape our expectations of it, we need to consider briefly how previous generations have approached the narrative. Written in the vernacular of court society, Murasaki Shikibu's vivid depiction of the world inhabited by her fictional hero, the Radiant Prince Genji, drew directly upon the realities of the lives of the aristocracy, providing the men and women who first read her tale with the shock of the familiar. The imperial palace and the bureaucratic institutions that supported it constituted a realm inhabited by the most privileged of an elite class—one that was aloof and isolated, disdainful of the lower orders, and extraordinarily self-absorbed. *Genji monogatari* satirizes the foibles and hypocrisies of the nobility, especially as these are exposed in the course of relationships between men and women, while at the same time reinforcing or affirming fundamental aesthetic, moral, and religious values in a way that was flattering to the self-regard of court society. It is no wonder, then, that the earliest portions of the narrative found an avid readership among the author's

peers, and that the initial reception of those first chapters likely paved the way for the author to enter court service in the salon of Empress Shōshi, where she probably completed the bulk of her masterwork.

Within a decade of its composition *Genji monogatari* began to circulate more widely outside the confines of the imperial court, and over the course of the following century *emaki* versions—scrolls containing both text and illustrations—were produced. However, because no manuscripts from the early eleventh century have survived (the earliest surviving fragments of *emaki* date from the twelfth century), it is impossible to say with any certainty to what extent copies were available at the court. Judging from comments found in *Sarashina nikki*, a journal (or diary) written in the mid-eleventh century by a woman known to us as “the daughter of Sugawara no Takasue,” it was difficult to obtain the complete text if you were outside the court. Few copies were readily available, and individual chapters often circulated separately.¹ Thus, even though the readership of *Genji monogatari* was limited during the early part of the eleventh century, it is clear from the account presented in *Sarashina nikki* that the reputation of the work quickly spread beyond the confines of the elite court nobility who worked in and around the imperial palace. Taking full advantage of stylistic techniques that had been developing for well over a century in Japanese prose (not just fiction but diaries, chronicles, and journals as well), Murasaki Shikibu crafted a narrative voice that was forcefully persuasive and often knowingly ironic. She also conjured through her writing the illusion of an internal reality or subjectivity within her characters. In turn, these rhetorical achievements had broader cultural implications. The articulation of a well-defined aesthetic sensibility in *Genji monogatari* through the subjectivity of characters who are consciously, often painfully, torn between the fleeting appeal of material, secular culture and a religiously motivated desire to escape worldly attachments revealed the contradictory nature of the dominant values at the court in mid-Heian Japan. Over time this conflicted aesthetic sensibility proved so appealing that it became a central element in what has long been regarded as a distinctive Japanese ethos.

Although the economic and political power of the court gradually contracted over the course of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the powerful military clans that came to dominate Japanese society from the twelfth to the nineteenth centuries did not reject the courtly aesthetics exemplified by the characters and narrative stylistics of *Genji monogatari*. Many of the cultural artifacts the contemporary world now almost instinctively associates with the “traditional” Japan of medieval society—landscape architecture and the tea ceremony, ink monochrome paintings and rustic ceramics, ikebana and the martial arts, linked

verse and the Noh drama, to name a few—either developed directly out of artistic forms produced by the aristocratic class of the Heian period, or were inspired by a desire to emulate the sensibility of that class. At the same time, medieval interpretations of *Genji monogatari* tended to read the work in narrowly didactic terms, as if it exemplified the moral and spiritual truths of either Confucian teachings about human relationships or Buddhist teachings about the evanescence of human life, the virtues of an attitude of resignation, and the need for renunciation of all things secular.

In a rather bizarre twist, Buddhist-inspired readings led to some strongly held convictions about the fate of the author, who was thought to have been condemned to Hell because her writing was so realistic and presented such an alluring view of courtly love that it tempted readers to cling to illusory values and stray from the path of enlightenment and salvation. The moral condemnation of fiction and the legend of Murasaki Shikibu's damnation, which appears in written form as early as *Hōbutsushū* (*Collection of Treasures*, compiled in 1179 by Taira no Yasuyori), were so widespread by the late twelfth century that it was not uncommon for aristocratic women who were fans of the text to engage in the practice of making offerings and prayers for the salvation of Murasaki Shikibu's soul. The Noh play *Genji kuyō* (*A Memorial Service for Genji*)² presents a variation on this legend by claiming that the author is in Hell because she neglected to perform memorial services for her protagonist Genji, condemning him and herself to damnation. This unusual transformation of Genji from a purely fictional character to a figure who interacts with the real-life author for the religious purposes of the play suggests just how deeply the affective realism of the original engaged medieval readers. The play ends with the ghost of the author performing *Genji kuyō*, thus ensuring salvation for them both.

Although the didacticism of medieval criticism may strike contemporary readers as static or naive, such readings made possible dynamic adaptations of certain aspects of the text, which served as a resource that later artists utilized to represent their own beliefs and understanding of social and spiritual realities. The powerful, poignant tension between worldly and religious aspirations at the heart of Murasaki Shikibu's view of human existence found renewed literary expression in a variety of forms: stories about martial exploits such as *The Tale of the Heike*; plays of the Noh theatre, some based directly on episodes from *Genji monogatari*; and diaries or miscellanies that drew inspiration from the techniques Murasaki Shikibu exploited to such powerful effect. These readings (or productive misreadings) of *Genji monogatari* by medieval literati, who drew upon the work as an aesthetic model for their own parochial aims, confirmed and solidified its canonical status.

The cultural sphere in which the text was celebrated widened considerably during the Tokugawa period (1600–1868). This phenomenon occurred for several reasons. The relative political and economic stability of the period resulted in the emergence of a largely urban mercantile class that enjoyed high rates of literacy and sufficient leisure time to pursue artistic interests. The effects of prosperity and wider literacy are exemplified by the popularity of Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694), the great *haiku* poet whose travel journals self-consciously strive to project a modern, ephemeral sensibility onto what he perceived to be the fixed historical and geographical ground of Japan’s literary traditions.³ The manner in which his works were circulated and consumed suggests that he was at once stoking and satisfying the desire of an emerging bourgeois readership for cultural literacy—that is, for familiarity and facility with the forms and meanings of Japanese culture. An understanding of indigenous traditions came to be a valued commodity, a polite accomplishment like the tea ceremony, music, or flower arrangement that could serve as proof of refined taste and sensitivity—aesthetic goods that bolstered notions of personal and social identity. Indeed, the very concept of Japanese culture in the current sense of a commonly shared national tradition began to come into being as a result of a growing consciousness on the part of a consumer class during the Tokugawa period that the tradition itself was an object worthy of desire and possession.

In the Tokugawa marketplace for cultural goods, *Genji monogatari* was an especially sought-after commodity. It was not uncommon for well-to-do young women even of the merchant class to possess as part of their marriage dowry a chest of fifty-four drawers, each containing slim picture-books, *ehon*, with illustrations and excerpts from each chapter. This commodification of *Genji monogatari* was only the most material evidence of its influence during this period, though for most readers of the time that influence was iconic (almost talismanic) in nature, since the archaic classical language of the original text, which is extremely difficult to follow, was more often admired than actually read. Indeed, exposure to Murasaki Shikibu’s work was often indirect, a product of enormously popular works that parodied its content and structure. From Ihara Saikaku’s *Kōshoku ichidai otoko* (*The Life of an Amorous Man*, 1682) to Ryūtei Tanehiko’s *Nise Murasaki inaka Genji* (*A Fake Murasaki and Her Rustic Genji*, published serially in 1829–42), many Tokugawa period readers experienced *Genji monogatari* through the filter of more contemporary (and thus accessible) literary practices.

Popular adaptations and abridgments of *Genji monogatari* stand as proof of its canonical status during the Tokugawa era. By the eighteenth century, however, there was increasing interest in the text as an object of historical and linguistic

research. Commentaries and annotations intended to explicate some of the more obscure passages of the manuscript date back to the eleventh century, and editorial efforts to try to recover the text as Murasaki Shikibu wrote it go back at least as far as Fujiwara no Teika (1162–1241), among others, in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Building on a long and rich tradition of textual analysis by a number of late medieval and early Tokugawa scholars, including Nakano In Michikatsu's (1566–1610) *Mingō nisso* (1598) and Kitamura Kigin's (1624–1705) distinguished, enormously influential commentary *Kogetsushō* (*A Portrait of the Moon Over Lake Biwa*, 1673), eighteenth-century researchers began to apply more rigorous linguistic and historical methods in the effort to explicate *Genji monogatari* and thereby recover the text for their age. This type of approach is now most commonly associated with a school of thought known as *kokugaku* (national learning, or native studies). The larger motivation for these scholars was the goal of rediscovering the language of Japan prior to the tidal wave of Chinese influences, especially its writing system. This was certainly the objective for Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801), whose seminal study *Genji monogatari: tama no ogushi* (*Genji monogatari: A small jeweled comb*, 1796) shaped interpretations well into the twentieth century. Spurred by protonationalist aims, *kokugaku* scholars pored over ancient texts in hopes of uncovering an *ur-Japanese* and thereby recovering the true spirit of an original Japanese culture. As a result of the obsessions of Norinaga and his peers, Japanese culture came to be defined in terms of an ostensibly unique aesthetic sensibility, *mono no aware*, which prized above all else an intuitive sensitivity toward the sublime, sad beauty that inheres in mutable nature and transitory human existence.

Although Murasaki Shikibu's narrative has been read consistently as exemplifying distinctively Japanese tastes and values, the popularization of the work in conjunction with the research of *kokugaku* scholars during the Tokugawa period set the stage for a major reassessment of its status during the Meiji period (1868–1912).⁴ Japan emerged from over two centuries of self-imposed isolation to confront the geopolitical realities of late nineteenth-century Western imperialism. Efforts by the Japanese government to acquire the material culture of the West and to construct its own empire as a way to avoid being colonized brought with them a widely felt anxiety that the emergence of a modern military-industrial society would undermine the unique character of Japanese culture and the concomitant sense of national identity that gave meaning and purpose to the Meiji task of self-transformation. The appeal to nationalist pride that underpinned assertions of an idealized conception of a uniquely native tradition—an idea that served as a bulwark against the vagaries

of change—reflected the deeply contradictory aspirations of modern imperial Japan. In the charged atmosphere of the Meiji period, with its colonialist ambitions, nationalist chauvinism, and racialist anxieties, *Genji monogatari* took on new significance as a monument of world literature, an achievement that could be placed alongside the works of Dante or Milton, Ovid or Tolstoy, as proof of the essential value of Japanese culture, of its equal stature with the Western powers.

The influence of nationalist ideology on the creation of modern notions of literary canons is hardly unique to Japan, but its impact is perhaps most visible in the claim that *Genji monogatari* is the world's first novel (a claim I shall address in more detail below). In addition, the fact that the writings of a woman author are part of the core canon of Japanese literature is often pointed to as a truly unique historical phenomenon among so-called national literatures. Justified or not, these appeals to the priority or originality of Murasaki Shikibu's work have largely shaped the perception of the text's cultural centrality over the past century. Some of Japan's best known modern writers—including Kawabata Yasunari, Yosano Akiko, Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, Mishima Yukio, and Enchi Fumiko, to name just a few—have drawn inspiration from *Genji monogatari* or made explicit use of its techniques and themes. The work has attracted considerable attention from critics and scholars over a range of disciplines, and there have been multiple translations into modern Japanese, including a best-selling version by the contemporary novelist Setouchi Jakuchō. Needless to say, *Genji monogatari* has been adapted to film, drama, animation, and graphic novels (*manga*).

As these recent works and adaptations suggest, *Genji monogatari* continues to occupy a central place in both the literary world and the popular imagination of Japan. The story has been read as a moral and religious guide, as a source for historical data on court society, as a feminist text and post-feminist text, as a marker of cultural literacy and national identity. Whatever we make of these individual interpretations, taken together they serve to remind us that the privileged position of the work is not based entirely on qualities intrinsic to the text, but is instead constructed from a long, complex history of critical reception.

Recognizing the ways in which past cultural assumptions or traditions extrinsic to a text may shape or even distort contemporary understandings is crucial for reading in a rigorous and open-minded manner. In practice, however, such recognition is reactive and doesn't provide much positive guidance to contemporary readers on how to judge *Genji monogatari* as a work of literary art. Perhaps that is why the approach of critics such as Motoori Norinaga, who focused on what they saw as the general aesthetic effects created by Murasaki

Shikibu's stylistics, continues to have some appeal. The assumption grounding such criticism is that literary art must ultimately be understood on its own unique terms, that its value transcends the passing fashions and tastes of any particular culture (and thus transcends history itself). In this view the beauty apprehended in the work's themes, its poetic language, and its representation of human nature possesses the quality of universality—that is, it is taken to be true or relevant for all times and all places.

At a cursory glance, the appeal to universality to support a claim of canonical status appears compelling, but it is also potentially misleading as a critical standard. The appeal to such status is an abstraction that obscures or deemphasizes those historically specific rhetorical and cultural elements that make a narrative like *Genji monogatari* worthy of our interest in the first place. To put the matter another way, the sense that a canonical work of literature is “universal” is an illusory aftereffect of reading and reflection that does not necessarily arise from the intrinsic, parochial qualities of the work. Thus, some degree of caution is warranted when making critical judgments based on generalized aesthetic criteria. A critical approach to the text that is truly sensitive to differences in cultural expectations is a difficult balancing act, one that requires the reader to resist broad, unifying theories of the narrative (e.g., the idea of *mono no aware* as the primary organizing principle) as well as to account for extrinsic factors—such as our own historical position as readers of the text—that may affect interpretations of the work. By the same token, even as we strive to take into account the cultural environment that made the creation of *Genji monogatari* possible, reading with a critically open mind demands as well that we remain confident enough to hold firm to our own parochial expectations and aesthetic values when evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of Murasaki Shikibu's narrative mode or poetic style.

The Heian court and the social context of the composition of *Genji*

ONCE A work of art has been canonized, the process of its composition may come to seem both the inevitable expression of the customs and values of a particular time and place and the fortuitous product of individual talent. This bivalent quality is a trace or mark of the productive literary symbiosis between a community of readers and the author. For this reason, it in no way diminishes Murasaki Shikibu to resist labeling her a genius and instead to make the more modest claim that she was an artist of her time whose primary talent was her

ability to exploit and synthesize the literary resources and stylistic practices available to her. In effect, that talent was her genius, and because any evaluation of the achievement of *Genji monogatari* must begin with the parochial qualities of the work, we must consider not just her situation as a woman living and writing at the Heian court but her “situatedness” in the social and political cultures of the period.

The society into which Murasaki Shikibu was born was the product of more than three centuries of institutional evolution and political intrigue. Beginning in the seventh century, the bureaucratic structure of the Tang court in China was gradually integrated into the indigenous clan system from which the imperial household originally emerged, creating a hybrid system of governance that shaped the political economy of Heian Japan as well as a range of social, religious, and cultural aspects of aristocratic life. Although the history of the Heian court is too complex to be treated fully here, three developments that had an especially profound influence on the conception of *Genji monogatari* deserve some brief consideration: (1) the creation of a hierarchical system of ranks and promotions to administer an extensive bureaucracy; (2) the institutionalization of what standard histories refer to as “marriage politics”—a process that coincided with the rise to dominance of the Fujiwara clan; and (3) the creation of a permanent capital that served as architectural expression and spatial projection of the institutional power of the court.

The earliest written record about early Japanese society is a short description of customs and manners that appears in a third-century Chinese source, *The Records of Wei*.⁵ Although not very reliable as a historical document, this account does make two notable observations, which are largely confirmed by the archeological record: early Japanese society was organized around extended familial units called *uji* (clans); and it was extremely status-conscious. Beginning from around the third century, a number of these clans gained hegemony over increasingly large territories and began to vie with each other for power. Out of this struggle what came to be known as the Yamato clan emerged as the dominant power in central and western Japan, and by the fifth century the Yamato ruler was awarding titles (*kabane*) to leaders of other powerful clans and gradually establishing claims of legitimacy as the imperial institution around which courtly society would develop.

The familial structure of the early court made proximity to the throne an overriding concern for those clans serving the imperial household. Such proximity was secured in part through official access provided by the acquisition of rank and the privileges of bureaucratic titles. However, a more important and direct way to gain proximity was through blood alliances created by marrying

daughters into the imperial clan and, if male offspring were produced, into the line of succession itself.⁶ As a result of this system, the authority of the emperor was diluted over time by the efforts of rival families to gain political control. For example, in the late sixth and early seventh centuries the Soga clan nearly succeeded in gaining control of the imperial line, and it was stopped only after the assassination of the clan leader, Soga no Iruka, in 645 in the Isshi Incident, which brought a new sovereign, Emperor Kōtoku (596–654), to power and restored more direct rule by the emperor. The plot to overthrow the Soga was hatched by Prince Naka no Ōe, who later became Emperor Tenchi (626–672), and was carried out with the support of the leaders of a number of clans, among them Nakatomi no Kamatari (614–669), who would be granted the new family name “Fujiwara” for his services to Tenchi. In an effort to consolidate its power and ensure the inviolability and authority of the imperial line, the court issued edicts known as the Taika Reform that continued and accelerated the process of restructuring political and economic institutions after the model of the Tang court—a process, it should be noted, that began under Prince Shōtoku (574–622), a member of the Soga clan who served as regent.

Administrative restructuring took more than a century to complete, during which time the court continued to struggle with factional rivalries and succession disputes. One of the earliest of the key reforms secured the economic foundation of the imperial household by claiming, or confiscating, all agricultural lands. This land was then divided up and redistributed to every family (a policy known as *kubunden*), establishing in effect a proto-manorial system that eventually led to the feudal economy of medieval Japan. The administration of lands was facilitated by a bureaucratic reorganization that divided the country into provinces called *kuni*. The central government appointed administrative governors, *kokushi*, and the provinces were further divided into districts called *gun* or *kōri*, and administered by locally appointed officials called *gunji*. These local officials were primarily responsible for keeping the peace, collecting taxes, recruiting labor, and registering population and land distribution.

Complementing the attempt to centralize control of the economy through land reform was the implementation of a series of governmental codes based on Confucian thought and Chinese legal practices. The bureaucratic system (*ritsuryō*) that emerged from these reforms consisted of a criminal code, *ritsu*, and an administrative code, *ryō*. The process of restructuring reached its culmination in the Taihō Code of 701 and its revision and refinement, the Yōrō Code, which was completed around 718–20 but not fully enacted until 757. The Yōrō Code remained in effect for the court until the Meiji Restoration of 1868.

Under the *ritsuryō* system, there were initially two main branches of

government: the Council of Religious Ceremonials, *Jingikan*, and the Council of State, *Daijōkan*. This division is noteworthy because it points to a crucial aspect of emperorship in Japan. The emperor was invested with political authority, but this authority derived from a number of sacerdotal responsibilities originating from the imperial clan's connection to Shinto ritual and its legitimizing claim of divine origins as descendants of the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu. With the spread of Buddhism, the emperor and his court also played a crucial role as patrons and supporters of Buddhist institutions, and the adoption of a Chinese model of administration formalized other quasi-religious ritual responsibilities—divination, geomancy, calendrical observations to determine the movement of deities and the timing of eclipses—that were assumed to be necessary for the regulation of the state and for material proof of political legitimacy. The dual nature of emperorship was thus the source of genuine political power and authority, but over time the demands of ritual and ceremonial functions placed on the person of the emperor weakened the imperial family's direct hold on the more purely secular organs of government.

The importance of the emperor's sacerdotal responsibilities to the political system of the court should not be underestimated, and, indeed, the *Jingikan* was originally conceived of as the higher of the two branches. It was responsible for annual festivals and official court ceremonies, as well as for the upkeep of shrines and the recording and observation of oracles and divinations. In reality, however, the *Jingikan* was quickly subordinated to the Council of State, the *Daijōkan*, and absorbed into its bureaucratic structure, which was not only much larger in size, but administered by officials who held much higher rank and thus much greater de facto authority than any official in the Council of Religious Ceremonials.

The Council of State handled all secular matters and consisted of the Ministers of the Left and Right (*Sadaijin* and *Udaijin*, respectively), Controllers of the Left and Right (*Sadaiben* and *Udaiben*), four Great Counselors (*Dainagon*), and three Minor Counselors (*Shōnagon*). The Minister of the Left was usually, though not always, the more powerful position and head of the government who acted as a kind of prime minister, or *Daijōdaijin*. Controllers under the Ministers of the Left and Right in turn administered the eight government ministries.⁷

Appointments to bureaucratic positions throughout the ministries and the offices of the imperial household were made according to a strict hierarchy of ranks. There were thirty levels in all. The top three ranks each had two subdivisions, senior and junior (e.g., senior third rank), making a total of six levels. Ranks four through eight each had four subdivisions—senior upper, senior lower, junior upper, and junior lower (e.g., junior upper seventh rank)—

making a total of twenty levels. There were also two initial ranks, greater and lesser, also divided into upper and lower subdivisions for a total of four levels. Appointments were sometimes ceremonial and did not carry any actual administrative responsibilities, especially in the case of members of the imperial family. For most courtiers, however, rank was enormously important. Economic benefits accrued with promotions up the hierarchy, and there were practical administrative duties at the lower and middle ranks in the ministries. Perhaps most important, the achievement of high rank was equated not simply with status but with the quality of an individual's character and breeding. Rank was very much a self-legitimizing qualification.

On the surface, the structure of the Heian court was generally in line with its Tang model; but the emphasis on familial connections that was the key feature of the older clan system transformed the institutional hierarchy, creating a hybrid system that necessitated the creation of several extra-code positions within the Council of State. One of these extra-code titles was the Consultant (*Sangi*). At any given time there were usually eight consultants, and these positions could serve as either a largely ceremonial appointment capping a distinguished career, or a steppingstone to further advancement. A second extra-code title was the Middle Counselor (*Chūnagon*), which came into being when the number of major counselors was reduced from four to two in the *Taihō* Code. The addition of this particular title, which was sometimes conferred as an acting appointment, helped open opportunities at the top of the bureaucratic pyramid. It was thus an important steppingstone as well, and the men who served as middle counselors often wielded considerable power and prestige. In addition to these changes in the composition of the Council of State, the *Daijōdaijin* evolved from its original function as a kind of prime minister into a position of preeminent rank usually translated in English as “Chancellor.” This position came to be called *Kanpaku*, and by Murasaki Shikibu’s time whoever held the office also held de facto power over the court and its affairs, since all organs of the bureaucracy were ultimately responsible to him.

Apart from the chancellorship, another equally important extra-code position was the office of Regent, *Sesshō*. Regents had existed before the *ritsuryō* system was established—Prince Shōtoku being perhaps the most famous of the pre-Taika Reform regents. Usually a regent was appointed to assist a child emperor, whereas the *Kampaku* ruled for an adult emperor, but in either case this *Sekkan* (Regent/Chancellor) system reflected the political reality that despite the attempt to rationalize and legitimize imperial rule through a rigid bureaucratic structure, gaining proximity to the throne through the line of succession remained a paramount political consideration among rival courtiers.

A crucial extension of the process of bureaucratic centralization was the establishment of a permanent capital at Heijō-kyō (present-day Nara) in 710. Modeled after the Tang capital of Chang'an, the city was an architectural and spatial projection of the court hierarchy. The design, which followed Chinese geomantic principles, was intended to situate the palace at the “head” of the city at the center of the northern boundary, with the rest of the capital laid out in a geometric grid of streets and avenues that divided it into left and right halves. This design, however, was never fully completed, hindered by succession struggles and by the machinations of aristocratic families seeking to strengthen their economic holdings inside and outside the capital. These rivalries were further complicated by the emergence of Buddhist institutions housed in major temples in the city that strove to gain access and influence at the court. Consequently, the capital was moved to Nagaoka in 784. But this move proved short-lived, and a decade later, in 794, the capital was moved yet again to Heian-kyō (present-day Kyoto).

Heian-kyō was somewhat larger in scale than Heijō-kyō, but it too replicated the hierarchical grid of Chang'an, with the palace at the “head” of the city on the north-central border, a major boulevard leading from the palace to the southern gate, the Rashōmon, and eastern (the left side of the city when looking south from the perspective of the palace) and western (right) sectors demarcated by major avenues running east-west. The palace itself represented a slightly different spatial configuration of power. Laid out on a larger rectangular plot, it consisted of an orderly arrangement of buildings—bureaucratic offices, guards quarters, and storehouses—that surrounded several major structures in the compound. These included the *Chōdōin*, which, among its many functions, was used for official audiences; the *Burakuin*, which was used for official banquets and entertainments;⁸ the *Daijōkan*, used by the Council of State; and the *Dairi* or Inner Palace, which held the Ceremonial Court (the *Shishinden*, sometimes referred to as the throne room), offices for the imperial household staff, the emperor’s residence (the *Seiryōden*), and a large number of chambers or apartments to house the primary consorts and concubines. If the city as a whole was designed as a projection of a rationalized, bureaucratic imperial state, then the palace layout reflected the system of marriage politics, with the bureaucratic machinery of state enclosing the inner harem where family alliances and political fortunes were established.

The original design of Heian-kyō (Kyoto) was never fully realized and like Heijō-kyō (Nara), the capital gradually diverged from its Chinese model. The western (right) sector was not as popular among higher-ranking aristocracy, and so over time parts of the city fell into disuse. Fires, epidemics, and natural

disasters further destroyed and depopulated sections of the capital, disrupting the intended spatial projection of power. Perhaps most important, many powerful aristocratic families built lavish villas in a style of architecture known as *shinden-zukuri* that revealed the reality of marriage politics at the court. These villas were not only an expression of taste and wealth but often served as the residence for a noble daughter who was the primary wife of an aristocrat or a member of the imperial family. Among high-ranking aristocrats in particular, it was not uncommon for the primary residence of a married couple to be the villa of the wife's family. In such cases, the husband usually maintained his own family residence elsewhere and normally had a number of secondary wives. As a result, the residences of some of the most important aristocratic families were in effect rival centers of power and cultural production. Over time these villas were constructed for retired emperors as well, who used them as a base from which to exert influence over court affairs; and in some cases even sitting emperors resided in villas. When Murasaki Shikibu served at the court of Empress Shōshi, the ruling monarch, Emperor Ichijō, resided for the most part in such a villa, the Tsuchimikado, under the largesse (and watchful eyes) of Shōshi's father, Fujiwara no Michinaga.

The ultimate irony of the evolution of court administration and aristocratic society during the eighth and ninth centuries is that over time the legitimacy and authority of the imperial institution was secured while the person of the emperor was effectively removed from de facto administration of the government. Moreover, stability in the line of succession was never fully secured. This happened largely because marriage politics undercut the original justification for adopting the Tang model of government: namely, the desire to establish a strong emperorship and a centralized state apparatus to prevent one family, like the Soga clan, from gaining control over the affairs of the imperial household. As things turned out, it was the northern branch or house of the Fujiwara clan (descendants of Nakatomi no Kamatari, that early champion of a strong emperorship) that came to dominate the court and the imperial succession.

The Fujiwara ascent to power, which took place over the course of the ninth and tenth centuries, is chronicled in works like *Eiga monogatari* (*A Tale of Flowering Fortunes*, ca. 1092),⁹ which explained the clan's rise as the inevitable workings of karma. Their acquisition of authority, however, was neither smooth nor inevitable. Throughout the seventh and eighth centuries the clan slowly built its economic base, and with wealth came a position of prominence at court. The regency line within the clan began with Fujiwara no Fuyutsugu (775–826), who served Emperor Saga throughout his life and rose to the position of Minister of the Right. Fuyutsugu's daughter became the primary consort of Emperor Saga's

son, and Saga's daughter was in turn married to Fuyutsugu's son Yoshifusa (804–872). Fuyutsugu's grandson through his daughter was named Crown Prince and eventually took the throne as Emperor Montoku after a succession struggle that left Yoshifusa the most powerful senior member of the Council of State. When Emperor Seiwa, who was only nine years old when he began his reign, succeeded Montoku, Yoshifusa was named Regent (*Sesshō*) and started the consolidation of Fujiwara power under this extra-code position.

The rise of the Fujiwara continued under Mototsune (836–891), Yoshifusa's adopted son, who served first as regent for Emperor Yōzei and later as chancellor (*Kanpaku*). Fujiwara control waned briefly in the late ninth century, but Tadahira (880–949) gradually reasserted authority and in 930 was named regent for the very young Emperor Suzaku. No regent was named for Emperor Murakami, but with the ascension to the throne of Emperor Reizei in 967, Fujiwara no Saneyori assumed the post of chancellor and two years later effectively eliminated all opposition to his family's authority when he succeeded in having Minamoto no Takaakira (914–983), the leader of a rival clan, exiled.

The power struggles of the late tenth century were all intrafamily affairs among members of the regency branch. Fujiwara no Kaneie (929–990) became regent in 986 when his grandson ascended the throne as Emperor Ichijō (980–1011). When Kaneie died, his oldest son, Michitaka (953–995), took over the regency and moved to consolidate the family's hold on power by having his daughter Teishi (977–1000) named empress and by scheming to have his own son, Korechika (973–1010), succeed him in turn. However, Michitaka's sister Senshi (962–1001), the mother of Emperor Ichijō, viewed Korechika as a potential threat and maneuvered to have one of her other brothers, Michikane (961–995), appointed regent instead. Michikane died within a week of his appointment, but Senshi was undeterred and plotted to have yet another brother, Michinaga (966–1027), named regent. Michinaga proved to be a ruthless leader. In 996, he exiled his rival (and nephew) Korechika. Three years later, he had his daughter Shōshi (988–1074) installed as an imperial consort and in the following year maneuvered to have her named empress, even though Teishi was still at the court.¹⁰ When Empress Shōshi gave birth to a son in 1008, Michinaga's hold on power was virtually absolute. Although he never took the official title of chancellor he was the uncle of two emperors and the grandfather of three more, and the period of his rule was the high-water mark of Fujiwara influence and the artistic zenith of the Heian court.

Murasaki Shikibu, author of the *Genji*

ELITE COURT society at the beginning of the eleventh century exhibited several distinctive characteristics. It was hierarchical and rigidly rank-conscious—so much so that rank by itself came to be considered a sign of merit and proof of good karma and was quite often the overriding criterion by which to judge the abilities and character of an individual irrespective of any actual talents or qualifications. The court was also intensely focused on ceremonials and public functions, which required detailed knowledge of proper form and conduct. These nearly obsessive preoccupations with rank and propriety created a hyperaesthetic culture that placed a premium on good taste: not simply for the sake of appreciating the intrinsic worth of art, but also to prove aristocratic breeding and, within the polygamous system of marriage politics, to act as a sexual lure that would draw aristocratic men to the salon of a noble lady. The manners and customs of such a rarefied culture are on full display in *Genji monogatari*, but the woman who turned the court's preoccupations into the subject of her art was in some ways an outsider to elite society.

The documentary evidence about the life of the woman we know by the nom de plume Murasaki Shikibu is scanty, but there is enough to piece together an outline biography. Her paternal line descended from Yoshikado, a son of Fujiwara no Fuyutsugu of the northern house of the Fujiwara clan. As noted above, another of Fuyutsugu's sons, Yoshifusa, was the founder of the regency branch that came to dominate the political life of the court. Murasaki's family, in contrast, belonged to a far less powerful branch. Though not as politically prominent, a number of her ancestors were well-known poets—most notably her great-grandfather Fujiwara no Kanesuke (877–933). Kanesuke counted among his peers Ōshikōchi no Mitsune and Ki no Tsurayuki; the latter occupies a special place in the history of Japanese literature as the primary compiler of the enormously influential first imperial anthology of Japanese poetry, the *Kokin wakashū* (*Collection of Japanese Poems Old and New*, 905).¹¹ In his time Kanesuke was considered one of the so-called thirty-six geniuses of poetry, and fifty-seven of his verses had the honor of being included in various imperial anthologies. Kanesuke was also relatively successful in terms of his political standing at court, rising to the position of Middle Counselor.

Murasaki Shikibu's grandfather, Masatada (d. 962), and her uncle, Tameyori, were recognized as skilled poets: seven of Masatada's verses were chosen for the imperial anthology *Gosenshū* (951). This artistic lineage was important to Murasaki's upbringing, and yet despite her family's reputation as poets and scholars, her branch of the Fujiwara represented the poor cousins of the clan, who did not rise above the middle ranks of the aristocracy to achieve any position of great political significance. The lack of official status posed

difficulties for Murasaki's father, Tametoki, throughout his life.

Because Tametoki is mentioned in connection with a poetry contest in 960, it is likely that he was born in the mid-940s, since he would have needed to be of age in order to participate in the event. His Japanese poetry was eventually included in later anthologies—the *Goshūishū* (compiled around 1086) and the *Shinkokinshū* (1205)—though it is possible that those selections were made partly in consideration of his daughter's reputation. He studied Chinese as a young man, and established himself as a scholar and a composer of verse in Chinese. He began to make his way up the bureaucratic ladder, first as an assistant to the governor of Harima. Emperor Kazan later appointed him in 984 to the post of secretary, senior grade, in the Ministry of Ceremonials, *Shikibu no Daijō*. When Kazan was forced to abdicate by Kaneie in favor of the boy-emperor, Ichijō, Tametoki lost his post and did not receive another appointment until 996, when he was named governor of the small island province of Awaji. This was a very low ranking appointment for someone of his age and learning, and so Tametoki protested to Ichijō. As a result, he was posted instead as governor to the larger and more prestigious province of Echizen, north of the capital along the coast of the Sea of Japan.

Tametoki served as governor until 1000, when he returned to the capital. He did not receive another formal posting for almost nine years, though he is mentioned in records of poetry contests and so obviously maintained some type of official relationship with the court. In 1011, he was again appointed governor, this time of the province of Echigo, a position he held until 1014. The highest rank he achieved was senior upper fifth, and after he returned to the capital from his final posting he retired to the Miidera Temple in 1016. The last official notice of his attendance at a court function is dated 1018, and he probably died a few years later, though some scholars list 1029 as the year of his death.

In 970, Tametoki married the daughter of Fujiwara no Tamenobu, a descendant from a different collateral branch of the northern house of the Fujiwara clan (though again not the regency line). The couple had at least three children: a son, Nobunori (d. 1011), and two daughters. Tametoki's wife apparently died when her children were quite young, so there is a high probability that Murasaki Shikibu was born during the early 970s, most likely in 973. Tametoki remarried and had several other children, including Nobumichi, who was appointed vice governor of Hitachi in 1019, and Jōsen, the abbot at the Miidera Temple where Tametoki retired in 1016.

As this brief sketch of her family background indicates, there is very little substantive documentary material on which to base a biography of Murasaki Shikibu, and scholars agree that what can be surmised about her life will always

remain largely speculative. Of course, one aspect about which there can be no doubt is that she received a thorough literary education from her father: her writings attest to her knowledge, and in any case it was in her father's interest to make sure she was trained in a way that would allow her to serve in the salon of a high-ranking lady. Her education would have included Chinese literature, which was an unusual area of expertise for a young woman. Despite her solid literary training, however, Murasaki came of age during the ten-year period when her father held no substantial position in the bureaucracy. Without official support or patronage, her father seems to have been unable either to secure an appointment for her at court or to arrange a marriage.

Her dependence on her father and his lack of official support explain why she accompanied him to the province of Echizen when he was named governor in 996. For an unmarried woman of her age and marginal social rank to leave the capital was, in terms of her prospects for potential advancement, virtually equivalent to being exiled. Sometime during the following two years she returned to the capital, and in either 998 or 999 she married a second cousin, Fujiwara no Nobutaka (ca. 950–1001). If Murasaki were indeed born in 973, she would have been in her mid-twenties, making her marriage late by Heian standards. She would not have been viewed as an especially attractive mate to be a primary wife, and that is confirmed by the fact that her husband, Nobutaka, was a much older man, nearly her father's age. Nobutaka also had several other wives—he had children by three other women—and a reputation as something of an outrageous character. These facts notwithstanding, it is useless to speculate on the nature of their relationship. What is known for sure is that they had a daughter, Kenshi, in 999,¹² and that Nobutaka died in 1001, probably as a result of an epidemic that swept the capital that year.

Tradition has it that Murasaki began writing *Genji monogatari* soon after her husband's death, supposedly as a kind of *nagusame*, or comfort, to fill her lonely days with the literary pursuits that obviously meant so much to her personally. How the earliest chapters circulated and exactly who was reading them at this time is not clear. But since she was a widow and her father, Tametoki, was once more without an appointment during this period of her life, it seems certain that portions of her tale had to have been read by members of the highest ranks of the aristocracy. For despite her lack of support and patronage, the quality of her writing undoubtedly brought her to the court's attention and helped her secure a position serving in the salon of the empress Shōshi in the residence of Fujiwara no Michinaga.

Most of what we know about Murasaki Shikibu's service comes from her own account of her time at Shōshi's court, which she recorded in a journal/diary,

Murasaki Shikibu nikki. Although this journal does not clearly state when she began her service—most scholars consider 1006 a compromise date—she was obviously well established by 1008, which is the year that Shōshi gave birth to the son who would eventually become Emperor Go-Ichijō. This was an extremely important event for Shōshi’s father, Michinaga, in that it secured his power after more than twelve years of ruthless political maneuvering; and its significance is reflected in the structure of Murasaki Shikibu’s journal, the first half of which is devoted to life at Michinaga’s villa, Tsuchimikado, where his daughter moved to avoid defiling the palace when she gave birth. The prominence given to the birth and all the rituals and festivities that surrounded it may not reflect the intended design or purpose of the journal, which may be only a surviving fragment of a larger diary. Nevertheless, whatever its original design (if there was one), it is only in the second half of the work that Murasaki Shikibu shifts her focus away from detailed, often trenchant observations of court life to more personal remarks about her peers and her own circumstances.

Following the fiftieth-day celebrations of the birth, which marked the end of the period of confinement and purification, Shōshi and her retinue begin making preparations to return to the palace. At this point, the tone of the author’s journal changes:

Seeing the water birds on the lake increase in number day by day, I thought to myself how nice it would be if it snowed before we got back to the Palace—the garden would look so beautiful; and then, two days later, while I was away on a short visit, lo and behold, it did snow. As I watched the rather drab scene at home, I felt both depressed and confused. For some years now I had existed from day to day in listless fashion, taking note of the flowers, the birds in song, the way the skies change from season to season, the moon, the frost and snow, doing little more than registering the passage of time. How would it all turn out? The thought of my continuing loneliness was unbearable, and yet I had managed to exchange sympathetic letters with those of like mind—some contacted via fairly tenuous connections—who would discuss my trifling tales and other matters with me; but I was merely amusing myself with fictions, finding solace for my idleness in foolish words. Aware of my own insignificance, I had at least managed for the time being to avoid anything that might have been considered shameful or unbecoming; yet here I was tasting the bitterness of life to the very full.¹³

Murasaki goes on to note how disappointed she feels when she rereads her tales,

and laments how her service to Shōshi has cut her off from those with whom she used to share her feelings. She is convinced that her former companions must consider her frivolous, and that people at the court must see her as nothing more than a common attendant. She feels misunderstood and isolated, and her sojourn at her family home merely intensifies those emotions.

Her account of personal uncertainties and loneliness may be less a record of her true state of mind than a literary pose—that is, it may be a conventional literary voice, one seen in other journals by aristocratic women written at the time. For that reason, some caution is in order in making any claims for the journal as a true expression of her inner self. Yet when we consider the circumstances of her life—her father’s political failures, her unusual education and upbringing, especially her training in Chinese, her isolation from the court and the brief time she had to spend away from the capital, her late marriage and widowhood, the solitary period when she most likely began her career as a writer—it is hard to believe that the self-description in her diary is only a literary pose, only the effect of conventionally introspective language. In a later passage, when she is discussing her peers and the gossip that sometimes swirls around her, what emerges from her entries is a complex personality, needy and strong, gifted and anxious.

So all they see of me is a façade. There are times when I am forced to sit with them and on such occasions I simply ignore their petty criticisms, not because I am particularly shy but because I consider it pointless. As a result, they now look upon me as a dullard.

“Well, we never expected this!” they all say. “No one liked her. They all said she was too pretentious, awkward, difficult to approach, prickly, too fond of her tales, haughty, prone to versifying, disdainful, cantankerous and scornful; but when you meet her, she is strangely meek, a completely different person altogether!”

How embarrassing! Do they really look upon me as such a dull thing, I wonder? But I am what I am. Her Majesty [Shōshi] has also remarked more than once that she had thought I was not the kind of person with whom she could ever relax, but that I have now become closer to her than any of the others. I am so perverse and standoffish. If only I can avoid putting off those for whom I have genuine regard.¹⁴

This volatile mix of pride and insecurity, of self-deprecation and exasperation with the ways of the world, crops up as well in her comments about how others react to her erudition and, of course, to her “tales.”¹⁵ It is no overinterpretation of

the text to read this as evidence of a sensitive person who is talented and strong-willed enough to gain the affection and confidence of an empress, but who is also awkward and obsessive in her interests.

The journal is so short it is impossible to go beyond these general observations and draw any more detailed conclusions about the personality of Murasaki Shikibu. Still, the observations she provides of her own life give us a helpful, if tantalizingly brief glimpse of the interaction between a brilliant literary sensibility and the rigid, ruthlessly proper, competitive, and hypersexualized society of the Heian court. Out of that fortuitous interaction Murasaki was able to draw the inspiration to write *Genji monogatari*, a narrative that reflects the complexities of both her temperament and the times in which she lived.

Barring the unlikely discovery of a manuscript dating from the time of composition, the date of completion of *Genji monogatari* will remain unknown. Since we do not know how much had been completed or even conceived by the time she arrived at the court, it is impossible to guess how quickly she was able to write. The author mentions in her journal how she lost a “fair copy” of her manuscript when Michinaga took it for his second daughter;¹⁶ and in the same passage she notes how happy she is to have received a precious gift of writing supplies—paper, brushes, and the like. What these brief remarks indicate is that she may have had to stop and start her work several times and that different versions of chapters were definitely circulating while she was composing. Copying was time-consuming, and even materials for writing were not always readily available. Given the constraints on an individual writer, then, it is possible—perhaps likely—that a large portion of the text was written while Murasaki was in service at the court, where she would have received the material support she needed.

Murasaki’s journal ends in 1010, and Emperor Ichijō died the following year. With his death, Empress Shōshi withdrew from the palace to a villa at Biwa. According to a journal, *Shōyūki*, by Fujiwara no Sanesuke (957–1046), Murasaki is listed among Shōshi’s attendants in the year 1013, and in her poetry collection there is an exchange of verses with a woman named Ise no Tayū that is dated 1014. However, her name does not appear on a list of attendants accompanying Shōshi on a pilgrimage in 1031, so it is highly likely that she died sometime in the intervening years. Unfortunately, there is no way to ascertain when she left court service or when she died, and any guess is based on mere speculation. It may seem like wistful sentimentality to be dissatisfied that the life story of Murasaki Shikibu is so utterly lost in time, but with so many gaps in the historical records—gaps that give rise to uncertainty about even the most basic

information, such as her given name¹⁷—it is in a way remarkable that we have as much information about her as we do. After all, we know that many other tales and diaries and records from that period have been lost, so we should count it a fortunate turn that *Genji monogatari* survived.

The question of genre: Writerly practices and readerly expectations

IN SUGGESTING that *Genji monogatari* is a product not so much of transcendent genius as of the “situatedness” of a gifted individual in particular cultural and social conditions, I do not mean to imply that Murasaki Shikibu’s achievement is principally historical or sociological in nature, as if her story were simply a compendium of facts about the customs and manners of the Heian court. Her achievement derives instead from the interplay among the various social and literary discourses that she drew upon to create for the reader an illusion of unmediated access to a different emotional and cultural realm—a realm that may be imagined as not merely possible but plausible. Murasaki Shikibu gives a vibrant account of her society through characters whose actions are sometimes appalling, but who are redeemed as literary creations by their ability to apprehend the beauty immanent in the fearful sadness of ephemeral life and by the mysterious, poignant human vulnerability to holding contradictory longings or seeking impossible ideals.

The temporal remoteness of the Heian court and its fundamentally different assumptions about the world pose serious, though not insurmountable, challenges for a translation. The style of the narrative can seem elliptical at points since the text assumes familiarity with court life on the part of the reader. By the same token, the realistic techniques of *Genji monogatari*, especially the use of circumstantial detail in descriptive passages, provide enough context on the whole to make the work reasonably accessible, even without extensive annotation. Moreover, multiple, fluidly shifting perspectives—especially the intrusive perspective of a narrator with a distinctive voice of her own—are occasionally employed to explain the significance of some aspect of the story, thereby acting as commentator and intermediary for the reader. The presence of multiple perspectives and voices that are often introspective and self-aware indicates that the author conceived of her work as a kind of textual fugue, combining and developing the various stylistic conventions available to her.

Murasaki Shikibu’s education was primarily a literary one, and as the thick matrix of allusion, poetic vocabulary, religious and critical discourses that make

up *Genji monogatari* attests, she had command of an extensive tradition that enabled her both to express her personal aesthetic sensibility and to represent the realities of court society. It is precisely that aspect of her art—the tone and texture and rhythms of language—that poses the greatest difficulty for a translation. While it is possible to make use of what we know about the historical, personal, or social contexts of the composition of a work to gain access to it, there is simply no way to reproduce precisely the effects achieved by one language in another. What *can* be achieved is an analogue to the original, and because I undertook this translation with that goal in mind, it may be helpful to note here a few of the general features of the literary environment in which Murasaki Shikibu developed as an artist. These include the deep connection of literary discourse both to the public functions of the court and to private social life; the development of an extremely sophisticated literary language that combined elements from both Chinese and Japanese; and the fusion of literary modes and sources that complicate generic categories.

In the process of adopting the legal and administrative structures of the Tang court in the seventh and eighth centuries, the Japanese court also emulated the Chinese emphasis on the importance to the state of the writing of poetry and history. History was seen as a means to establish political legitimacy and to provide guidance for good governance. Poetry had a ritual or ceremonial function, and it was thus crucial for courtiers to be able to compose verse as part of their official duties. Poetry was also used among the aristocracy as an important form of communication in personal relationships, especially romantic liaisons and courtships leading to marriage. The study of poetry and rhetoric was thus a major part of courtly education generally.

Officially sanctioned histories in the Nara and Heian periods were written in Chinese, though one of the oldest extant chronicles, *Kojiki* (*Records of Ancient Matters*, 712), was written mainly in Japanese. Later vernacular histories, exemplified by works such as *Eiga monogatari* (noted above) and *Ōkagami* (*The Great Mirror*, ca. 1119), illustrate the continued influence of the Chinese valorization of history as a narrative form, but they are written in a narrative mode that partly emulates Murasaki Shikibu's stylistics—a reflection of how quickly the prestige of *Genji monogatari* was established. Similarly, poetry in both Chinese and Japanese was widely practiced, and privately collected anthologies, such as *Kaifūsō* (*Yearnings for Ancient Chinese Style*, a collection of Chinese verse compiled ca. 951) and *Man'yōshū* (*Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves*, compiled during the mid- to late eighth century), exerted tremendous influence. Later, imperially sponsored anthologies of Japanese verse, beginning with the *Kokinshū*, further refined the conventions of Japanese poetry and

established standards for composition, while the continuing importance of Chinese verse was reinforced through the early eleventh-century compilation by Fujiwara no Kinto (966–1041) of the *Wakan rōeishū* (*Collection of Japanese and Chinese Poetry to Sing*).

Formal education in Chinese was largely reserved for men at the court, and male courtiers had to use Chinese in official or public capacities in ways women normally did not. This fact of court life, coupled with the association of women authors with the development of vernacular narrative forms and the use of *hiragana*, may make it seem that some literary practices were strictly gendered. It is certainly true that noblewomen were not as a rule educated in Chinese, but the cultural situation was complex, and it would be a mistake to assume that women were restricted solely to writing in the so-called woman's hand (*onnade*). The polygamous society of the court in combination with marriage politics encouraged the patronage of literary and artistic talent in the salons of high-ranking ladies, and while explicit displays of facility in Chinese by women were discouraged, that did not necessarily limit tastes to a purely Japanese aesthetic. On the contrary, there is little doubt that highly literate women would have had some knowledge of at least the poetry of China, especially works written during the Tang dynasty.

In the case of Murasaki Shikibu, the range of allusions in *Genji monogatari* indicates how well versed she was in Chinese literature. Her knowledge of the language is mentioned explicitly in her journal, where she notes that she was much quicker and more adept than her brother at learning Chinese—a facility that caused her scholarly father to lament that she had not been born a boy. Later, her knowledge of Chinese would cause her some grief at court, where she was mocked for a talent not considered appropriate or ladylike. In her journal she expresses a mixture of exasperation and resignation over gossip that censured her for being bookish and haughty about her learning, and notes (not without some sense of pride) how the atmosphere at court forces her to read the poems of Bai Juyi with Empress Shōshi in private.¹⁸ In reality, then, poetic practices were not as absolutely gendered as they may seem on the surface, and the claim by Murasaki Shikibu that she had to read Chinese with her empress in secret suggests just how transgressive literature could be.

Because literary practices were deeply embedded in all aspects of court society, and because these practices drew upon not only a long indigenous tradition but also an enormous body of work from China, many sources were available to Murasaki Shikibu when she began composing *Genji monogatari*: officially sanctioned histories and anthologies, private collections of poetry, miscellanies and journals, court records of public ceremonials and rituals,

religious texts, and of course fiction in a variety of forms. More important, much of the literature of mid-Heian Japan showed a tendency toward a fusion of forms: between folk tales (Japanese and Asian continental) and courtly narratives, as in *Taketori monogatari* (*The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter*, compiled early tenth century); between poetry and prose, as in *Ise monogatari* (*Tales of Ise*, ca. 961), which may have begun as a collection of Japanese poetry (*waka*) around which short anecdotes developed to provide context and meaning for the thirty-one-syllable verse form; and between personal diaries or journals and poetry, as in *Kagerō nikki* (*A Gossamer Diary*, ca. 974), *Izumi Shikibu nikki* (*Diary of Izumi Shikibu*, ca. 1007), or Sei Shōnagon's celebrated *Makura no sōshi* (*Pillow Book*, ca. 996–1002).

This rich literary legacy is present in several key elements of *Genji monogatari*. First and most obvious is the extensive use of poetry. Murasaki's narrative is not strictly speaking an *uta-monogatari*, a poem-tale like *Ise monogatari*, since the prose was not added primarily as a supplement to individual poems. However, it does draw heavily on the social and political use of poetry as an essential part of the narrative structure. Second, the work is made up of a tightly interwoven web of allusions that connect it not just to other works of poetry and fiction but also to religious texts, histories, and court records that provide detailed observations of ceremonies, rituals, entertainments, and contests. Third, the story makes use of the convention of a narrative voice that is individuated, critical, and often introspective to create the illusion of a consciousness or subjectivity that seems to arise out of the text. This narrative technique developed over a period of time, especially in diary or journal literature (from Ki no Tsurayuki's *Tosa nikki*, ca. 935, through *Kagerō nikki*, and on to *Makura no sōshi*), and Murasaki makes use of the stylistics of voice for the development of her characters, whose depth and emotional realism constitute one of the signal achievements of her fiction. The subjectivity of the characters further contributes to the overall realism of the work by creating multiple perspectives—a technique, to return to a point made above, that is most obviously on display in the intrusions of a narrator who occasionally comments self-consciously on her relationship with the main characters.

The allusive quality of Murasaki Shikibu's writing and the fusion of so many generic elements—fiction, history, poetry, court records, the interiorized subjectivity of memoir and diary—is reflected in the operative generic word used in the title, *monogatari*. A *monogatari* is literally an accounting or “telling” (*katari*) of “things” (*mono*), and the term was applied equally to the titles of journals and diaries, histories, poem-tales, and fiction. This broad usage points to the fluid notion of genre that existed at the time the author wrote. Hers was a

literary culture defined, in a peculiar way, by what may seem to us like polar opposite practices. The standards for what constituted proper diction and subject matter, especially for poetry, were prescriptive, idealized, and highly conventional, and yet there were no absolute generic boundaries separating various forms and styles of writing. The crossing of literary boundaries was an accepted practice that gave the author the scope she needed to represent her world realistically.

The fact that the tale Murasaki Shikibu created resists simplistic categorization brings us back to the question raised at the beginning of this introduction. How should the contemporary reader approach this text? More specifically, are we justified in thinking of this work as a novel? To call *Genji monogatari* the world's first novel is, from a historical standpoint, anachronistic and critically problematic, since it gives priority to a Western genre that arises much later and has no connection with Murasaki Shikibu's stylistics. Still, it is difficult completely to discount all of the qualities of *Genji monogatari* that seem familiar to modern readers or that meet contemporary expectations. This is especially true of its heteroglossia, a term coined by Mikhail Bakhtin to describe what he saw as one of the distinctive features of the novel:

The novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types and by the individual voices that flourish under such conditions. Authorial speech, the speech of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized). These distinctive links and interrelationships between utterances and languages, this movement of the theme through different languages and speech types, its dispersion into the rivulets and droplets of social heteroglossia, its dialogization—that is the basic distinguishing feature of the stylistics of the novel.¹⁹

Heteroglossia, once it has been “incorporated” into the novel, is further defined by Bakhtin as “*another’s* speech in another’s language,” speech that creates a “double-

voiced discourse” by serving both the direct intentions of a fictional character and the indirect, or refracted, aims of the author.²⁰

I noted earlier that Murasaki Shikibu’s use of the wide range of literary discourses available to her helped create a multivocal narrative that served

specific rhetorical functions within the fictional world of the court (such as establishing the motives and subjectivity of the characters) as well as the author's larger aesthetic and moral aims. Since the multivocal element of her stylistics shares the quality of "double-voicing" so distinctive to the modern novel, it is not unreasonable to consider *Genji monogatari* novelistic. Indeed, when we examine the discursive and poetic elements that Murasaki Shikibu drew upon to compose her narrative, there is in fact much that resembles certain iterations of the novel. To take one example, it shares a number of features with Gothic romance: a tendency for characters to be introspective and isolated; the use of desolate, eerie settings; manifestations of the supernatural such as spirit possessions; a recursive plot structure based upon haunted obsessions with the past and the return of repressed desires; a sense of doom, of being cursed and unable to escape destiny. And like a Gothic romance, *Genji monogatari* gestures toward an affect of the sublime that derives in large part from anxiety and terror.

Yet for all these similarities, the work also transcends the category of Gothic romance by giving us moments of comic relief, celebrations of auspicious fate, satiric and ironic observations of court life, and a remarkably vivid sense of the emotional lives and motivations of the characters. The complexity of Murasaki Shikibu's narrative, then, complicates any formal comparisons of it to the novel, because the shared quality of heteroglossia is largely the product of historical coincidence. The "double-voiced" discourse of *Genji monogatari* is rooted in a number of specific customs and speech acts practiced at the highest levels of Heian court society that figure prominently as plot devices in Murasaki's narrative: the use of intermediaries by highborn men and women who would normally only speak with one another indirectly;²¹ the heavy use of poetic allusion in which a speaker assumes the voice of another in an attempt to manipulate a situation to realize his or her desires; the use of letters to conjure the presence of those who are absent or dead; and the occurrence of spirit possessions in which the words of one character, who may be either living or dead, literally find voice through another. In all these customary speech acts there is already a "double-voiced" discourse at work, which suggests that the similarities between *Genji monogatari* and the modern Western novel are accidental, arising out of very different social and cultural practices.

The point here is not to dismiss similarities between Murasaki Shikibu's narrative and various subtypes of the Western novel, but to account for the respective historical contexts of composition. After all, some modern readers may find certain aspects of *Genji monogatari* so alien that the story may seem puzzling, or even clumsy. For example, the temporal structure of the narrative may strike some as uneven and discontinuous because the order provided by

culturally specific markers and psychological conceptions of time—a court calendar organized around religious and agricultural festivals, the keen observation of lunar cycles, the belief in karmic destiny—is radically different from our own. *Genji monogatari* may also confound modern expectations with its heavy use of a prescriptive, idealistic aesthetic vocabulary to represent idealized categories of appearance, behavior, and values within a fundamentally realistic mode of narrative. As a result, the description of settings or of the emotional states of the characters may seem repetitive and limited.

The presence of both striking similarities and major differences between *Genji monogatari* and the modern novel (the ways in which it confirms or confounds our expectations for the novel) may make a firm generic classification problematic, but the comparison is still worthwhile in that it highlights the assumptions behind the critical categories we use to judge a work of literary art and forces us to account for the expectations we bring to our readings. The importance of the comparison becomes even more apparent when we consider that Bakhtin's evocative description of the stylistics of the novel certainly applies to *Genji monogatari* in one key respect. For what he is really describing with his notion of heteroglossia is a quality of narration that actively resists or undercuts generic classification. Ironically, then, the anachronistic label of “world’s first novel,” historically inaccurate though it may be, is not entirely inappropriate after all, since the novel by its very nature is a form that evades easy categorization. Murasaki’s *monogatari* is an amalgamation of other texts that nonetheless remains *sui generis*.

Some notes on the translation

THROUGHOUT THE various stages of preparing this translation I have tried as far as possible to replicate in English the parochial literary qualities of the classical Japanese text while remaining ever conscious of the highly subjective nature of this type of work. Over the years I have been asked many times, usually by colleagues in the field, why I chose to undertake this project. The question is a reasonable one, though the implications it raises are not entirely positive. After all, there are other English-language versions of this work, and offering one’s own translation can seem like an implicit critique of earlier efforts—though that has never been my motive or intent. Moreover, in the case of *Genji monogatari* the difficulty and length of the source text present such a daunting challenge that anyone who takes it up must be foolish or presumptuous or self-absorbed—and to be honest, as I have struggled through this work there have been times when I felt I was all those things. So why take up the challenge?

In the face of such a serious question it is tempting to retreat behind a parapet of stock explanations: because Murasaki Shikibu's work is intrinsically beautiful; because it is an important monument of world literature; because it stirs personal feelings of admiration and pleasure. As it happens, I was (and still am) motivated by all those reasons. Yet as I worked through the source text, translating and revising numerous times, the justification for pursuing a project that took me away from so much in my personal and professional life evolved. The art of literature only comes into being at the moment of engagement between reader and text, and since every such engagement is different, there can never be a definitive reading. Since all translators are readers first and foremost, the most considered justification I can offer (especially to myself) is a paradoxical one: I have undertaken this work precisely because there can be no such thing as a definitive translation. The very idea of somehow completely capturing in one language a text in another is a chimera, for the text possesses the reader as much as the reader/translator possesses the text. Thus, I believe it is only through multiple translations of brilliantly complex and historically influential narratives like *Genji monogatari* that we can "get at" a source work in another language, that the art created in the moment of reading can be made truly manifest.

Translating, then, is a deeply humbling task because it heightens our awareness of the parochial nature of all languages and forces the translator to confront issues of faithfulness, originality, and influence that can never be fully resolved. In a sense a translation is a virtual palimpsest, a writing over of one language by another that unavoidably acts as a mediating barrier to the very text it strives to make intelligible. As a mediation of something considered authentic and original, translation can be justified only if it maintains the pretense that it is accurate and sincere in its attitude toward the source work. Indeed, translation is so fundamental to cultural exchange that its contradictory nature can seem like an analytical illusion, something that is there only when one thinks about it. The common tendency to set aside the more troublesome aspects of translation as an abstract annoyance that interferes with the readerly pretense of "getting at" that authentic something of the source text explains why the ideal of translation is transparency—a style of writing that somehow makes the translator's presence undetectable so that the reader may experience the original in an unmediated way. But that experience is a trick of the mind. A translation is an extremely intrusive form of reading, but it is a form of reading all the same, one that makes explicit the fact that literary texts only come into being as *art* in the consciousness of readers. In a very real sense, the authentic text of a work like *Genji monogatari*—the "original" that any translation gestures toward—is the

sum of all its readings. To put the point in a different way, the only truly original text is one that has never been read.

Although my justification for preparing this translation seems paradoxical, it in fact guided the practical choices I made in rendering the source text into English. I began with an explicitly literal version that I subsequently retranslated several times. I approached my work in this way so that the classical Japanese would leave some traces in the English style—just as the older underlying text in a palimpsest may still be visible. These traces are apparent in a number of intentional quirks of style and typography in my version: the occasional inversion of phrases and clauses from their usual order in English, the use of dashes (or ellipses in quoted speech) to convey parenthetical comments or to indicate breaks in sentences marked by grammatical forms that have no exact equivalent in English, and the use of italics to mark out thoughts or interior monologues. Although these quirks represent the aftereffects of my efforts to replicate the rhythms and pace of the classical Japanese, the prosody of English is so different that I did not try for direct correspondences but sought to capture more general effects.

In retranslating the initial version, I proceeded by operating under the assumption that although Murasaki Shikibu's writing would have been challenging to her contemporaries (as any complex literary work challenges a reader), the classical language that is so difficult now would have been familiar and accessible to an audience that shared the author's social background and literary expectations. Solitary reading was common at the court, but quite frequently courtiers read together, and out of that shared experience a community of interpretation arose. Such a community would have helped to clarify complicated relationships and difficult allusions in the text for one another. Although the reading practices of the Heian courtiers cannot be replicated, the tasks of explanation and explication, which were an important aspect of reading together, can be taken up in a translation. Thus, accessibility and clarity have been overriding goals for me, and to achieve those goals I have added relevant information either within the body of the text or in footnotes. At the same time, I have tried to maintain an even pace in the narrative by keeping the visual disruption caused by footnotes to a minimum. Still, a fair amount of annotation is required, with the majority of notes pointing to the poetic allusions that were a crucial part of the reading experience for Murasaki Shikibu's contemporaries. These allusions, which are an unwritten part of the text, not only add color and nuance but also help illuminate a character's mood and motives or explain some element of the plot. Other footnotes explain social customs or beliefs when such information seemed important to more fully comprehend the

story. Still, one of the tasks of translation is explication (or explanation), and so I concluded that adding brief phrases to clarify passages that would have been understood by the author's contemporaries (but that now might cause confusion standing on their own) does no more violence to the text than footnotes.

I have tried to replicate the general rhythms of the prose style, which tends to exhibit longer and more complex sentence structures than modern English, but not at the expense of the pace of a narrative that was written as if to be read aloud. I feel that even in some of the longer soliloquies, the rhythms of Murasaki Shikibu's style create a sense of forward momentum. While her sentence structure is often complex, the author repeatedly relies on certain grammatical patterns to maintain a generally flowing quality to the rhythm of sentences.²² Since the prosody of English does not always permit the use of such long sentences without losing the sense, I have tried to compensate where possible by using parallelisms, multiple appositional phrases, lists, and parenthetical statements.

I have not tried to copy in English the precise rhythmic patterns of Japanese poetry, since many of them utilize wordplay and allusions that greatly expand their semantic reach. Quite often neither the sense nor the aesthetic feel of a poem can be captured in English in a verse limited to thirty-one syllables. By the same token, adding words to a translation to make it come up to the requisite syllabic count can potentially be as misleading as adding too few words. For that reason I decided after considerable trial and error to structure poems as triplets with lines of equal syllabic length, with the length of lines varying from poem to poem—that is, some poems may have lines of eight syllables each (twenty-four total), while others may have lines with as many as fourteen syllables (forty-two in all). To capture the rhythms of the original I have tried to create a kind of counterpoint between phrases and clauses, and in some cases I have used commas and ellipses to mark weak or strong caesuras.

I am aware that my stylistic choices for rendering the poetry in English (like my decision to use italics to visually highlight thoughts or interior monologues) may be controversial, since they fly in the face of conventional forms. My justification is twofold. First, Japanese poetry is an art that demands contextualization, and so the narrative function of Murasaki Shikibu's poems calls for a flexible approach to form. After all, not every poem is lyrical in tone, though many of them *are* used to heighten the expression of emotion or mood. A large number of verses have an expository function in that they are composed to explain or tease, to insult or exult, to praise or complain. These multifarious uses in the narrative occasionally require a more expansive form to convey the sense or mood, which the triplet form provides without going to the extreme of free

verse. Second, I believe it is more accurate and pleasing to try to capture multiple meanings in the verse itself rather than explain them in a footnote.

A few other choices should be noted here. The characters' names are problematic in many cases, since they may vary from chapter to chapter (this is especially true of the male characters, whose appellations change as they rise through the ranks of the bureaucracy). Since my overriding concerns are clarity and accessibility, I have used traditional names for some of the characters but not all of them, since some of the traditional names are more justified than others. I explain my choices in notes in the text and feel confident that they are relatively easy to follow. As for the names of plants, textile colors and patterns, governmental offices, and the like, I have for the most part stayed with standard scholarly or common English names. However, there are a few instances when I diverge from standard usage, and when I do so, I note my reasons for that divergence. Finally, it bears mentioning again that while the classical Japanese vocabulary and imagery used to convey aesthetic values or emotional states is rich and subtle, it is also somewhat limited due to the prescriptive impulse that arose over concerns with propriety in diction. The result is a repetitiveness (such as the seemingly endless number of sleeves dampened with dewy tears) that may fly in the face of contemporary expectations of style and character development. Still, I have tried not to go too far with the use of synonyms for the sake of lexical variety (the thesaurus effect), but have relied instead on narrative context to suggest the fuller nuances of this sort of vocabulary.

The process of negotiating linguistic and cultural differences involves an interplay of poetics and criticism that necessitates the kinds of choices described above—choices that, while certainly not arbitrary, are ultimately subjective. I am fully aware that my translation remains an analogue of the original, one created by an individual interpretation of the text. This too is a humbling realization. However, I hope that highlighting the limits of translation allows us to see the value of the task. For in the same way that a skeptical reading of the canonical status of *Genji monogatari* opens us more fully to the challenges and pleasures of Murasaki Shikibu's narrative, the effort of a translation to harmonize languages also lays bare parochial assumptions and expectations that might otherwise go unconsidered, and thereby opens up a space of self-reflection where the interaction between reader and text can bring into being the meanings and effects of Murasaki Shikibu's art.

¹ A fine English-language version of this work is available. See *As I Crossed a Bridge of Dreams*, trans.

Ivan Morris (New York: The Dial Press, 1971), pp. 54–55.

² The authorship of this work, which likely dates to the fifteenth century, is in doubt. It has been variously attributed to Zeami and Konparu Zenchiku, among others.

³ Bashō is considered by some scholars to be the last of the great medieval poets, so my use of the term “modern” requires some explanation. His disciples and peers described his aesthetics and poetic practices in terms of a dialectic between the concepts of permanence (*fueki*) and temporary, mutable fashion (*ryūkō*)—concepts that owe a great deal to medieval aesthetics. My use of “modern” is meant to emphasize the second element of that dialectic. More important, I do consider Bashō modern in the sense that the widespread circulation and consumption of his works were made possible by an early modern print economy that radically impacted the conception and reception of his poetry and travel journals.

⁴ Patrick Cadreau has written a study of *Genji* scholarship during this period, focusing mainly on the work of Hagiwara Hiromichi (1815–1863). See *Appraising Genji: Literary Criticism and High Anxiety in the Age of the Last Samurai* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006).

⁵ A translation of this account may be found in William Theodore de Bary, et al., *Sources of Japanese Tradition: From Earliest Times to 1600*, Vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 6–8.

⁶ Six women took the throne in early Japan, but emperorship became an almost exclusive preserve of men after 770. There wasn’t another empress regnant until Meishō (1624–1696; r. 1629–43) and Go-Sakuramachi (1740–1813; r. 1762–71) ascended the throne during the Tokugawa period.

⁷ These were the Central Affairs Ministry, Ministry of Ceremonials, Civil Affairs Ministry, Popular Affairs Ministry, Punishments Ministry, War Ministry, Treasury, and Imperial Household Ministry.

⁸ The *Burakuin* gradually fell into disuse; by Murasaki Shikibu’s day, most of its functions were carried out in the Inner Palace (*Dairi*).

⁹ William and Helen McCullough translated this work and wrote an authoritative introduction and notes that provide an account of the history and institutions of the Heian court. See *A Tale of Flowering Fortunes: Annals of Japanese Aristocratic Life in the Heian Period*, 2 vols. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1980).

¹⁰ The Yōrō Code specified there could be only one empress at a time, but this rule was often ignored. Michinaga formally did away with it when he named his daughter the *Chūgū* empress (*Chūgū* being an older term for the empress’s quarters). Teishi held the older title of *Kōgō*, a term that means something like “empress consort.”

¹¹ The title of this anthology is usually abbreviated to *Kokinshū*, and that is how I cite it in the text.

¹² This daughter, who was later known as Echigo no Ben, rose to prominence in 1025 when she became the wet nurse (*menoto*) to the future Emperor Go-Reizei.

¹³ Richard Bowring has provided a superb translation and study of *Murasaki Shikibu nikki*. See *The Diary of Lady Murasaki* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), pp. 33–34.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 56.

¹⁵ See two passages in particular: pp. 30–31 and 57–59.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁷ Shikibu is taken from the position her father held at the time she came of age. Murasaki may be based on either the character who becomes Genji’s most beloved lady or the purple (*murasaki*) color of wisteria, *fūji*, an element of her family name. The author recounts in her journal an incident in which she is teasingly referred to as the character Murasaki. See ibid., p. 31.

¹⁸ See ibid., pp. 57–58.

¹⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 263.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 324 (the italics are Bakhtin’s).

²¹ These intermediaries, usually ladies-in-waiting, often act in their own interests to facilitate a love affair, and thus play an authorial role (with what Bakhtin refers to as “refracted intentions”) in the narrative.

²² To take two simple examples, the author makes extensive use of the verbal suffix *ba*, which sets up a conditional or cause-and-effect relationship between clauses, and the conjunctive particle (*w)o*, which

visually and grammatically marks a weak break between sentences without fully bringing a statement to a stop. The effect is of one sentence or phrase rolling, both semantically and rhythmically, into another.

The Tale of Genji

I

Kiritsubo

The Lady of the Paulownia-Courtyard Chambers

IN WHOSE reign was it that a woman of rather undistinguished lineage captured the heart of the Emperor and enjoyed his favor above all the other imperial wives and concubines? Certain consorts, whose high noble status gave them a sense of vain entitlement, despised and reviled her as an unworthy upstart from the very moment she began her service. Ladies of lower rank were even more vexed, for they knew His Majesty would never bestow the same degree of affection and attention on them. As a result, the mere presence of this woman at morning rites or evening ceremonies seemed to provoke hostile reactions among her rivals, and the anxiety she suffered as a consequence of these ever-increasing displays of jealousy was such a heavy burden that gradually her health began to fail.

His Majesty could see how forlorn she was, how often she returned to her family home. He felt sorry for her and wanted to help, and though he could scarcely afford to ignore the admonitions of his advisers, his behavior eventually became the subject of palace gossip. Ranking courtiers and attendants found it difficult to stand by and observe the troubling situation, which they viewed as deplorable. They were fully aware that a similarly ill-fated romance had thrown the Chinese state into chaos.¹ Concern and consternation gradually spread through the court, since it appeared that nothing could be done. Many considered the relationship scandalous, so much so that some openly referred to the example of the Prize Consort Yang. The only thing that made it possible for the woman to continue to serve was the Emperor's gracious devotion.

The woman's father had risen to the third rank as a Major Counselor before he died. Her mother, the principal wife of her father, was a woman of old-fashioned upbringing and character who was well trained in the customs and rituals of the court. Thus, the reputation of her house was considered in no way inferior and

did not suffer by comparison with the brilliance of the highest nobility. Unfortunately, her family had no patrons who could provide political support, and after her father's death there was no one she could rely on. In the end, she found herself at the mercy of events and with uncertain prospects.

Was she not, then, bound to the Emperor by some deep love from a previous life? For in spite of her travails, she eventually bore him a son—a pure radiant gem like nothing of this world. Following the child's birth His Majesty had to wait impatiently, wondering when he would finally be allowed to see the boy. As soon as it could be ritually sanctioned, he had the infant brought from the home of the woman's mother, where the birth had taken place,² and the instant he gazed on the child's countenance he recognized a rare beauty.

Now, as it so happened, the Crown Prince had been born three years earlier to the Kokiden Consort, who was the daughter of the Minister of the Right. As the unquestioned heir to the throne, the boy had many supporters and the courtiers all treated him with the utmost respect and deference. He was, however, no match for the radiant beauty of the newborn Prince; and even though the Emperor was bound to acknowledge the higher status of his older son and to favor him in public, in private he could not resist treating the younger Prince as his favorite and lavishing attention upon him.

The mother of the newborn Prince did not come from a family of the highest rank, but neither was she of such low status that she should have been constantly by the Emperor's side like a common servant. Certainly her reputation was flawless, and she comported herself with noble dignity, but because His Majesty obsessively kept her near him, willfully demanding that they not be separated, she had to be in attendance at all formal court performances or elegant entertainments. There were times when she would spend the night with him and then be obliged to continue in service the following day. Consequently, as one might expect, other courtiers came to look down on her not only as a person of no significance, but also as a woman who lacked any sense of propriety. Moreover, because the Emperor treated her with special regard following the birth of his second son, the Kokiden Consort and her supporters grew anxious; they worried about the effect of such an infatuation on the prospects of the Crown Prince and wondered if the younger Prince might not surpass his half brother in favor and usurp his position. The Kokiden Consort had been the Emperor's first wife. She had arrived at the palace before all the other women, and so His Majesty's feelings of affection for her were in no way ordinary. He considered her protests troubling, but he also had to acknowledge that she was deserving of sympathy, since she had given him two imperial princesses in addition to the Crown Prince.

Even though the mother of the newborn Prince relied on the Emperor's benevolence for protection, many of the ladies at court scorned her. She grew physically weak, and because she felt powerless and had no one to turn to for help, she suffered greatly because of his love.

Her chambers at the palace were in the Kiritsubo—named for its courtyard, which was graced with paulownia trees. Because the Kiritsubo was in the northeast corner of the palace, and thus separated from the Emperor's quarters in the Seiryōden, he would have to pass by the chambers of many of the other court ladies on his frequent visits to her. Their resentment of these displays was not at all unreasonable, and so it was decided that the woman herself would have to go more often to the Seiryōden. The more she went, however, the more her rivals would strew the covered passageways connecting the various parts of the palace with filth. It was an absolutely intolerable situation, for the hems of the robes of the accompanying attendants would be soiled. On other occasions, when the woman could not avoid taking the interior hallways, her rivals would arrange for the doors at both ends to be closed off so that she could neither proceed forward nor turn back, trapping her inside and making her feel utterly wretched. As the number of these cruel incidents mounted, His Majesty felt sorry that his beloved should have to suffer so and ordered that she be installed in the chambers of the Kōrōden, a hall next to the Seiryōden. To do so, however, he had to move the lady who had resided there from the very beginning of her service at court to other quarters, causing her to nurse a deep resentment that proved impossible to placate.

When the young Prince turned three, the court observed the ceremony of the donning of his first trousers. Employing all the treasures from the Imperial Storehouse and the Treasury, the event was every bit as lavish as the ceremony for the Crown Prince. Numerous objections were raised as a consequence of this ostentatious display, and everyone censured the ceremony as a breach of protocol. Fortunately, as the young Prince grew, his graceful appearance and matchless temperament became a source of wonder to all, and it was impossible for anyone to entirely resent him. Discerning courtiers who possessed the most refined sensibility could only gaze in amazement that such a child should have been born into this world.

During the summer of the year the young Prince turned three, his mother's health began to fail. She asked for permission to leave the court and return to her family home, but the Emperor would not hear of it and refused to let her go. She had been sickly and frail for some time, and so His Majesty had grown accustomed to seeing her in such a condition. "Wait a little while," he simply told her, "and let's see how you feel." Then, over the course of the next five or

six days, she became seriously ill. The woman made a tearful entreaty, and at last she received permission to leave the palace. Even under these dire circumstances she was very careful to avoid any behavior that could be criticized as untoward or inappropriate. She decided to retire from the court in secret, leaving her young son behind.

Resigned to the fact that the life of his true love was approaching its end and mindful of the taboo against defiling the palace with death, His Majesty was nonetheless grief-stricken beyond words that the dictates of protocol prevented him from seeing her off. The woman's face, with its lambent beauty conveying that air of grace so precious to him, was now thin and wasted. She had tasted the sorrows of the world to the full, but as she slipped in and out of consciousness, she could not convey to him even those feelings that might have been put into words. The Emperor, who now realized that his beloved was on the verge of death, lost control and made all sorts of tearful vows to her, no longer able to distinguish past from future. She, however, could not respond to him. The expression of weariness in her eyes made her all the more alluringly vulnerable as she lay there in a semiconscious state. The Emperor was beside himself and had no idea what he should do. He had granted her the honor of leaving in a carriage drawn by servants, but when he returned to her chambers again, he simply could not bring himself to let her go.

"Didn't we swear an oath to journey together on the road to death? No matter what, I cannot let you abandon me," he said.

She was deeply moved by his display of sorrowful devotion. Though breathing with great difficulty, she still managed to compose a verse for him:

*Now in deepest sorrow as I contemplate
Our diverging roads, this fork where we must part
How I long to walk the path of the living*

"Had I known that things would turn out like this ..."

She evidently wanted to say more to him, but her breathing was labored. She was so weak and in such pain the Emperor longed to keep her at the palace and see it through to the end, come what may. But when he received an urgent message informing him that the most skilled of priests had been called to her family home to chant the requisite prayers of healing for her that evening, His Majesty at last agreed that his beloved should leave the palace, unbearable as it was for him to make that decision.

His heart was full and he could not sleep as he impatiently waited for the short summer night to end. The messenger he sent had barely had time to get to the

woman's home and return with news of her condition, yet His Majesty was assailed by a sense of dark foreboding.

As it turned out, when the messenger arrived at the woman's residence, he found the family distraught and weeping. "She passed away after midnight," they informed him. The messenger returned to the palace in a state of shock. The Emperor, stunned and shaken by the news, was so upset that he shut himself away from the rest of the court.

His Majesty desperately wanted to see the young Prince his beloved had left behind at the palace, but there was no precedent for permitting anyone to serve at court while having to wear robes of mourning. So it was decided that the boy should be sent from the palace to his mother's residence. Too young to fully comprehend what was going on, he knew from the way people around him were behaving, and from the Emperor's ceaseless tears, that something was terribly wrong. The death of loved ones is always a source of grief, but the little boy's puzzled expression only added to the unspeakable sadness of it all.

Despite grief and sorrow, forms and rituals have to be observed, and so the funeral was conducted according to prescribed customs. The late woman's mother rode in a carriage that followed immediately behind the carriage bearing the corpse. Weeping inconsolably, longing to rise to the heavens with her daughter on the smoke from the pyre, how sad must she have been when the cortège reached Otagi, where a solemnly grand funeral ceremony was performed.

"Even as I gaze on the empty, lifeless body of my child," the mother said, "I cannot help thinking that she is still alive. So I shall watch as my precious daughter is turned to ash and smoke that I may resign myself to her passing."

Her voice was firm and steady, but then she swayed and very nearly fell from her carriage. The women attending her had anticipated this might happen, but they still did not know what to do for her.

There was a messenger from the palace. The deceased had been posthumously promoted to the third rank. It was a sorrowful spectacle as the messenger drew near and read the imperial edict announcing the promotion. Because the Emperor was filled with deep regret that he had never named her Second Consort before she died, he thought that the least he could do now was promote her one more rank. There were many, however, who resented even this final show of affection.

Those possessed of a more refined sensibility found it impossible to harbor resentment toward her. They recalled her graceful appearance, her beautiful face, her kind disposition and gentle nature. Yes, the display of affection bestowed on her by His Majesty *had* been unseemly, but now even the higher-ranking ladies fondly recalled her compassion and gentle character—memories that brought to

mind an old verse most appropriate for that moment: “When she was with me, I resented her playful spirit, but now that she’s gone, I yearn for her.”³

The days passed in a meaningless blur for the Emperor, who dutifully observed each of the seven-day ceremonies leading up to the forty-ninth day after the funeral. Despite the passage of time, His Majesty was so lost in grief he could find no comfort. He was indifferent to the consorts and ladies-in-waiting who attended him in the evenings and instead passed his days and nights distracted and disconsolate. For all who observed his grief, it was truly an autumn drenched by a dew of tears.

Over in the chambers of the Kokiden the mother of the Crown Prince and her faction remained implacably unforgiving. “Is he still so in love with her,” she complained, “that even after her death he doesn’t consider the feelings of others?” And indeed it was true that whenever the Emperor looked at the Crown Prince, his thoughts would inevitably drift in yearning to the younger Prince, and he would then dispatch his most trusted ladies-in-waiting or nurses to the family home of his late beloved to inquire after the boy.

The winds of autumn were stirring, the dusk air suddenly began to chill the skin, and the Emperor, lost in his memories, grew increasingly melancholy. One evening he sent a lady-in-waiting, Yugei no Myōbu, the daughter of an archer in the Palace Guard, to the house where the young Prince was staying.

The moon that night was exquisite, and, having sent the woman on her way, His Majesty was soon lost in a reverie. He had always arranged for some form of entertainment with music and poetry on just such spectacular evenings as this. He conjured phantom images of playing the koto together with his lost love and recalled the special feeling and artistry of her performance. He remembered her way of speaking, so seemingly natural and unforced, and her looks and bearing, so superior to the others. These images clung to him, bringing to mind the old verse that claimed reality in the darkness was no better than dreams.⁴ *How wrong that poet was, he thought. There is no substitute for her real presence here in the dark.*

As soon as Yugei no Myōbu arrived at the residence of the young Prince, her carriage was drawn in through the gate. The scene was quite touching. Although the grandmother of the little boy was a widow, she had carefully maintained appearances and made the residence a pleasant place to live in order to look after her only daughter in a proper and loving manner. Now, however, she had fallen into a dark mood. She had been so tearfully distraught ever since the death of her daughter that she had allowed the grasses and plants to grow untended in her garden, which appeared to have been buffeted by autumn winds. Moonlight filtered in through tangled vines of false cleavers growing in wild profusion.

Yugei no Myōbu alighted from her carriage at the southern gate, but it was impossible for the grandmother to say anything to her at first. When the old woman finally found her voice, she said, “Although it is a bitter fate to live on after the death of my child, I am deeply humbled that a messenger from the Emperor should part the dew on these overgrown grasses just to make her way to my abode.” She found it hard to control her grief.

Myōbu was genuinely moved and replied tearfully, “The head of the imperial household staff reported that when she called on you, she was so touched she felt as though her very soul would disappear. Although I am not exceptionally sensitive, I now understand what she meant.”

She gathered her composure, then read the message the Emperor had given her:

For a time my thoughts and emotions were in such turmoil that I wondered if this wasn’t all just a dream. Now, as I slowly recover my equilibrium, I have come to the unbearable realization that her death is not a dream from which I will awaken. I have no one to confide in, no one to ask what I should do. Thus, I want to ask you to consider returning discreetly to the palace. I am concerned about the young Prince and imagine that it must be trying for him to pass his days in a place so steeped in dew and tears.

“The Emperor’s voice was so choked with grief,” Myōbu added, “that he could not speak clearly. At the same time, he did not want the courtiers to think he was weak-willed and fragile, so he struggled to maintain control of himself. It was painful to see him in such a state, and I left without listening to everything he told me.”

She handed the letter over to the grandmother, who replied, “Though I am blinded by the darkness of grief, the gracious light of the Emperor allows me to read his words.” The old woman looked at the note:

I have heard that the passage of time will bring some measure of relief from these sad thoughts. But though the days and months flow by, grief continues to torment me and I find no end to my suffering. I constantly worry about what is to become of my son, and feel anxious that I am unable to raise him with you. Allow me for now to keep him here at the palace as a keepsake of my former love.

His Majesty had revealed his true feelings in the letter. He had even attached a poem:

*Winds rustle the bush clover at Miyagino
And turn dew to pearls ... winds at the palace bring tears
And concerns for the young bush clover at your home⁵*

The boy's grandmother was unable to read all the way through the letter. "Though I have experienced the tribulations that come with living so long, I feel insignificant and ashamed when I recall the ancient pines of Takasago.⁶ For that reason, I am all the more reluctant to leave, constrained by the thought of showing myself at the palace. I have been favored so often by the Emperor's gracious consideration that I cannot bring myself to accept the invitation. I am not sure just how much the boy understands, but he frequently presses us to visit the palace. Naturally he wants to go to a place he finds familiar and interesting, but his inclinations make me feel sad, since it means he will leave me. Please convey my private thoughts to His Majesty. I regret that my own inauspicious circumstances have forced the boy to live in a place like this. It is not right that he should be here, and it is more than someone like me deserves."

The boy had already been put to bed. "I had hoped to appear before the Emperor with news about the condition of the young Prince," Myōbu said as she prepared to hurry back to the palace. "He is waiting so eagerly for some details, but the night will surely grow very late before the boy awakens, and I must leave."

"The darkness that envelops the heart of a parent who has lost a child is so hard to bear," said the grandmother, "that I long to speak with you to lift that darkness.⁷ Please come again, not in your capacity as a messenger, but in private so that we may talk at our leisure. Over the years you have honored me with your visits in more auspicious times. Now, seeing you bring such tidings as this to me, I am amazed at how unpredictable life really is. From the moment of her birth we placed all our hopes and aspirations on our daughter. The Major Counselor, her father, told me on his deathbed that 'we must realize our dream of having her serve at court. It would be unforgivable for you to abandon that dream just because I am dying.' He was so insistent about the matter that I sent her to court to honor his last wishes, even though I knew she had no one there to protect and support her. Then His Majesty favored her with an unusual degree of affection, which she did not merit. Even as she had to hide the shame she incurred on account of her unprecedented position, her relationship with the Emperor deepened the envy of others and led to so many incidents that caused her heartache. Her situation was a cruel and strange one, and look how it all ended. I now consider the love His Majesty bestowed on her a heavy burden instead ... but of course it is the darkness of my heart that makes me say such

outrageous things.” Her voice was choked with tears, and she could not continue. The night was now well advanced.

“The Emperor shares your feelings,” Myōbu replied. “I saw him weeping and heard him say the following over and over”:

Our relationship could never have lasted long, because my love was so excessive it startled and offended those who saw us. Now I realize how cruel her fate was. I feel my love for her should not have given even the slightest offense, and yet for the sake of my love alone must I bear so much unjustified resentment from others. I have been abandoned, and have nothing to soothe my heart. I fear I am becoming a pathetic fool, the object of shameful gossip. Did I do something in a previous life to deserve this?

Myōbu relayed the Emperor’s words, though she did not convey everything he said. Breaking down in tears, she told the grandmother, “The hour is late, and I must return with my report before the night is out.” With that she hurried back to the palace.

At that moment the moon was setting, the clear sky was gradually becoming light, and a chill breeze arose. The chirping of the insects amid the grasses elicited profoundly sad emotions, and Myōbu found it hard to leave this desolate abode.

*Bell crickets seem to cry their hearts out
But the tears I weep are not confined
To a single long night in autumn*

Myōbu was reluctant to board her carriage. The grandmother sent a response through an intermediary to tell her, “This may perhaps sound like an accusation, but ...”

*A caller from beyond the clouds brings dewy tears
And greater woe to this hut amidst tangled reeds
Echoing with the lonely chirring of crickets*

It was inappropriate to send an elegant present on such an occasion. Instead, the grandmother sent a memento of her daughter: a set of robes and some hair ornaments, which apparently had been saved for this very purpose.

The more youthful women who had served the Prince’s late mother at court were of course saddened by her death, but they had also grown accustomed to

being at the palace day and night and so naturally found their late mistress's family home lonely and tedious. Recalling the splendid appearance of the Emperor, they urged the grandmother to take the boy to the palace right away. She was reluctant to do so, however, convinced that it would invite public censure for someone as inauspicious as she to accompany the little Prince. Moreover, she knew that if the child were at the palace on his own, she would not be able to see him very often. The thought of his absence caused her a great deal of anxiety and made it difficult for her to send him away.

When Myōbu returned to the palace she found His Majesty still awake, unable to rest. She felt great pity for him. He had summoned four or five of his most elegant and refined ladies, and while gazing westward into the garden between the Seiryōden and the Kōrōden and pretending to admire the splendid autumn foliage, he conversed quietly with them. Lately he had taken to spending all his time looking at paintings depicting Bai Juyi's *Song of Everlasting Sorrow*, which was so like his own story. These had been commissioned by Emperor Uda and included poems by one of Uda's consorts, Lady Ise, and by Ki no Tsurayuki, as well as other verses in Chinese and Japanese that alluded to the story. It was the only thing the Emperor wanted to talk about.

He questioned Myōbu in great detail about the conditions at the home of his lost love, and she privately conveyed to him how sad the visit had made her. He read the grandmother's written response to his request:

How should I reply to your most gracious offer? Your words throw my troubled heart into dark confusion.

*The tree that was once a buffer against
These harsh autumn winds has withered and left
The bush clover to its uncertain fate*

The Emperor understood that these intemperate words—which implied that he would not be able to protect a motherless child—were written at a moment of emotional distress. He tried to suppress his feelings so as not to show how tormented he was, but he could not endure the pain. Obsessing over all of his memories of the woman—even the moment when he first laid eyes on her—he could scarcely believe that so much time had passed, especially when he recalled how hard it had been for him to be apart from her for even the briefest period.

The Emperor took pity on the grandmother. "She told you how gratifying it was to be able to fulfill her late husband's last request that their daughter serve at court. Now, judging from her poem, it seems she believes all her efforts have

been in vain. She should not feel that way. Though her daughter may be gone, there will surely be occasions when I must do things for her grandson ... should the young Prince survive to manhood. She should thus be patient and live a long life in anticipation of his glorious future."

Myōbu had the mementos brought forth. Recalling how Emperor Xuanzong had dispatched a Taoist summoner to search for the spirit of Yang Guifei, the Emperor thought, *If only this ornamental hair comb proved that the messenger had indeed visited the residence of my deceased love.* But he knew these were idle thoughts.

*Had I sent a Taoist summoner
To seek the spirit of my beloved
Might he have discovered where she went*

There was a portrait of Yang Guifei among the illustrations of the *Song of Everlasting Sorrow*. A skilled artist had executed it, but there are limits to the powers of a brush, and the warm glow of real-life beauty was lacking. The lotus flowers of the Taiye Pond and the willow trees of the Weiyang Palace—truly these were apt metaphors for her beauty! And her Tang-style attire was unquestionably vivacious. But when he wistfully conjured up the sweet familiarity of his own lover, he could come up with no image that adequately expressed her beauty—no flower's hue, no bird's cry. They had been in the habit of exchanging vows constantly, mornings and evenings, swearing that they were as inseparable as trees whose branches have intertwined, or as the male and female birds of legend that, having only one eye and one wing each, always flew together. Fragile, transient life, however, pays no heed to vows of eternal love, and he was lost in melancholy regrets.

The soughing of the wind, the chirring of insects ... these brought only sadness to him. The quarters of the Kokiden Consort were close by on the north side of his private chambers in the Seiryōden. It had been a long time since she last came to serve him here, and on this particular evening, with the moon in full splendor, he could hear her indulging in musical entertainment to pass the night. The Emperor was appalled and found it quite unpleasant. The courtiers and ladies-in-waiting who observed his countenance at that moment listened uneasily as well. The Kokiden Consort was a proud and haughty woman who behaved as though she couldn't care less about His Majesty's grief.

The moon was waning.

*If even at the palace above the clouds
A mist of tears can obscure the autumn moon*

*A mist of tears can obscure the autumn moon
How could it shine clearly on that rustic hut*

His thoughts strayed to that “lonely hut amidst tangled reeds.” The wicks in the lamps were trimmed and trimmed again, and he stayed up until the oil was exhausted. Hearing the voices of officers announcing the changing of the guard on the second watch, he knew it must be after one in the morning, since they had entered the Hour of the Ox. He knew that the eyes of the courtiers were all on him, so he withdrew behind the curtains to his private quarters. He found it impossible to sleep, however, and when he arose the next morning he could not get out of his mind a snatch of a poem by Lady Ise: “Unaware that the dawn has broken and the beaded curtains have been drawn up.”⁸

He achingly recalled the nights he spent with the lady in her paulownia-courtyard chambers—how his lost love would sleep past dawn, and how he would lie awake, unable to meet her in their dreams. He ended up neglecting his morning offices, and he had no appetite for breakfast. It looked as though he was just going through the motions, picking at his food, distracted to the point that he paid no heed to the trays set in front of him. The servants were touched by his suffering, and his closest attendants sighed and whispered among themselves how troubling his behavior was, how it must be the effect of some karmic bond between him and the deceased lady forged in a former life. Some expressed their disapproval and resentment without reservations, and there were murmurs and rumblings that the Emperor’s obsessive love for the woman had gone beyond the bounds of propriety. For him to continue to ignore his official responsibilities as he was doing was an inauspicious and alarming state of affairs, and for some his behavior once more brought to mind the example of Emperor Xuanzong and Yang Guifei.

The days and months passed, and the young Prince finally came back to the palace. He had grown so splendid and handsome that he no longer seemed to belong to this mortal world. His worried father, knowing that the beautiful die young, took the boy’s good looks as an unlucky omen.

In the spring of the following year the time came for the Emperor to formally designate the heir apparent. He was seized by a desire to pass over the presumed Crown Prince, his son by the Kokiden Consort, and appoint his favored younger son instead, but he knew that the little Prince had no supporters and that the court would never accept such a move, which might prove dangerous to the boy. So in the end he went against his personal wishes and confirmed the Crown Prince as his heir apparent, all the while keeping his true feelings concealed. The courtiers remarked among themselves that no matter how much His Majesty

preferred the younger son, he knew there were limits to his affection. When the Kokiden Consort caught wind of these rumors, she felt both relief and satisfaction.

The grandmother of the young Prince had long been sunk in a deep depression, and finding no means to console herself, she finally passed away. Was her death the answer to her prayers to be allowed to go to her daughter? The Emperor was once more plunged into grief beyond the measure of ordinary mortals. By this time the young Prince was almost six and was old enough now to understand what was happening. Deeply attached to his grandmother, he wept inconsolably. As she neared death, she recognized how accustomed her grandson had grown to being with her through the years, and she repeated over and over how sad she was to leave him alone in the world.

With both his mother and grandmother gone, the young Prince moved back to the palace for good. When he turned seven he underwent the ceremony of the First Reading, which initiated him into the study of the Chinese classics. The court had never known a child so precociously intelligent, and His Majesty, knowing how others felt and believing that talent and beauty die young, could not help but view such abilities with alarm.

“How could anyone possibly resent him now?” the Emperor declared.
“Because he has lost his mother, I want him treated with affection.”

Eventually even the Kokiden Consort and her attendants were won over, and whenever the young Prince accompanied his father to the Kokiden chambers, he would be permitted entry behind the curtains where the ladies-in-waiting were serving His Majesty. The fiercest warriors and most implacable enemies would have smiled had they seen him, and the ladies of the court were reluctant to let him out of their sight. The Kokiden Consort had given the Emperor two princesses as well, but neither of them could compare in beauty to this boy. The other consorts and ladies felt no inhibitions around him—indeed, they allowed him to catch glimpses of their faces—and his own appearance was so elegant that they would experience an embarrassed excitement whenever they saw him. All the courtiers considered him exceptionally splendid, a playmate to be treated with special deference.

His formal training included instruction on the koto and flute, and word of his talents echoed throughout the palace—though if I were to go into all the details about his abilities my account would seem exaggerated, and he would come across as too good to be true.

The Emperor learned that among the members of a mission from the Korean kingdom of Koryō was a diviner skilled at the art of physiognomy. An old edict by the Emperor Uda had forbidden the presence of foreigners within the palace,

so His Majesty discreetly arranged to have the young Prince meet with this man at the Kōrōkan, the residence provided for foreign missions. The Major Controller of the Right assumed the role of guardian and accompanied the boy to the mission under the pretense that he was the father of the child. The diviner was both puzzled and astounded. He tilted his head back and forth, unable to believe that this child could really be the Major Controller's son.

"The young man's features tell me he is destined to be ruler of this country," the diviner declared, "and will perhaps even attain the supreme position of Emperor. Yet if that is what fate has in store for him, I foresee chaos and great sorrow for the court. On the other hand, if his destiny is to ascend to a position such as Chancellor and act as a guardian of imperial rule, then it appears he will be a great benefactor to the state. Still, I must say that judging by his features alone, the path leading to the Chancellorship seems less likely."

The Major Controller was himself a scholar of considerable learning and discernment, and his conversations with the men of the Korean mission were deeply engaging. The party composed and exchanged verses in Chinese, and because the mission planned to leave for home in a day or two, one of the diviner's poems expressed the joy at having met such a remarkable boy face-to-face and the sorrow of having to part from him so soon. In response to the heartfelt expression of this poem, the young Prince composed an accomplished verse of his own. The diviner praised his effort as auspicious and bestowed lavish gifts on him. In return, the diviner received splendid presents from the imperial household. Naturally, news of this encounter spread through the court. His Majesty did not let on that he knew anything about it, but the grandfather of the Crown Prince, who happened to be the Minister of the Right, caught wind of the gossip and, not knowing quite what to make of it, grew suspicious.

The Emperor in his wisdom had earlier sought out the opinion of a Japanese diviner, whose reading of the boy's physiognomy accorded with his own thinking at the time. His Majesty had been holding back on installing the young Prince in the line of succession, and was thus impressed by the perspicacity of the Korean diviner, who recognized the boy's imperial lineage. Even so, he could not be sure how long his own reign would last, and he hesitated to appoint his son prince-without-rank. He anxiously wondered whether the boy, who lacked support from his mother's family, would not end up precariously adrift once he was no longer in the line of succession. For that reason he determined that the boy's prospects might be better if he were made to serve as a loyal subject of the imperial court, and so he had his son tutored accordingly in the arts and in various fields of learning. The boy was so exceptionally bright it seemed a shame to demote him to commoner status, but the Emperor knew that

designating his son heir apparent would invite the calumny and scorn of the court. He consulted yet another diviner who was wise in the ways of Indic astrology, and when this new reading proved to be in line with the others and with His Majesty's own thoughts on the matter as well, he decided to confer on the boy the clan name of Minamoto—Genji⁹—thereby making him a commoner.

Months and years passed, but there was never a moment when the Emperor forgot his love for the lady who had resided in the chambers looking out on the paulownia courtyard. Thinking he might find someone who could assuage his grief, he had women of appropriate breeding and talents brought before him. But it was all in vain, for where in the world could he expect to find her equal? Just when he had reached the point where he found everything tiresome and was contemplating retiring from the world, an Assistant Handmaid informed him of a young woman, the Fourth Princess of the previous Emperor, whose beauty was matchless, whose reputation at court was beyond reproof, and whose mother had raised her with extraordinary care and devotion. Since this Assistant Handmaid had once served at the court of the previous Emperor, she was familiar with the mother of this young woman and accustomed to waiting on her. In the course of her service she had been able to observe the Fourth Princess as she grew from childhood, and even now would occasionally see her.

"I have served at court for three successive reigns," she told the Emperor, "and I have never before seen anyone who even closely resembles the late lady of the Kiritsubo. The daughter of the former Empress, however, definitely puts me in mind of her. She is a woman of exquisite refinement and beauty."

Could this really be true? His Majesty, who could barely contain himself, began to make some discreet inquiries.

The mother of the Fourth Princess warned her daughter about the situation at the palace. "The Kokiden Consort is a vindictive woman. Just look at the unfortunate example of the lady in the Kiritsubo. The treatment she suffered was truly appalling." Unable to decide if she should allow her daughter to go to the palace, the mother was still struggling with the Emperor's request when suddenly she passed away.

Thinking that the Princess was now helpless and alone, His Majesty again approached the young lady. "I will think of you as an equal to my own daughters," he assured her. Her ladies-in-waiting, her supporters from her mother's family, and her older brother, Prince Hyōbu, who served in the Ministry of War, were all of the opinion that attending the Emperor would bring solace to her—and in any case it certainly would be preferable to remaining in her current wretched circumstances.

So it was that she was sent to the palace and installed in the Higyōsha, which

was also called the Fujitsubo because its chambers looked out onto a courtyard graced with wisteria. The young woman was thereafter referred to as “Fujitsubo,” and truly in face and figure she bore an uncanny resemblance to the deceased lady of the Kiritsubo. Fujitsubo, however, was of undeniably higher birth, and that status protected her from criticism, since the courtiers were predisposed to judge her a superior woman. Since she lacked no qualifications, the Emperor did not feel constrained in his relationship with her. The court had never accepted His Majesty’s love for the lady of the Kiritsubo, and so his affection for her was viewed as inappropriate and inopportune. The Emperor never wavered in his undying love for the lady of the paulownia-courtyard chambers, but it is a poignant fact of human nature that feelings change over time. Inevitably his attention shifted toward Fujitsubo, who, it seems, brought comfort to his heart.

Because the young Genji was always at his father’s side, he was constantly in the presence of the women who attended His Majesty most frequently. These women grew familiar with the boy and gradually came to feel that they did not have to be reserved around him. Of course, none of the consorts considered herself inferior to the others, but even though each one was very attractive in her own individual way, there was no denying that they all had passed, or were on the verge of passing, the peak of their charms ... all but Fujitsubo, that is. She still possessed the loveliness of youthful beauty and, try as she might to keep herself hidden away behind her screens, Genji, who was always nearby, would catch glimpses of her figure. He had no memory of his mother, and when he heard the head of the imperial household staff say that Fujitsubo looked just like her, his young heart ached with wistful longing—if only he could always be close to his father’s new consort!

Genji and Fujitsubo were the two most precious people to the Emperor. “Do not be shy around the boy,” His Majesty told Fujitsubo. “It may seem strange and curious, but I feel as though it is fitting for him to think of you as his mother. Do not think him discourteous, but cherish him for my sake. His face and expressions are so like his mother’s ... and since you resemble her so closely, you can hardly blame him for thinking of you the way he does.”

After the Emperor made this request, Genji, in his boyish emotions, would try everything—even references to the transient blossoms of spring or the blazing leaves of autumn—to gain Fujitsubo’s recognition of his yearning affection for her. When the Kokiden Consort learned of the unprecedented favoritism His Majesty was displaying toward these two, she once more grew cold and distant toward Fujitsubo and her retinue. Moreover, her earlier ominous dislike of Genji and his mother flared up again, and she found the boy repellent. Her son, the

Crown Prince, was considered flawlessly handsome, and his reputation was above reproach. Nonetheless, he was no match for the lustrous beauty of Genji, who possessed an aura that prompted the courtiers to call him “the Radiant Prince.” Because Fujitsubo was his equal in looks and in the affections of the Emperor, she came to be referred to as “the Princess of the Radiant Sun.”

It pained the Emperor that his son would eventually grow out of his youthful good looks, but when Genji turned twelve, preparations were made for the coming-of-age ceremony in which his hair would be done up and his clothes and cap worn in the style of an adult. His Majesty personally tended to every little detail of the ceremony, adding touches that went beyond custom and set a new standard. The ceremony that had initiated the Crown Prince into manhood had been a spectacular affair held in the Shishinden, the great ceremonial hall of the palace. The Emperor wanted Genji’s ceremony to be just as majestic and proper. He had various offices—including the Treasury and the Imperial Granaries—make formal preparations for the many banquets and celebrations that would follow the ceremony, and he left special instructions that no expense should be spared and that his directives should be carried out so as to make the occasion one of utmost splendor.

His Majesty was seated facing east under the eastern eaves of his residence in the Seiryōden, and the seats for Genji and the minister who would bestow the cap were located in front of him. Genji appeared before the Emperor at around four in the afternoon, during the Hour of the Monkey. The lambent glow of his face, which was still framed on either side by the twin loops of his boyish hairdo, made his father feel all the more regretful about the change in appearance that was about to take place. The honor of trimming back Genji’s hair fell to the Minister of the Treasury, whose face betrayed the pain he felt the moment he cut Genji’s beautiful locks. The Emperor had a hard time keeping his emotions in check. *If only his mother were here to see this ceremony*, he thought, struggling to maintain his composure.

The capping ritual followed, and when that was finished, Genji withdrew to an antechamber to rest and change into the formal attire of an adult: an outer robe with the underarm vents sewn up. Stepping down into the garden east of the Seiryōden, he faced his father and performed obeisance, placing his ceremonial wand on the ground, rising and bowing left, right and left again, then sitting and repeating his actions to show his gratitude. He cut such a magnificent figure that all in attendance were moved to tears. As might be expected, the Emperor found it harder than the others to hide his feelings. At that moment the sad events of the past, which he normally kept himself from dwelling on, came flooding back. Since Genji was still at a tender age, His Majesty had fretted that cutting his

locks and putting his hair up in the style of an adult man would spoil his looks. To his amazement the ceremony only added to Genji's aura of masculine beauty.

The Minister of the Left, who performed the capping ritual, had taken the younger sister of the Emperor as his principal wife. She gave him a daughter, whom he doted upon, raising her with the utmost care. The Minister was troubled when he learned that the Crown Prince evidently desired his daughter, because he was secretly planning to arrange a match for her with Genji. And so in the days leading up to the ceremony, he approached the Emperor with his proposal.

"I see," His Majesty replied. "Well ... given that the boy seems to have no patrons for his coming-of-age ceremony, and since we have to select an aristocratic young woman to sleep with him on the night of his initiation, let's choose your daughter." Thus encouraged, the Minister followed through with his plans.

After the ceremony, Genji withdrew into the attendant's antechamber. As the party was making a celebratory toast in his honor, the Emperor gave permission for Genji, who had no rank, to sit at a place below the imperial princes but above the ministers. The Minister of the Left, who was seated next to him, casually dropped a few hints about his daughter, but Genji, who was still at an age when he felt diffident and embarrassed about such matters, did not respond.

An attendant from the imperial household staff brought a message from the Emperor to the Minister, requesting his presence. The Minister went to the imperial quarters, where a senior lady-in-waiting presented him with the appropriate gifts that custom demanded: a white oversized woman's robe made especially for this presentation, along with a set of three robes. His Majesty vented his pent-up emotions, presenting a cup of rice wine to the Minister and reminding him of his responsibilities toward Genji:

*When you with purple cords first bound his hair
Did you not also bind your heart and swear
Eternal vows to give him your daughter*

The Minister composed this reply:

*So long as the deep purple of these cords that bind
Our hearts as tightly as your son's hair never fade
So our mutual vow will retain its deep hue*

He stepped down from the long bridge that connected the imperial residence in

the Seiryōden and the Ceremonial Court in the Shishinden and performed obeisance in the east garden. There he received a horse from the Left Division of the Imperial Stables and a falcon caged in a mew from the Office of the Chamberlain. Princes and nobles lined up along the foot of the stairs leading down from the Seiryōden into the east garden, and they each received gifts appropriate to their rank.

Decorative boxes of thin cypress wood filled with delicacies and baskets of fruit were among the items prepared for the Emperor that day. The Major Controller of the Right, who had acted earlier as Genji's guardian, had been put in charge of the presentations. The garden overflowed with trays stacked with rice cakes flavored with various fillings and with four-legged chests of Chinese-style lacquer stuffed with presents for the lower-ranking attendants—so many that their numbers surpassed even the presentations made at the coming-of-age ceremony held for the Crown Prince. Indeed, it was an incomparably magnificent affair.

That evening, Genji departed for the residence of the Minister of the Left, which was located on Sanjō Avenue. The ceremony welcoming Genji as groom and solemnizing his wedding was conducted with unprecedented attention to proper form. Feeling a touch of dread, the Minister was captivated by the masculine beauty of Genji, who still looked quite boyish. In contrast his daughter, who at sixteen was four years older than her new husband, was put off by Genji's youthfulness and considered their match inappropriate.

The Minister enjoyed the full confidence of the Emperor. After all, his principal wife, the mother of the bride, was His Majesty's full sister. Thus, the bride came from a distinguished line on both sides of her family. Moreover, the addition of Genji to the Minister's family diminished the prestige of his rival the Minister of the Right, who as grandfather of the Crown Prince would eventually assume power as Chancellor. The Minister of the Left had numerous children by several wives. His principal wife had given him, in addition to Genji's bride, a son who was now Middle Captain in the Inner Palace Guard. This young man, Tō no Chūjō,¹⁰ was exceptionally handsome, and the Minister of the Right could hardly ignore such a promising prospect, even though he was not on good terms with the Minister of the Left, his main rival for power. He therefore arranged to marry the young Tō no Chūjō to his fourth daughter, who was his greatest treasure in the world. His regard for his son-in-law was every bit as strong as that given to Genji by the Minister of the Left. For their part, the two young men forged an ideal friendship.

Because the Emperor was always summoning him, Genji found it difficult to live at his wife's residence. In his heart, he was obsessed with the matchless

beauty of the Fujitsubo Consort, who seemed to be exactly the kind of woman he wanted to take as his wife. *Is there no one else like her?* he wondered. He found his bride to be a woman of great charm and proper training, but he was not really attracted to her. He had been drawn to Fujitsubo when he was a child, and the torment caused by his feelings for her was excruciating. Now that he was an adult, he was no longer permitted behind the curtains of the consorts. Whenever there was a musical entertainment, he would play the flute in accompaniment to Fujitsubo's koto, his notes subtly conveying his true feelings for her. The sound of her soft voice was a comfort to him, and the only time he felt happy was when he was at the palace. He would serve there for five or six days in succession, occasionally spending a mere two or three days at his wife's residence. His father-in-law attributed Genji's behavior to his youth and did not fault him for it, but instead continued to do all he could to offer support at court. He chose only the most exceptional ladies-in-waiting to serve his son-in-law and daughter, and he went out of his way to put on the musical entertainments that Genji so enjoyed and to show him every favor.

When Genji stayed at the palace, he took up residence in the Kiritsubo. The women who had once served his mother had not been dismissed and scattered, and so they were now assigned to wait on him. Orders were sent down to the Office of Palace Repairs and to the Bureau of Skilled Artisans to rebuild and expand the former residence of Genji's mother, a villa on Nijō Avenue. The project was to be carried out so splendidly that there would be no other villa like it. The setting of the surrounding woods and hills was already unparalleled, and when the garden pond was enlarged, the result was so eye-catching that it created a stir. Genji thought wistfully that such a villa would be the perfect residence for a wife who had all the qualities of his ideal woman, Fujitsubo.

It is said that it was the Korean diviner who, in his admiration, first bestowed on Genji the sobriquet Radiant Prince.

¹ The courtiers are referring to *Song of Everlasting Sorrow* (長恨歌) by the Tang dynasty poet Bai Juyi (白居易, 722–846). The poem recounts the infatuation of the emperor Xuanzong (685–762) with Yang Guifei, which caused him to neglect affairs of state. His army revolted, and he was forced to execute his lover.

² It was customary for births to take place outside the palace in order to avoid defilement. A period of confinement for ritual purification usually followed a birth, which is why the Emperor has to wait to see his son.

³ The source of this poem has not been identified. It is cited in the twelfth-century commentary *Genji monogatari shaku*.

⁴ *Kokinshū* 647 (Anonymous): “The reality of our meeting in the pitch-black darkness was in no way

superior to seeing you clearly in my vivid dream.”

⁵ An allusive variation on *Kokinshū* 694 (Anonymous): “Just as the bush clover in Miyagino awaits the breeze to lift the weight of dew from its delicate leaves, so I await you.”

⁶ *Kokin rokujō* 3057 (Anonymous): “I do not want to let anyone know that I still live on. It shames me to wonder what the pines of Takasago must think.” The pines of Takasago were a symbol of longevity.

⁷ A reference to a poem by Fujiwara no Kanesuke, *Gosenshū* 1102: “Though the hearts of parents do not dwell in darkness, how easy it is to lose one’s way out of love for a child!”

⁸ *Ise shū* 55: “Though I slept on, unaware that the dawn has broken and the beaded curtains have been drawn up, it never occurred to me that I would not dream of her.” The poem is written in the voice of Emperor Xuanzong.

⁹ The name “Genji” is the reading of the characters for Minamoto (*gen*) and “family name” (*shi/ji*).

¹⁰ I am following custom and using this name for Genji’s close friend, brother-in-law, and rival. The name Tō no Chūjō refers to his positions as Middle Captain in the Inner Palace Guard (*Chūjō*) and in the Office of the Chamberlain. Like most of the male characters, he is identified by his position at court throughout the narrative, but since his positions and ranks change over time, it is easier to refer to him throughout by this initial appellation.

II

Hahakigi

Broom Cypress

THE RADIANT Prince—a splendid, if somewhat bombastic, title. In fact, his failings were so numerous that such a lofty sobriquet was perhaps misleading. He engaged in all sorts of flings and dalliances, but he sought to keep them secret out of fear that he would become fodder for gossips who delighted in circulating rumors about him and end up leaving to later generations a reputation as a careless, frivolous man. Genji was keen to avoid the censure of the court and, thus constrained, went about feigning a serious and earnest demeanor for a time, abstaining from all elegantly seductive or charming affairs. No doubt the Lesser Captain of Takano, that legendary lover, would have been amused.¹

Genji was serving as Middle Captain in the Palace Guard at the time, and in fact he preferred being stationed there. Consequently, his visits to his wife, who resided at the estate of her father, the Minister of the Left, all but ceased. Although people expressed their suspicions about him, wondering if his heart wasn't in wild turmoil over a secret lover,² Genji was not the sort who carried on common affairs impulsively or brazenly. There were rare occasions, however, when he strayed from his professed path of moderation, and he had an unfortunate tendency to become obsessed with relationships that brought him stress and pain, giving himself over entirely to behavior that could hardly be called proper.

During a stretch in the rainy season when there was no break in the clouds, a directional taboo³ forced Genji to stay on and attend the Emperor for a longer than normal period. The members of the household of the Minister of the Left grew anxious and resentful at Genji's neglect of his wife, but they continued to arrange every detail of his wardrobe so that he would cut a remarkable figure at court. Moreover, the sons of the Minister, Genji's brothers-in law, would spend

all their free time in Genji's palace quarters when they happened to be in service. One of these sons, Tō no Chūjō, was a Middle Captain who also served in the Office of the Chamberlain. He was a full sibling to Genji's wife—he and his sister had both been born to Princess Ōmiya—and of all the Minister's children he was closest to Genji and could behave in a more intimate and relaxed manner in his friend's presence at entertainments and amusements. Tō no Chūjō preferred the company of Genji because the residence that his own father-in-law, the Minister of the Right, had painstakingly provided and maintained for him and his wife was a dreary, uninspiring place. It must be added that he was fond of having affairs with other women.

Tō no Chūjō also had dazzlingly furnished quarters at his father's residence at Sanjō, but he was always accompanying Genji on his comings and goings. They were constantly together, day and night, pursuing the same interests and diversions, and he in no way lagged behind the Radiant Prince in his accomplishments. Because they were inseparable, it was natural that they did not stand on ceremony with one another. They never kept their innermost feelings hidden, but displayed an easygoing harmony whenever they spoke.

They had endured an especially tedious day, having spent the time in idleness on account of the interminable rain, and because the palace seemed practically deserted during the early evening hours, Genji's quarters took on a more relaxed atmosphere than usual. Drawing an oil lamp beside him, Genji perused some Chinese classics. Tō no Chūjō pulled out some letters written on paper of various hues from a small cabinet near him and was seized by the desire to read them. Genji would not allow that, but he did say, "I'll let you look at a few of the more appropriate ones ... there are several I'd be ashamed for you to read."

Tō no Chūjō resented his friend's refusal. "But it's just those letters you don't feel free to share with me that I'm curious to see. I've exchanged many letters of the most common variety with ladies of all ranks, and at the time we were corresponding I couldn't wait to read them. Yet when I reread them now, the only ones really worthwhile were written when the women were being petulant or impatient with me for keeping them waiting."

Despite his protests, he knew full well that Genji would never have letters from high-ranking ladies—letters that had to be kept strictly confidential—lying scattered about in a commonplace cabinet like this where anyone could see them. Genji would certainly hide his most intriguing missives in a secret location, and would be comfortable sharing only those from easygoing ladies of decidedly second-rate backgrounds.

"Well, you certainly have a lot of them, don't you?" said Tō no Chūjō, who went on to interrogate Genji about the author of each of the missives. He found it

amusing that his suppositions and guesses about the letters were sometimes right on the money, and other times wildly off the mark. Still, Genji gave very little away, and, by leading his friend on, he managed to disguise the identities of the letter writers.

"You must have a great number of letters at your place," said Genji. "I'd really like to take a peek at them. If you let me, I'll gladly open this cabinet to you."

"I have very few worth looking at," Tō no Chūjō answered. "You see, I've come to the realization that as far as women are concerned, there aren't many who are flawless enough to make you think *she's the one*. I've come across many who have passable skills in the arts, who can write flowing characters that create an impression of superficial elegance, who show a kind of facile understanding of how to respond in verse on certain occasions. Yet even when one chooses a woman on the basis of such accomplishments, she almost always fails to live up to the expectations created by her talents and disappoints in the end. She'll swell with pride, going on and on about her own accomplishments, looking down on others and, all in all, behaving rather foolishly. Her parents are always waiting on her, spoiling her with affection and lavishing attention, keeping their precious little princess hidden away in the recesses of their estates until some man hears about her extraordinary gifts and gets all worked up. Beautiful, young, and carefree, with little to distract her, she'll follow the lead of others, dedicate herself to some trivial diversion, and as a result acquire and perfect some skill. Naturally, those who look after her keep silent about her flaws, keeping up appearances and spreading plausible-sounding rumors that make her seem better than she really is. Since such rumors are all a man has to go on, can he really afford to assume the worst about her without actually meeting her? So a man goes about, wondering if she's the genuine article, and when they finally meet ... well, it's rare that a woman actually lives up to her reputation."

Listening to Tō no Chūjō's lament, which gave the impression of a world-weary man who had experienced the shame of such disappointments, Genji smiled wryly. Although he knew that his friend's account of women was hardly the whole of the matter, he had had a few affairs that matched Tō no Chūjō's experiences.

"Can there really be women," Genji asked, "who lack even the most trivial merits?"

"I'm not saying that," Tō no Chūjō responded. "Who would be foolish enough to be drawn to a woman with absolutely no talent? A woman who has nothing to recommend her is as rare as one who is perfect in every way. My point is that a

woman who is born into the nobility is raised with the greatest care, which includes concealing her many faults. So of course she's going to look superior to other women. A woman born into a family of middling rank will reveal her sensibility and habits of mind with a style and personality all her own, and so you would expect to discover various things that distinguish her from others. As for women of the lowest class ... well, I'm not especially interested in learning anything about them."

Genji's curiosity was piqued by the worldly posture his friend had assumed. "I wonder about your standards. Can you really classify all women on the basis of just three levels? How do you discriminate between a woman born of a noble family ... say rank three or above ... whose social position has been ruined and whose rank has fallen so that it is indistinguishable from others, and a woman of less distinguished background ... say rank four or lower ... whose family has so prospered at court that they can now lavishly furnish her residence and adopt a smug attitude that proclaims their daughter inferior to no one?"

Just as Genji posed his question, the Warden of the Left Mounted Guard and the Junior Secretary from the Ministry of Rites showed up, explaining that directional prohibitions for that day were keeping them confined to the palace. They both had reputations as elegant lovers, and since they were also eloquent speakers—fluent, logical and precise—Tō no Chūjō was eager to detain them and get their opinions on his idea of classifying women according to three levels. Their subsequent conversation touched upon topics of a highly questionable and even slightly disreputable nature.

The Warden addressed the matter straightaway. "A woman who is a parvenu will likely be judged by court society as inferior despite her rise in status, especially if her pedigree is not appropriate to her rank. On the other hand, a woman who may have a distinguished pedigree, but who lacks the means to make her way at court, will see her fortunes and position diminish over time, and her prospects and reputation crumble away until she cannot maintain her status in spite of her pride. Events will then conspire to make her situation more and more untenable. Looking at each of these types of women, I'm afraid we have to relegate them both to your middle category. Provincial governors toil away, tied up with petty people and affairs, but even among that lot, consigned to a middling station in life, there are various gradations that distinguish them. We live in an age when we sometimes find governors who are really not at all inferior, even though they come from the middle ranks. Actually, there are some of the fourth rank who are qualified to serve as a counselor, who have unsullied reputations and comfortable fortunes and prospects, and who are easier to take than some inexperienced or immature nobility of higher rank. There are many

instances of such men who maintain splendid households where their daughters are nurtured with the utmost care. Nothing is lacking, nothing held back, no expense spared to raise them in the most dazzling manner ... and as a result they grow into excellent young ladies who are beyond reproach. These women go into court service and many of them find unexpected good fortune, marrying above their station.”

Genji smiled at that. “I guess that when all is said and done, the key is finding a girl from a rich family.”

Tō no Chūjō responded petulantly. “Now you’re talking nonsense. Such a remark is not worthy of you.”

The Warden continued his disquisition: “The highborn lady who brings together both pedigree and public reputation, yet who in private lacks personal breeding and manners, is eccentric and not worth discussing. She’s the type who makes you wonder in disappointment how she could have been brought up like that. Of course, it strikes you as perfectly natural when a woman’s pedigree and reputation are in harmony and her character is flawless. So you assume that’s the way things ought to be and aren’t surprised by her, even though such a woman is a rarity. But perhaps I should set aside any discussion of the highest-ranking ladies, for someone as lowly as I could never be on their level.

“Beyond these types, you sometimes unexpectedly come across an adorable, defenseless girl whose existence is unknown to court society. She lives in a lonely, sublimely dilapidated residence shut away from the world behind a gate overgrown with weeds, and so of course you think of her as an exceptionally rare find. You’re mysteriously drawn to her, your imagination stimulated by the things that make her different, and you wonder how she could have ended up in a place like that. Her father is likely to be some pathetic, overweight old man, her brothers probably all have unpleasant faces, and there in the women’s quarters in the inner recesses of the residence ... which, no matter how you try to imagine it, is nothing out of the ordinary ... is a fiercely proud lady with all the refined demeanor of one who has somehow managed to acquire some accomplishments, even if she is not of the first rank and thus not all that much to talk about. And yet because you would never expect to find a woman like that in such a place, how could you not find her alluring? Of course, you can’t compare the discovery of a woman like that to opting for a flawless woman of superior rank, but by the same token it is difficult to simply toss her aside.”

The Warden glanced knowingly at the Junior Secretary, who, interpreting the expression as a subtle reference to the flawless reputation of his own sister, kept his counsel on the matter.

Genji seemed lost in thought: *I wonder about all this. Are there really women*

like that out in the world? After all, when I consider my wife, there don't seem to be any perfect women among the highest classes.

Genji was dressed in an intentionally casual manner in an informal robe, minus trousers, over soft white under robes. He had neglected to tie up the cords of his outer robes, and as he half-reclined amidst his books and papers in the dim shadows cast by the lamp, he cut such an attractive figure that the other men felt a desire to see him as a woman. He was so beautiful that pairing him with the very finest of the ladies at the court would fail to do him justice.

During the course of the young men's discussion of various types of women, the Warden remarked, "There are women who are flawless enough for a commonplace affair, but when the time comes to take a wife, you find it impossible to decide even if you have a large number of women to choose from. The same is true of men who serve at court and are expected to be rock-solid pillars of society. It proves quite difficult to produce a man of true worth and ability, and so no matter how gifted or clever he may be, in the end there will never be more than one or two who are fit to govern. That's why superior people command their inferiors, and inferiors follow their superiors, mutually accommodating each other to carry out public affairs.

"Now then, just consider the person who is to take charge of the private affairs of your household. It wouldn't do at all if she doesn't have the proper qualifications. That being the case, a man is naturally going to look around because he knows that a woman may possess some good qualities while lacking others. After all, it is rare to find one who, though maybe not perfect, is at least acceptable ... and even a man who is not inclined to compare the appearance of one woman to another is going to take great care in making his decision, since the one he chooses will be his mate for life. All things being equal, he will take someone whose tastes match his own and who does not have the kind of flaws he must spend all his time correcting and setting in order. Well, this is all very hard, and a woman is not necessarily going to fulfill all of a man's expectations. That's why a man who does not allow his affections to stray, who focuses his attention on one woman and does not discard the karmic bonds of his first marriage vows, will always be seen as sincere, honest and loyal. And a woman who is able to keep her husband from straying is the one we take to be refined and attractive.

"Given all that—how should I put this?—having observed all sorts of relationships in society, I can't help having doubts as to whether there is any woman who is perfectly elegant, or who can live up to the ideals in a man's heart. In the case of your lordships, what kind of woman could ever be worthy enough to meet your exalted standards? No doubt she would have to be young

and beautiful and beyond reproach in every way. She would be well versed in composition, but her choice of words would be modest and her brushstrokes light and delicate, leaving you a little agitated and longing for a more revealing response. You are forced to wait, feeling unbearably impatient until that moment when you can get close enough to her to make your advances and exchange a few words. But she will say very little, speaking under her breath in a faint voice that shows how adept she is at concealing her flaws. Just when you think she is most pliant and feminine, she starts to fret about whether or not you really love her. And then when you humor her, she becomes flirtatious. This has to be the worst fault in women.

“Above all, a wife must never neglect her duty to assist her husband. A husband can get along well enough if a woman is not too emotionally demanding, does not make a big fuss over niceties, and doesn’t give herself over to fashion. Of course, a man doesn’t want a wife who is too serious, who busies herself with supporting her husband and managing the household to the extent that she keeps her hair swept back all the time, exposing her ears and making herself unattractive. A man who goes to work in the morning and returns home in the evening doesn’t want to have to go to the trouble of talking with a stranger about the odd behavior of people he has encountered in public and private or about the good and bad things he has seen and heard. If he has a wife who is close to him and will listen to his stories and understand him, then doesn’t he assume he should be able to discuss such matters with her? Maybe he suddenly recalls something and smiles, or perhaps tears come to his eyes, or maybe he relives some feeling of righteous indignation at something that happened to someone. Or he might have feelings that he just cannot keep to himself and thinks he might share them with her and ask her opinion. But if she is unattractive or too preoccupied to understand, he ends up turning away from her in disillusionment. Remembering something he has kept inside, a thought that makes him laugh or let out an audible sigh, he will mention it, almost as if speaking to himself, and all she will do is look up with a blank expression and reply, ‘Did you just say something?’ What man wouldn’t regret marrying someone like that?

“When all is said and done, we men really should consider picking a completely childlike, compliant woman ... a woman we can mold into an acceptable and flawless wife. Even when she gives you some cause for concern, you still have the feeling that there is some value in disciplining her. When you are with such a woman face-to-face, she is truly vulnerable and precious to you, and you are compelled to view her faults through forgiving eyes. Even so, there will be occasions when you have to be apart, and you tell her about something

important that must be done, or give her some task, trivial or practical, that must be carried out to the letter. It will turn out that she cannot act on her own and is unable to do things as you instructed. This is really quite annoying and her unreliability will cause you no end of trouble. Why does it always seem that it's the cold, distant, slightly unpleasant woman who, depending on the occasion, is able to perform well in front of others and bring honor to your house?"

The Warden had tried to cover all aspects of the subject, but he was unable to come to any firm conclusions. Instead, he finished his analysis by heaving a great sigh. "Considering all of this," he continued, "you can't choose a wife solely on the basis of her family background, and certainly not on the basis of her looks alone. If you can find a woman who is not so strange or demure as to make you regret your choice, if she is serious through and through and has a quiet personality, then you ought to consider her dependable. Should she have any talents beyond these basic qualifications or be sweet-tempered, you should count yourself lucky. Even if she is deficient in certain respects, you shouldn't make unreasonable demands for her to improve. So long as she is morally upright and not fretful or jealous, then she will over time acquire an outward grace. Her comportment will be modest, she will protect her honor, and she will endure things she has a right to complain about, hiding her resentment behind feigned ignorance or pretending to be nonchalant.

"Unfortunately, there are cases where a woman can no longer suppress the emotions that have been building up inside her heart, and she will leave behind some fierce words that chill your soul, or compose a moving poem to which she has attached a memento that will remind you of her, then hide herself away in some village deep in the mountains or on a deserted strand along the shore. When I was a child I would hear stories like that, which the ladies-in-waiting would read aloud, and I found them so touching I was moved to tears. Now, when I think back on it, their tales seem frivolous and overly dramatic. A woman who casts aside a man who has deep feelings for her and runs off to hide in utter disregard of the husband's feelings, even when she has just cause for being upset, will stir anxieties that last a lifetime. The whole affair is extremely tiresome. Some people will praise her actions, saying how exquisitely profound her emotions are, and as a result her feelings of sad regret will accumulate to the point where she decides to become a nun. Having made up her mind, her heart seems pure and serene and she can no longer even consider returning to her former life. Her acquaintances come to call on her, telling her how melancholy it is that things should have come to this. When her husband hears of this he weeps, and the messenger and older ladies-in-waiting tell her what a shame it is and how sad that her husband has such deep feelings. The woman, who still has

lingering affection for him, will then realize she had no reason to throw away his love. She will gather together the hair she had clipped from her forehead when she took vows as a nun and, feeling forlorn and helpless now that there is no turning back, will break down and cry. Though she had kept her emotions in check up to that moment, once she gives in to her feelings she is no longer able to hold back her tears whenever she considers her situation. Because she now seems to have so many regrets, the Buddha himself must look at her as one whose heart is tainted by base attachments. Halfhearted devotion to the Buddha is an even more certain path to Hell than being mired in the five evils of earthly existence.⁴ Even if the marital bond was deep enough that the husband takes her back before she renounces the world, is there any couple that would not harbor at least some resentment upon recalling such an incident? For better or worse they live together as husband and wife, and their relationship is based on a deep karmic bond and shared emotions that can weather almost anything that might happen. Yet whenever a wife runs away, can any couple ever completely put aside their feelings of mutual reproach?

“It is folly for a wife to resent her husband, display her anger, and quarrel obsessively over some little affair he has had on the side. A man’s affections may stray, but so long as he is still capable of the kind of feelings he had for her when they were first married, then she has good reason to think that their relationship has strong emotional bonds. If she makes a big fuss over his dalliances, however, those bonds may be cut for good.

“In general, then, a woman should be modest in all things. She should give a gentle hint when she knows something is going on that justifies her resentment. Or she should imply, without being spiteful, that there have been some occasions that have bothered her. If she behaves in such a way, her husband’s regard for her will surely increase. Most of the time a man’s wandering heart can be calmed by the guidance of his wife. A woman who is too lenient and turns a blind eye to her husband’s behavior may in contrast seem easygoing and lovable, but in the end she will be dismissed as frivolous. As Bai Juyi put it, ‘Who can tell where an unmoored ship will drift?’⁵ Isn’t that the truth?”

Tō no Chūjō nodded and replied, “Staying on the same subject, it’s a serious matter when a person you like for their charm and sensitivity gives you cause to wonder if they can be trusted. Although people may choose to put up with their partner’s wayward behavior and even fool themselves into believing they see some improvement, that doesn’t mean that the wayward partner has reformed. In any case, when an indiscretion brings discord to a marriage, there is probably no better recourse than to calmly ignore it.” His remarks described perfectly the situation of his own sister, which was no doubt his intention, and so it irritated

him that her husband, Genji, was not joining in the discussion but was pretending to nod off instead.

The Warden, who now found himself regarded as the expert on such matters, whinnied on and on. Tō no Chūjō, who wanted to hear what he had to say, assumed the role of disciple and listened eagerly.

“Compare women to artisans, if you will,” the Warden continued. “For example, a woodworker may indulge his imagination and create all sorts of items ... toys meant for a moment’s diversion, objects not based on any model or pattern. These things look fashionable and amaze you with the cleverness of their construction, and insofar as they are new and different and in keeping with the times, they attract attention as modern and up-to-date and so have a certain charm. Yet when one has something of true beauty made properly ... formal furnishings, say, or some decorative object for your residence that has a conventional form ... the distinction between a maker of novelties and a master craftsman is plain for all to see. To take another example, there are many skilled painters at the palace, but when you have to pick one to do basic sketching for a work, it’s hard to tell at a glance which ones are the truly skilled artists. Paintings that present startling scenes of the mountains on the Isle of Hōrai where the immortals dwell, or that show the stern visages of beasts from exotic lands or the faces of demons no man has ever seen, all give play to the imagination and astonish our eyes, since they bear no resemblance to the real world. Such works are fine, given what they are, and any painter should be able to execute them. But when it comes to realistically depicting scenes in the everyday world ... mountain vistas, flowing streams, the appearance of our dwellings ... what matters is the attention to detail and technique a master painter brings to his representation of both serenely commonplace objects and steep, rugged landscapes. Whether creating the impression that one is far removed from society by piling up layer upon layer of thick foliage, or giving one a sense of familiarity and comfort by foregrounding a garden enclosed by a bamboo fence, all such effects require a special power and grace far beyond the skills of an ordinary artist.

“Or take calligraphy. Even a person with no real knowledge of the art can add a flourish here and there to create the impression ... at least at a cursory glance ... that he has great talent, while a person who can in fact write with true skill and care may appear to lack the ability of a master. But when you compare the works of such people side by side, you can see that the latter is closer to the genuine thing. So it is with all trivial matters of art and pleasure. I know that when it comes to human emotions, it is even more the case that you cannot trust the affected elegance a woman puts on for show on a special occasion. Shall I tell

you how I came by this knowledge, though I may have to speak indiscreetly about an affair?" He shifted a little closer, and Genji woke up. Tō no Chūjō was sitting across from him, his chin cupped in his hands, listening in earnest anticipation. It made for a charming tableau, resembling a scene in which a learned priest expounds on the ways of the world. It was the kind of moment, however, when young men find it hard to keep their relationships secret.

"Some time ago," the Warden resumed, "when I was still a very low-ranking official, I was quite taken with a young woman. But, as I presumed to mention to Your Highnesses earlier, she was not exceptionally beautiful, and so I decided in my youthful, fickle heart that I would not take her as my main wife. Though I thought of her as someone I could always turn to and rely on, there was something lacking, and I was sure I could do better. So I played around and cheated on her, and when she became distressingly jealous, she lost favor with me. I kept hoping that she would not be like that, and wanted her to be a little less sensitive. While I found it irksome that she was so unforgiving and suspicious, I was also puzzled that she had lost patience with a man of such a low rank as I. At the same time, I couldn't understand why she still had feelings for me. I often felt sorry for her, and so I eventually brought my tendency to stray under control.

"Her temperament was such that somehow or another she contrived to do her best for me, even in matters for which she had no innate ability. She prodded herself, ashamed of faults she didn't want others to see, and she earnestly supported me in every way, trying her best never to go against my wishes in even the slightest matter. At the beginning I had thought of her as a strong-willed woman, but in the end she was yielding and accommodating. She worried that she might put me off if she did not make herself attractive, and whenever she allowed herself to be seen by someone not close to her, she would fret about it, feeling that perhaps she had shamed her husband. She did her utmost to maintain her wifely virtue, and as we grew accustomed to living as husband and wife, I was not at all ill disposed toward her except for that one detestable flaw ... her jealousy, which she could not control.

"At the time she seemed so absurdly obedient and fearful, I thought I should teach her a lesson ... you know, shake her up a little so she would stop being jealous and mend her ways. So I pretended I was truly fed up and that we should break off our relationship. Since she had previously shown only a submissive attitude to me, I thought for sure I could teach her a lesson and intentionally treated her with wretched callousness. When, as usual, she got angry, I told her that if she were going to be so willful and disagreeable, I would put an end to our marriage and not meet her again despite the deep bond we shared as husband and

wife. I said, ‘If you really want us to separate, just keep harboring your baseless suspicions. But if you want us to have a long future together, then you have to accept that there will be hardships and try to not let things bother you. Rid yourself of your twisted disposition, and I will find you endearing. As soon as I work my way up at court and achieve respectable status, no other woman will ever compete with you for my devotion.’ I thought I was being so clever in straightening her out with such assertive words, but she just smiled vaguely and replied, ‘It doesn’t bother or worry me that you are in a period in your life when you have neither status nor distinction, nor am I waiting impatiently for you to achieve success. But I find it painfully unbearable to have to always hide my feeling of wretchedness and rely on the uncertain hope that as the months and years go by the day will finally arrive when you reform your behavior. So the time has come when we must go our separate ways.’ Her spiteful words made me very angry and I said a number of hateful things to her. At that point the woman, unable to control her passions, grabbed my hand and bit one of my fingers. I put on a show of outrage and, holding out my crooked finger, stalked out. ‘Now that you’ve disfigured me like this,’ I threatened, ‘how can I possibly show myself at court? You yourself said I’m of no consequence, so now that you’ve done this, how do you expect me to get ahead? If this is how things are, then it looks like we really are through once and for all.’ I composed a poem:

*As I bend my wounded fingers counting
The times I called on you, your flaws it seems
Are not confined to jealousy alone*

‘You won’t have me to resent any more,’ I said, and as expected she burst into tears and shot back:

*Having counted in my heart the times
I showed restraint at your behavior
Now I have to take my hand from yours*

“She challenged me in this manner, and even though I did not believe our relationship would really change, I drifted about seeing women here and there and let many days pass without once communicating with her. Then one night, near the end of the eleventh month, I was detained at the palace in order to rehearse music and dance for the Rinji Festival at the Kamo Shrine. A miserable sleet was falling that night, and as I was saying goodbye to my companions, who were going their separate ways, it occurred to me that I had no other place to go

but hers. Sleeping at the palace seemed a dreary prospect, and the thought of visiting some woman who puts on an air of refined elegance chilled me to the bone. And so, all the while wondering what she thought about me, I went to peek in on her and see how she was faring. As I brushed the snow off myself, I felt constrained by feelings of embarrassment, and yet I hoped that perhaps tonight her icy resentment had thawed. The lamps had been dimmed and turned toward the walls, and softly padded robes had been plumped up and hung over a large filigree basket to be warmed and perfumed. The blinds were raised just as they were supposed to be, and the room gave the appearance that she had been waiting for me to return that very evening. Since everything was prepared just to my liking, I felt a swelling pride until I noticed she was nowhere to be found. Only the women who served her were there, as I had expected, and they told me she had gone to her parents' residence for the evening. She had left no elegant poem to rouse my interest, no word at all that she was anxious to see me. She had simply left and locked herself away, showing no consideration for me. I was quite let down and couldn't help wondering if her unyielding spitefulness wasn't implicitly signaling to me that I should go ahead and hate her if I wanted. The rooms gave no indication she was having an affair ... was her aim to make me angry and suspicious of her? Yet the hues and stitching of the robes she had laid out for me were prepared with more than normal care, just as I would have wished. Clearly she was taking care to look after me even though she now assumed I had abandoned her.

"Things being the way they were, I figured she would never cut me off completely, and so I tried to downplay our spat and make up with her. And though she did not defy me by hiding herself away and making me run around looking for her or by replying in a way that would cause me embarrassment, still she told me, 'I cannot continue putting up with you the way you are now. If you reform and develop a more steady disposition, then maybe we can see each other.' Even though she spoke to me like that, I was convinced she could never leave me, and so I thought I'd let her stew a while longer to punish her. 'All right, then, let's do as you suggest,' I told her, showing her just how stubborn I could be. She suffered so much during that time that at last she died. I knew then that I should never have made light of her, and I can't help thinking now that it's good enough for a man if his wife is someone who is wholly dependable. It was always worthwhile talking to her, regardless of whether we were discussing some trivial, passing matter or an important issue. She was so skilled at dyeing cloth that it's no exaggeration to compare her to the goddess of fall foliage, Princess Tatsuta herself. And when it came to weaving, she was as skillful as the Celestial Weaver Maid we celebrate at Tanabata.⁶ Gifted in such ways, she was

an exceptional wife.”

The Warden felt a keen sorrow at the memory. Tō no Chūjō tried to console him, saying, “Her weaving may have been unsurpassed, but her real virtue was following the example of the Celestial Weaver Maid, who faithfully keeps her vow of love with the Herdsman. The fact is, you cannot expect to find someone again whose weaving compares with that of Princess Tatsuta. When the passing flowers or autumn foliage are not in harmony with the hues of the season, they do not stand out as brightly, and their beauty dissipates. Women are just like that ... their beauty passing out of season. That’s why it’s so difficult in this hard life to decide upon a wife.”

These words acted as encouragement to the Warden, who promptly resumed his discussion. “After she died, I started calling on a woman whose family lineage was peerless and who seemed to have an exquisitely refined temperament. She wrote poetry in a flowing hand, was well trained in the plucking style of the koto, and sang like a master. I couldn’t find any flaws in anything I saw or heard of her. She was also passably good-looking, and so even while I continued to be on familiar terms with the woman who bit my finger, I was also secretly visiting this other woman and eventually grew very attracted to her. After the death of my wife, while I was grieving and wondering what I should do, I came to the realization that nothing could be done for those who have died and started visiting the other woman more frequently. After I became familiar with her, I began to notice that she was somewhat ostentatious ... and flirtatious. Since she did not seem to be the sort of woman I could trust, I began to keep my distance a little, and when I did so she started meeting another man in secret.

“It was an autumn evening during the tenth month. The moon was bright and seductive, and as I set out from the palace I encountered a certain high-ranking courtier. We got into my carriage together, and though I was intending to stay the night at the home of my father, who was a Major Counselor at the time, this courtier told me he was quite eager to stop by a certain place where a woman was waiting for him. Because the house he mentioned happened to be on the way to my father’s house, I caught a glimpse of its garden through the fence and saw the moon shimmering on the surface of the pond. Finding it hard to pass by a dwelling where even the moon seemed to have taken up residence, I dismounted the carriage with the man. He apparently had had this sort of rendezvous before and seemed very excited when he sat down on the widely spaced boards of an open veranda near the inner gate. He struck a dashing pose as he gazed up at the moon. Chrysanthemums, their colors faded by the autumn frost, were arrayed gorgeously, and the scarlet profusion of scattered maple

leaves rustling in the breeze looked magnificent. The man took out a flute from the breast fold of his robe and began to play various popular *saibara* such as ‘The Shade Is Good.’⁷ He also sang a few verses: ‘Let us tarry awhile at the well of Asuka, the shade is good, the waters cool, the grasses inviting ...’ The woman inside accompanied him skillfully, having apparently readied her six-string koto. Her instrument reverberated clearly, and she played it flawlessly, softly, having tuned it to a folksy minor key, and the sound that wafted from the other side of the bamboo blinds seemed quite fashionably modern, a perfect accompaniment to the pure autumn moon. The man was charmed and impressed and moved closer to the blind. Alluding to a poem about visiting the abode of a beautiful woman, he tried to get a response from her, saying, ‘I see no trace of anyone having disturbed the fallen leaves in your garden.’⁸ He picked some chrysanthemums and composed a poem:

*How lovely are the peerless moon
And music here ... yet do they draw
None but coldhearted men to you*

‘I hear you have spoken ill of me. But never mind. Let me have one more song. When a person you want to encourage to listen is present, you should put all your skills on display.’ The woman replied to his brazen bantering, affecting a disinterested voice:

*A leaf can never hope to stay the autumn breeze
Any more than words or music could make tarry
This flutist who accompanies the bitter wind*

“She responded seductively, unaware that I was witness to her distasteful forwardness. She then switched to a larger thirteen-string koto tuned to the *banshiki* mode,⁹ darker in tone and thus appropriate for the season. Her style of plucking was lively and contemporary, and yet even though her playing sparkled, listening to her left me feeling unsettled and embarrassed. When a lady you are seeing intimately from time to time goes out of her way to be fashionably elegant, she is certainly very alluring, at least on those infrequent occasions when you actually meet. But if on one of your rare visits a woman you are considering as a possible mate behaves too voluptuously, then you begin to grow wary and worry she might not be reliable after all. On the basis of what I observed that evening, I decided to end my affair with that lady.

“Though I was young and inexperienced at the time, when I look back and

compare those two women, their capriciousness made them seem inscrutable and unreliable to me. And from now on I will likely be even more inclined to feel that way about women. Your lordships may take delight only in the pleasures of those fragile and fleeting charms of a young lady whom poets would liken to the dew on bush clover that scatters when you pluck the flower, or to sleet on leaves of dwarf bamboo that melts away at your touch. But though you may feel that way now, just wait another seven years, and when you reach my age you will think the same way I do. Please take my poor, humble advice and be careful with women who lead you on. They'll cheat on you and make you look foolish in the eyes of others."

And so he advised them.

Tō no Chūjō continued to nod his head.

Genji smiled faintly, apparently agreeing with the Warden, then remarked, "It seems in both cases your romantic escapades were awkward and unlucky." They all had a good laugh.

Tō no Chūjō spoke up next: "I'd like to tell you about a foolish woman I knew. I started seeing her in secret, and because it looked as though I would have to keep seeing her on the sly, I didn't think our affair would last. But as we grew intimate I came to have deeper feelings for her, and even though I could not meet her very often, I simply couldn't get her out of my mind. Eventually our relationship reached the stage where I could see she trusted me, and many times I honestly thought if she depends on me so much, then there must be things I do that upset her. If there were, however, she never let on about them. Even when I did not visit her for long stretches, she did not jealously resent me or think me inconsiderate. Instead, she kept up appearances morning and night, as if she expected me every day. She was so meek and docile that I was moved to pity and assured her that she could always rely on me.

"She had no parents and was quite lonely and helpless. That's why I found it touching that she apparently thought of me as her provider. She was so quiet and unassuming that I was unconcerned and let my guard down. But then, during one of those long stretches when I did not call on her, she received some rather deplorable messages from my wife's household ... messages that implied threats against her. Unfortunately, I heard about that only much later.

"I was unaware there had been such unpleasantness, and even though I had not forgotten her, we went so long without exchanging a word that she grew despondent. She was so wretched worrying over the baby girl I had fathered by her that she sent me a wild pink, suggesting, I suppose, that the child was like the flower, hidden from sight and easy to overlook." Tears welled up in Tō no Chūjō's eyes.

“And the letter that accompanied the flower?” asked Genji.
“Nothing special, really,” he replied. “She sent this poem:

*The hedge around the hut of the mountain peasant
Grows untended now ... let fall your tender mercy
Let it fall like dew and settle on this wild pink¹⁰*

“With her verse fresh in my mind, I went to see her. She was as faithful and uncomplaining as ever, but her face was worn with care. It was autumn, and as she gazed out from her dilapidated house at the overgrown garden drenched in dew, her tearful expression seemed to vie in sadness with the melancholy chirring of the bell crickets. I felt as though I were part of some old romance:

*I cannot judge which of these flowers is fairest
Their colors mingling in never-ending summer
But there is none dearer than my little wild pink*

“I turned my attention from the child and comforted the lady by reminding her of the old poem in which a lover promises to visit always, so that dust never settles on their bed.¹¹ She replied with this.

*Autumn arrives and rough winds shake
Dew from wild pinks and tears from sleeves
That wipe dust from my lonely bed*

“She spoke casually, giving no hint that she harbored any serious resentment. Even when she wept, she seemed ashamed and awkward and tried to hide her face from me. It pained her to think that I might view her suffering as accusatory, and that attitude so reassured me about our relationship that I did not visit her again for a long time. During that interval she ran off, disappearing without a trace.

“She may still be alive somewhere, but her situation must be precarious and uncertain. If only she had given me some indication of how strongly attached she was to me at that moment when I was so moved by her plight, then she would never have had to run away like that. I would never have neglected her as I did but would have treated her properly, just like any other woman I called on, and looked after her forever. I cherished that little wild pink and so assumed I would always be able to visit her. But now I am unable to track her whereabouts. Certainly this woman is an example of the unreliable type you mentioned earlier.

She appeared so unruffled, never letting on that she found my treatment of her cruel, but in the end my feelings for her, which had never waned, turned out to be nothing more than a futile, one-sided love. Now, even as I am slowly getting her out of my heart, I sometimes think about her, imagining that she has not forgotten me altogether ... that there are evenings when she realizes she cannot blame anyone else for her predicament and her heart smolders with regret. She is certainly the type of woman you cannot rely on or hold to for very long.

“Although a difficult woman is memorable, and thus hard to get out of your mind, when things do not go well and you find it troublesome to continue seeing her ... as you found with the woman who bit your finger ... you tire of the relationship. And a talented woman like your koto player is almost certain to be burdened by the sin of infidelity. As for the woman I spoke of, she was so utterly lacking in character that I have doubts about her as well. So I have reached the point where I find it impossible to choose which type of woman is best. It has proven difficult to compare each respective relationship between men and women in this manner. Where is the woman who could combine the virtues of the three women we discussed without inevitably bringing with her all their unmanageable flaws? Set your sights on the beautiful goddess of fortune, Kichijōten, and not only will her holiness bore you stiff, but you’ll end up reeking of incense to boot!”

The young men all laughed at that.

“But come now,” Tō no Chūjō prodded the Junior Secretary from the Ministry of Rites. “There must be a few unusual affairs going on around your place. Tell us a little about them.”

“Do you honestly think anything worth discussing happens in a place as lowly as mine?” the young man asked.

Tō no Chūjō remained insistent, however. He declared that he was waiting for a response, and so the Junior Secretary wracked his brain to come up with some tale.

“When I was still a student of letters in the Bureau of Education, I happened to be calling on a clever young woman. Like the woman the Warden mentioned, she was a good companion. I could discuss official matters with her, and she was also deeply prudent when it came to the conduct of household affairs. Her brilliance would put an unprepared scholar to shame, and so it was hard to hold my own with her in any conversation we had.

“I began to attend an academy to study Chinese with a certain scholar who just happened to have many daughters. As things turned out, I became intimate with one of them, and when her father found out, he brought out some ceremonial sake cups and spoke to me in an overly suggestive tone, reciting a

line from Bai Juyi's poem in praise of marriage: 'Listen while I recite a poem about the two paths of life.'¹² You know the poem ... the one that extols the virtues of a wife who comes from an impoverished home and urges the husband to cherish her. I hadn't actually fallen head over heels for the woman or anything like that, but I was mindful of her father's feelings. In any case I was beholden to him, and she was a kind and considerate support to me. Even during our pillow talk she would impart her knowledge of Chinese, teaching many crucial things I would need for my official position. Her own writing was clear, almost manly. She employed a precise, rational diction and never mixed the more feminine *kana* script with her Chinese characters. Naturally I couldn't break off the relationship, because with her as my teacher I was able to learn how to write halting verses in Chinese. Even now I can't forget the debt I owe her ... but then again, for a man like me who has no intellectual talents at all to have to rely on a woman I was intimate with and have her witness my pathetic performances ... well, it was too shameful. Your lordships, of course, would never need such an efficient and rigorous helpmate. As for me, even though our relationship strikes me as trivial and regrettable now, at the same time she was someone I was drawn to, perhaps as a result of a karmic bond from a former life. It seems that men are really the feckless ones."

The moment he finished, both Genji and Tō no Chūjō cajoled him, saying, "Well, well, a most intriguing lady indeed," in order to get him to finish up his story. Knowing he was being led on, the Junior Secretary feigned distaste, a comical sneer crinkling his nose as he continued.

"Now then, I did not go to see her for the longest time, and when I finally dropped in on some errand, she was not at all the relaxed, familiar woman she had once been, but instead stayed behind a bothersome screen when we met. It seemed to me she was being peevish, which was foolish behavior, and so I thought this might be the perfect opportunity to break up with her. Yet I knew that such an intelligent woman would never hold a grudge for a frivolous reason. She understood the ways of the world and would not be resentful. She spoke in a voice that sounded rushed and breathy. 'These past few months I have been indisposed by a severe malady and prescribed a regimen of herbal tonic concocted mainly of garlic. This has rendered me extremely malodorous and incapable of meeting you tête-à-tête. Though we cannot meet directly, I would be pleased to undertake any miscellaneous tasks you might request of me.' Her words were so admirably learned, and so ... manly. When I got up to leave she was perhaps feeling anxious and restless, for she added in a screechy voice, 'Please do come by when this odor has dissipated!' I felt very sorry to leave without responding to her, but there was no reason to hang around and, to tell the

truth, the odor was getting to me. So I had no choice but to cast an imploring look at her as if to excuse myself. I sent this poem:

*On a night when the spider's busy spinning
Foretold my arrival, why insist I wait
And put me off till the smell of garlic fades*

“‘What sort of excuse are you giving me?’ I asked. The words had barely left my lips, and I was on the verge of making my escape, when her reply came chasing me down:

*If my love could bring you every night,
Why then should the daytime be so blinding
Or this smell of garlic so offensive*

“You have to admit that she was certainly quick.” He spoke so calmly that the young nobles found the whole account implausibly sordid.

“A complete fabrication,” they said, laughing. “Where could anyone ever find a woman like that? You might just as easily have gone off to meet a demon. The whole thing is unpleasantly weird.” Flicking their thumbs with the nail of their index finger to indicate their pique, they chided the Junior Secretary and pressured him to tell them something better than that. But the young man just sat there and replied, “How can I serve you up anything stranger than that?”

The Warden interceded.

“Generally speaking,” he said, “it is really pathetic how people of no importance, men or women, think they have to show off every last little thing they have learned. A woman who acquires knowledge of Chinese and has read the Three Histories or the Five Classics lacks all feminine charm. But then again, why should we assume that a woman, just because she’s a woman, would go through life without acquiring any knowledge at all of public and private affairs? Though she may not receive any formal education, a woman who has even a modicum of intelligence will retain many things she sees and hears. Through such knowledge she may learn to write cursive Chinese characters, and the next thing you know she is sending stiffly written letters half-filled with Chinese script to other ladies who don’t have a clue what to do with them. When you see such a woman you’re filled with chagrin, wondering why she couldn’t be a bit more soft-spoken and ladylike. She may not have intended to show off her learning in the letter, but of course as it is being read aloud in a halting, strained voice the whole thing seems calculated. There are many examples of this sort of

behavior among the upper ranks of court ladies.

"A woman with aspirations to being a poet will become so obsessed with the art of composition that she'll insert allusions to felicitous old phrases even in the opening lines of her correspondence. She'll send off a poem at the most inopportune moments, which can be quite offputting. If the man doesn't reply, he's inconsiderate, and if he can't come up with an equally learned allusion, he looks ridiculous. For instance, at some seasonal festival, when a man is really busy ... let's say on the morning of the Sweet Flag Festival in the fifth month when you don't have a moment to think calmly about anything ... she whips out a poem with some fabulous allusion playing on the words 'sweet flag' and 'sweet eyes,' or some such nonsense. Or maybe it's the Chrysanthemum Festival, when you have no time at all to wrack your brains to come up with some difficult poem in Chinese as the occasion demands, and here she is sending you a lamentation that strains to play on the words 'chrysanthemum' and 'dew.' The poem is not only unsuitable to the time and place but also a downright nuisance. What otherwise might have seemed a charming or moving poem at a subsequent reading ends up being totally inappropriate and not worth a second glance because of the manner in which it was sent. Composing a poem with no forethought is not very tactful.

"It is far easier to deal with a woman who has no talent for discerning the proper moment or season to compose, who does not put on airs and try to act refined in a way that leaves you wondering why she did what she did. In all cases a woman should pretend to be ignorant, even if she has a little learning. And when she has something to say, she should just focus on a couple of points and skip the rest."

While the Warden was droning on, Genji was preoccupied with thoughts of one particular woman. Comparing her to the women he had heard about this evening, he was moved to an even greater admiration, since she seemed to be that rare type who was neither extravagant nor lacking in any way.

There was no conclusion to their discussion, and in the end as daybreak neared their ramblings came to include some rather queer and disreputable stories.

The weather that day finally cleared. Having been shut up in the palace because of the rain, and mindful of the sensitivities of his father-in-law, Genji left the palace. The atmosphere at the residence of his wife was one of vivid grace and beauty. Nothing was out of place. Still, it seemed to him that even though his wife was one of those women his companions of the previous night would have found hard to abandon, a sincere woman who could definitely be trusted and relied upon, she remained overly refined and proper. He found it

difficult to warm to her icy, distant demeanor, and because he felt so constrained, his ardor toward her cooled and he had a lonely feeling that something was lacking. He bantered teasingly with Chūnagon, Nakatsukasa, and a few of the other more exceptional ladies-in-waiting who attended his wife. These young women couldn't help but observe his appearance—they found him most alluring with his robes loosened in the summer heat. When the Minister arrived at his quarters, Genji, who was still in casual dress, had a curtain placed between them while they discussed various matters.

"Here he is, dressed so formally on such a hot day!" he whispered to the ladies, who giggled at Genji's show of exasperation at his father-in-law. He motioned to them to hush, then stretched out languidly, propping himself up on his elbow. His attitude was thoroughly nonchalant.

As night approached and he was preparing to leave, Genji overheard one of his attendants saying, "I've just found out that the movements of the Middle Deity places him between us and the palace, and so we cannot stay here. But returning there tonight would violate the directional taboo."

"Is that right?" Genji asked. "We must of course avoid that direction, but my residence at Nijō lies along the same route ... so where should I spend the night? I am really not feeling up to this." He was getting ready to retire when his attendants reminded him that it would not do to stay.

One of them made a suggestion: "The Governor of Kii Province, who has faithfully served the Minister, has a villa east of here in the vicinity of the Nakagawa River. He recently dammed the river up to make a stream and pond for his garden, so it's a cool, shaded place."

"That sounds perfect," Genji replied. "Since I'm not feeling well, any place is fine so long as my carriage can pass through the gate with the oxen still harnessed. I don't want to have to get out where I might be seen."

Although there were a number of discreet locations where he could have gone to avoid the directional prohibition, Genji had not come to his wife's residence for some time. He thus would have found it awkward had his father-in-law, who had been eagerly waiting for this visit, suspected him of using the prohibition as an excuse to spend the night with another woman.

Genji's request was conveyed to the Governor of Kii, who obliged and made his villa available—though he was a little anxious about the situation. "My father, the Vice Governor of Iyo," he said to a subordinate, "has recently had to perform a purification of his own residence, and so he has temporarily moved all the women who live there to my household, which is rather small and cramped. I'm concerned that his lordship might find this offensive."

When Genji heard of these remarks he tried to reassure the Governor, saying,

"I'd be delighted to have those ladies nearby. Sleeping on the road with no women around is a rather alarming prospect. All I need is a little space behind their curtains."

An attendant chimed in, "In that case, the Governor's residence is an excellent choice."

Messengers and other attendants were sent ahead. Because Genji left hurriedly under the utmost secrecy for an out-of-the-way destination, he did not notify his father-in-law and was escorted only by his closest attendants.

The Governor's servants were put out and grumbled, "This is all so sudden!" But no one paid any attention. Rooms in the women's quarters in the pavilion on the east side of the main hall were cleaned and aired out, and temporary lodgings were set up. The stream that had been created by damming the Nakagawa flowed south between Genji's lodgings and the main hall and proved to be just as delightful as reported. The wattle fence around the garden was in a rustic style, and the landscaping had been executed with considerable ingenuity. The breeze was refreshingly cool, the chirping of ground beetles could be heard all around, and fireflies were constantly flashing here and there. It was simply delightful. Genji's party began drinking at a spot that overlooked the burbling stream where it flowed out from under the passageway connecting the east pavilion to the main hall. The Governor sent off for some delicacies, bustling in and out just like the master of that house at Koyurugi no iso who, according to the song, ran off for seaweed to go with the wine he provided his guests. Genji leisurely surveyed the scene around him and recalled the discussion from the previous evening. Was this residence the kind of place where he could find that midlevel type of woman the Warden had mentioned? He had heard rumors that the young second wife of the Vice Governor of Iyo, the father of his host, was a woman of proud mien, and so his curiosity was aroused. Listening intently, he could detect signs from the west side of the residence that the women were there. The rustling of kimonos mingled with the sound of muffled voices, creating an effect not at all unpleasant. The women were evidently aware of the presence of Genji's party, for they were straining to suppress their laughter. Because the lacquered lattice shutters were still open, the Governor of Kii muttered, "How careless!" and had them closed up. When he did, Genji slipped quietly over to a spot where the lamplight and the shadows of the women filtered out through an opening above the sliding doors. He thought he might be able to steal a peek inside, but there were no gaps between the doors, and so he sat there listening for a while. It seemed to him that the women must be gathered in the nearby main hall, and as he eavesdropped on their secret whispers he soon realized that they were talking about him.

One of the women remarked, “I’ve heard he’s very serious. What a shame he was married off to a highborn lady when he was so young.”

Another chimed in, “I’ve heard different. They say he’s always running off to meet some secret lover!”

At that, Genji’s heart leapt into his throat. There was, after all, one particular affair that had preoccupied him recently, and it made him nervous. What if, even on a chance occasion like this, he overheard someone exposing *that* particular secret of his?

The women said nothing more of interest to him, however, and so he stopped listening. He heard them cite one of his poems, though they misquoted it. It was a verse he had sent to Princess Asagao, daughter of Prince Shikibu, the Minister of Ceremonials, along with cuttings of the bellflowers that were her namesake. Apparently the Princess’s retinue had a tendency to rather loosely and freely toss poems about. He wondered if he wouldn’t be disappointed when they actually met.

The Governor of Kii came out and had more lanterns set up. He also had the servants lengthen the wicks on the oil lamps to brighten up the place and bring out some fruits and sweets for his guests. Genji, alluding to a bawdy *saibara* called “My House,”¹³ teased the Governor, saying, “What a careless host you are! You’re not at all like the master of that house where the guests get both curtains and some delightful treats.”

“My lord,” replied the Governor, alluding to the same song, “I cannot know what your pleasure is.” He demurred subserviently, however, pretending not to understand Genji’s reference. When Genji withdrew to a spot near the veranda to nap for a while, the others in his party also settled down.

The children of his host were all attractive. One of them was a handsome youth Genji recognized as a page who served in the Emperor’s quarters. Children of the Vice Governor of Iyo were also present, as was one other boy of about twelve or thirteen who looked exceptionally noble and refined.

Genji inquired of his host, “Whose child is that? Where does he come from?”

The Governor of Kii replied, “He’s the youngest child of the late Captain of the Outer Palace Guard. The Captain was quite fond of the boy, but sadly he died when his son was still young. So the boy’s older sister has looked after him, and thanks to her he is serving here. He’s an unusually gifted child who should do very well in his studies. I’m hoping he’ll become a page to the Emperor as well, but I’m afraid it won’t be easy to secure a post for him, because he has little family support.”

“That’s unfortunate,” said Genji. “His older sister ... she’s your father’s second wife? Your stepmother?”

“Yes, that’s right,” the Governor of Kii answered.

“She certainly doesn’t look like a stepmother. She’s far too young and pretty. The Emperor himself asked about her. He said to me, ‘Her father let it be known that he wanted her to serve at court, but I wonder what happened?’ Truly the world is an uncertain place.” Genji spoke with a seriousness that seemed beyond his years.

“My lord,” said the Governor, “it was indeed a surprise when she became my father’s wife. But, then again, you can never predict what will happen in this world, as the case of my stepmother attests. It is a sad fact that a woman’s fate is especially uncertain.”

“Your father must be very protective of her, is he not?” Genji asked. “He must treat her like a princess.”

“Of course ... how could he not?” the Governor continued. “He thinks of her as the mistress of his house, but no one, including me, approves of this infatuation.”

“That may be,” said Genji, “but aren’t you criticizing him only because you think of yourself as more up-to-date and thus more appropriate for a young woman? Your father is quite fashionable in his own way, is he not? Doesn’t he try to keep up his looks? By the way, where is the lady?”

“We plan to lodge all the women in the servants’ quarters,” Genji’s host replied, “but it seems that some of them can’t bring themselves to go there just yet.”

The party was well into its cups, and soon everyone was lying down and sound asleep on the veranda beyond the outer blinds.

Though Genji felt relaxed, he could not sleep. It was tedious sleeping alone, and thinking about it kept him awake. There were indications that the women were just beyond the sliding doors to the north side of where he lay, and he speculated that this might be the lodging of the lady he and his host had been discussing a short time ago. Keeping his emotions in check, and moved to pity by her fate, he arose quietly and moved over to their doors to listen in on them.

“Hello? Are you in there?” someone whispered.

Genji recognized the voice as that of the boy he had taken note of earlier. His husky whisper sounded charming.

A woman replied, “I’m staying here tonight. Is our guest asleep yet? I had hoped he would be lodging close by, but I’m told he’s settled in a room farther away.” Her relaxed, sleepy voice bore a resemblance to the boy’s, and so Genji gathered that she must be his older sister.

“He’s sleeping just inside the veranda in the east pavilion. I caught a glimpse of him. It’s just like everyone said ... he’s really splendid-looking,” the boy

murmured.

“If it were daytime, I’d steal a glance at him myself.”

She spoke drowsily, her voice muffled by her bedclothes, which were drawn up over her face. *How disagreeable*, Genji was thinking. *What a bore that she should be so reluctant to ask about me.*

“Shall I sleep on the veranda? It’s so dark in here,” the boy said, apparently lengthening the wick on the lamp. The woman seemed to be lying just on the other side of the doors.

“Where has Chūjō gone?” the lady asked. “It scares me when no one is nearby.” One of her female attendants, who was lying down in the corridor just below the entrance to the room, replied, “Chūjō went to the bath. She’ll be back soon.”

Once they had all settled back down, Genji tested the latch and tried pulling the door open. It had not been locked from the inside. A curtain had been drawn across the doorway. A lamp was flickering dimly and there were several Chinese-style four-legged chests cluttering up the room, so he had to make his way cautiously. Entering the chamber where he guessed she might be, he saw her diminutive figure lying there alone. Though she was annoyed at being disturbed, she assumed it was Chūjō until he began to pull at the robes covering her.

“I heard you calling for a ‘Captain,’ ” whispered Genji, in an outrageous play on her attendant’s name, “so being a Captain myself I took that as a sign that my inner desires for you were not in vain.”

The woman had no idea what was happening and, feeling as though some spirit were assaulting her, she called out in fright. Since her robes were covering her face, however, her cry was muffled.

“I know this is unexpected, and I wouldn’t blame you if you think me rash. But I beg you to let me express my feelings, which I have kept bottled up inside, so that you will understand. I have long waited for an opportunity like this, so you mustn’t think of my feelings for you as foolish or superficial.”

He spoke gently to her, and because his looks would have charmed demons and spirits, she was at a total loss as to how to handle the situation. She couldn’t very well call out that a man was in her room. She felt powerless, thinking how improper this was, and in her shock and surprise she said in hushed tones, “You must have the wrong person.”

She was so mortified that she wanted to vanish from his gaze, and her reaction created an aura of helplessness he found sweetly irresistible.

“How unjust of you,” said Genji, “to suspect that the emotions that drew me here have mistakenly guided me to the wrong place. Can’t you see that my

behavior is driven by passion? I have no intention of ravishing you. Please just let me tell you a little about how I feel.”

The lady was so petite that Genji swept her up in his arms and headed back toward the sliding doors. Just then they encountered Chūjō, the attendant the young wife had been calling for earlier.

“Oh no,” Genji muttered, and Chūjō, realizing something was amiss, came feeling her way toward them. The room was suffused with the superb scent of Genji’s perfumed robes, and as soon as she caught a whiff, which seemed to strike her full in the face, she immediately figured out what was going on. Confronting this unpleasant surprise, Chūjō had no idea how she should act or what she should say. Had he been a man of ordinary rank, she might have forcibly pulled her lady from his arms. But doing so would have ended up exposing the situation to the entire household. So she simply followed them, her heart in her throat.

Genji seemed unperturbed as he carried the lady into an interior chamber. Just before he closed the sliding doors, he told Chūjō, “Come for your mistress at dawn.” The young wife was mortified at the prospect that Chūjō would now assume she had planned this affair with Genji in advance. Because she was drenched in perspiration and in obvious distress, Genji took pity and spoke tender words to her—words he had practiced perhaps on other amorous adventures? He exhausted all his wiles to show how sensitive he was and thus win her over.

She was disgusted and still in shock.

“I can’t believe this is happening,” she said to him. “You’re obviously of exalted status, so even though you grandly insist on the sincerity of your devotions, I can’t help feeling that you are making sport of me. It’s true what they say. People should stick to those of their own rank.”

She struck a pose of resistance and dejection, and because she looked so forlorn, he felt ashamed and assumed a more serious demeanor as he tried to placate her.

“This is the first time I have ever behaved like this, so I have no idea if it’s true that love is only appropriate when it is between people of similar status. It is cruel of you to take me for some common paramour. I’m sure you’ve heard things about me, so you ought to know that I have never willfully forced my affections on anyone. Hasn’t some karmic bond destined us to meet? I myself am amazed by my own strange impulsiveness, which you are quite right to reject.”

Speaking earnestly, he tried all sorts of blandishments. But because he was so incomparably handsome, she was convinced it would make her feel even more

wretched were she to let him have his way. Thus, though she worried he might think her disagreeable—too prim and proper—she became increasingly withdrawn and treated his pleas frostily, hoping that she could ward him off by coming across as an obstinate woman who did not understand the ways of love. She was compliant by nature, but in forcing herself to be resolute, she resembled supple bamboo, which, though it looks fragile, will not easily break.

The lady was now genuinely unhappy and found it unspeakably base that he had selfishly forced himself upon her. After it was over, he was moved to pity by her weeping. Although it pained him to see her in this state, he would have regretted it had he not taken her. Still, it was annoying that she should be inconsolable.

“Am I really all that repulsive to you?” His tone was scolding. “You ought to consider our sudden tryst as something preordained. It’s cruel of you to be so distracted and unresponsive, as though you’re completely ignorant of the ways of men and women.”

“Had I been the object of your affections when I was younger,” she said, “before I assumed my unhappy role as second wife to an old man, I might have comforted myself thinking there would be a time when we would meet later on and you would come to truly love me. Of course, I know it’s unreasonable for someone like me to hold such high expectations. But now as I lie here with you for one brief night and realize how fleeting our relationship is, my heart is experiencing turmoil such as I have never known before. Very well, then ... if this is how it must be, then I must ask you to behave as though nothing happened tonight.”

Upon hearing her words, Genji understood the reasons why she was so preoccupied. He comforted her, swearing among other things that he would not neglect her, that their relationship was not a trifle.

A cock crowed and his attendants began to stir.

“We slept the whole night through,” said one, while another called out, “Let’s prepare the carriages!”

The Governor of Kii came out as well, and one of the female attendants could be heard remarking, “If he came here just to avoid a directional taboo, why is he leaving so early? It’s practically the middle of the night!”

Genji knew it was unlikely he would have another opportunity like this, and he wondered how he might manage to come here again, since it would be improper to exchange letters with the woman. The thought of not being able to see her again disturbed him greatly. Chūjō appeared, just as she had been ordered. Because the lady was in such distress, Genji was about to let her go with her attendant when he detained her for a moment.

“How may I communicate with you? Your unprecedeted coldness toward me ... my own painful feelings ... these mutual remembrances that deeply bind us ... they are each remarkable in their own way.”

His tearful countenance made him even more appealing. As the cock crowed again and again, Genji felt he was being pressured to leave. He composed a verse:

*Though I have not fully voiced my complaints to you
Dawn breaks and even the cock has no time to spare
But seems in a hurry to make us rise and part*

Thinking about her own status, the young wife felt unworthy and ashamed, unsure of what to make of his attentions, which were more than she deserved. She thought of her husband back in Iyo, an unlovable man whose lack of grace she found contemptible, and was suddenly overcome with fear that the old man in his dreams might have seen her with Genji. She replied:

*I cannot fully share my woes with you
Before the dawn ... and so my sorrows grow
Till like the cock I raise my voice and cry*

The sky gradually brightened. Genji saw the woman back as far as the entrance to her room. People were now bustling about inside and out of the residence, and so he closed the sliding doors to shut them off from the others. When he did so, the doors brought to mind the image used in many poems of a barrier gate that separates lovers, making him feel helpless and lonely. He was wearing an informal summer robe and gazing out over the railing at the garden to the south. The lattice shutters under the eaves on the west side of the residence clattered as they were opened, and he sensed that the women inside were peeking out at him. They were likely the more curious attendants who must have been deeply impressed and thrilled with the dashing figure he cut, which they could barely see over the low screen just inside the veranda.

The light of the moon faded as day came on, but its ghostly silhouette remained clearly etched in the sky, imparting a deeply felt beauty to the dawn. Depending on the emotions of the person viewing the scene, the ineffable beauty of the dawn could be either sadly overpowering or lustrously elegant. Genji's emotions, which he could share with no one, were causing him distress, and when he at last got up to leave he could not resist the urge to keep glancing back at her, knowing that there was no reliable way to exchange messages.

Genji returned to the household of his father-in-law, but the afterglow of the affair kept him awake. It would not be easy to meet the young wife again, and that realization brought on pangs of sympathy for the woman who, he imagined, was likely suffering even more than he. Though not truly exceptional, she certainly belonged to that midlevel type he and the other young gentlemen had discussed that rainy evening. Attractive and gracefully modest, she perfectly matched the description that the Warden, a man of experience, had given them that night.

Genji began to spend all of his time at his father-in-law's residence. He was in a constant state of anxiety, however, since there was no word about the young wife, and he wondered what she might be thinking. Unable to stand it any longer, he summoned the Governor of Kii and made a request.

"May I take into service that handsome lad we discussed—you know, the son of the late Captain? He had a rather endearing air about him, and I'd like to have him in my personal retinue. I shall present him to the Emperor myself."

"You are far too gracious, my lord," replied the Governor. "I shall have your request relayed to his older sister ... that is, to my stepmother."

Genji felt his heart rise in his chest. "Has the boy's sister," he inquired, "given you any siblings?"

"No, she has no children," the Governor answered. "She's been married to my father for two years, but I've heard she's quite dissatisfied. Evidently she regrets going against her father's wish that she serve at court."

"What a pity," said Genji. "She has a good reputation. Is she really as beautiful as they say?"

"She's probably not all that bad-looking, but I don't actually know since I'm not very close to her. As a stepson, custom demands that I keep my distance."

Five or six days after this exchange the Governor brought the boy to Genji. Though the lad was not, strictly speaking, handsome in all respects, he nevertheless presented a fresh, graceful appearance. Genji called the boy in and spoke to him with an easy familiarity. For his part the boy was overjoyed, sensing in his youthful heart that he was in the presence of someone remarkable. Genji asked him for details about his older sister, the young wife of Iyo. The boy attempted to answer as best he could, but he was so proper in his bearing that Genji felt reticent lest he press his questioning too far. It was difficult to ask the boy to be his messenger without divulging his affair with the boy's sister. Still, in the end Genji succeeded in conveying just what he wanted, and though the boy was surprised when he vaguely caught on to what Genji was requesting, he was still innocent enough that he did not fully grasp all the implications. Thus, when he delivered Genji's letter, he was stunned to see tears welling up in his

sister's eyes. Humiliated that her younger brother might know what had transpired, she held out the letter and unrolled it so that it hid her face. Genji had written a great deal:

*If our eyes shall never meet I have no hope
Of seeing you on other nights in my dreams
Since nights spent longing for you bring me no sleep*

"As the poet put it, 'Because of sleepless nights ...'"¹⁴

It was a dazzling letter and she could hardly stand reading it. Blinded by her tears, she lay prostrate, pondering these events that had brought a new and unexpected twist of fate into her life.

The following day Genji summoned the boy, who then informed his sister that he was to go to Genji's residence. When her brother asked for her response letter, she told him, "Inform your lord that there was no one here to take the letter from you."

The boy smiled and replied, "How can I tell him that? He told me to make sure I delivered it with no mistakes."

His answer darkened her mood, since she could only assume that her younger brother knew everything that happened that night. Her anguish knew no limits.

"Very well," she said in a fit of pique. "If you're so smart, then don't go at all!"

"How can I not go when I've been summoned?" he said, and left.

The Governor of Kii, a man of amorous inclinations, was attracted to his young stepmother and thought her beauty was wasted on his elderly father. In order to get on her good side, he made a fuss over her younger brother and took him along everywhere he went.

Genji called the boy to him and said, "I waited all day yesterday for you. Apparently I am not in your thoughts as much as you are in mine."

The boy blushed upon hearing Genji express his resentment in this way.

"So where do things stand?" Genji continued, and the boy had to explain the situation.

"So my request was in vain? She's being much too difficult," Genji said, giving the boy another letter. "You probably have no idea about us, do you? Before she married the old Vice Governor of Iyo, your sister had been meeting me. However, she came to look on me as some unreliable, thin-necked youth and so turned for support to that inelegant old man. Now she seems to be making a fool of me ... but even so, I want you to be a son to me. After all, the old man she depends upon isn't long for this world."

When he learned about this earlier affair between Genji and his sister, the boy was quite taken with the story, which struck him as splendidly romantic. Genji found his reaction charming.

Genji kept the lad by his side all the time, taking him along to the palace and generally behaving just like a father. He even ordered his personal chamberlain, who was in charge of the wardrobe, to prepare clothes for the boy.

Genji sent a constant stream of letters to the young wife. Because the messenger—the lady's younger brother—was still so inexperienced, she was tormented by the fear that one of those letters would accidentally fall into the wrong hands, and she would gain a reputation as a frivolous woman. To her way of thinking, good fortune depended on one's reputation, and so she would never reply to Genji's letters in an intimate manner. Though she could not help but recall his extraordinary good looks and bearing, which she had vaguely glimpsed in the darkness that night, she kept reminding herself that even if she made herself attractive and took him as a lover, nothing would ever come of it.

Not a moment passed when she wasn't in Genji's thoughts, and he recalled their tryst with mixed feelings of pain and affection. He obsessed over her, unable to get the image of her frail, brooding figure out of his mind. He considered trying to steal in to see her again, but so many watchful eyes policed her residence that he would very likely be risking detection. He was appalled by the thought of how devastating the exposure of their affair would be to her.

He spent several days at the palace, as he usually did, waiting for an opportunity when the Middle Deity did not block the direction to the young wife's residence. When that day finally arrived, Genji suddenly left the palace, ostensibly heading for his wife's residence at Sanjō. But then, on the pretext that a directional taboo prevented him from going to his wife, he instead dropped in on the Governor of Kii. The governor was caught off guard, but he was still pleased and delighted by the visit, since he assumed Genji had come to admire once more the artistry of the stream and pond in his garden. Shortly after noon Genji told the boy, "Everything is going just as I have planned." He made the boy promise to help and kept him nearby all through the day. That evening he summoned him again first thing.

The young wife had learned about all that was taking place from her younger brother. Given the effort Genji had put into his elaborate scheme, she did not sense he was trifling with her. And yet her heart was torn by doubts. She knew that if she were to open up to him and reveal her wretched state, it would only bring back the distress she had experienced that previous evening, which now seemed like a dream to her.

Because she felt so awkward and ashamed about meeting him surreptitiously,

the moment Genji summoned her younger brother she told her attendants, “It is improper for me to be staying so close to our guest’s quarters. And since I am not feeling all that well, I think it best for me to quietly slip off to a room a little farther away so I may get a massage.” So saying, she moved off to a hiding place in the quarters of her chief attendant, Chūjō, just off a veranda leading to a private part of the residence.

Because he intended to see the lady, Genji had his own retinue retire early and then sent a message off to her. The boy, however, was unable to locate his sister. He wandered about looking everywhere, cutting through all the clutter and coming out to the veranda, where he found her at last. He was quite put out by all the bother and on the verge of tears.

“My lord will think I’m no use at all,” he complained.

“How could you get yourself involved in such an outrageous scheme,” she scolded him. “Having a child convey a message like this ... it’s absolutely shameless! He should know better! Tell him that I am not well and that I am keeping my attendants with me to have a massage.”

She sent him off with a final admonishment, saying, “Everyone will think this is very suspicious.”

In her heart of hearts, though, she was deeply troubled. If only she hadn’t decided to marry the old man, or if only she were still living at her family residence, where the image of her late parents still lingered on—how delightful it would have been to wait for Genji, even if he came to her only once in a while. She forced herself to pretend she did not care about his feelings, that she could ignore him, but he must now think her a woman who does not know her place. She was doing what she honestly believed was best, but she was suffering greatly for it. Still, what was done was done, and it was useless to think about it any more. So she resigned herself to the situation, resolving to suppress her true desires and remain heartless and insensitive.

Genji was lying and waiting, wondering how the boy was faring, but also feeling uneasy about having someone so young carry out his designs. When the boy returned and he learned that all his planning had been in vain, he found her strength of character both strange and admirable.

“She truly puts me to shame,” he said, looking quite miserable.

For a long time he said not a word, but sighed as if he were in pain. He thought he had suffered a terrible setback.

*Wandering lost on the road to Sonohara
As I approach the broom cypress, it fades from view
Just like your mystifying heart when I come near¹⁵*

“Is there no way to tell you how I feel?” he wrote.

The woman was unable to sleep, so she replied:

*How painful it is that the broom cypress
Grows in such a humble place ... like that plant
I fade from sight, so you cannot approach*

The boy found all of this too unbearable and, unable to sleep, continued to wander about the residence. This worried his sister, who feared that if someone saw him they would think it odd.

As always, Genji’s attendants were sleeping soundly. He was alone and agitated. The woman’s disposition was like nothing else he had ever encountered, and, unlike the broom cypress, her proud and haughty figure rose up before him and would not fade away. Her willful propriety was hateful, but it was also what made her attractive to him. Feeling he was suffering unjustly, he tried telling himself, *So be it! Let her selfishly do as she wants!* But then he found it was not so easy to dismiss her from his heart and told the boy, “Take me to where she is hiding.”

“She’s locked herself away in a very cluttered place, and there are a lot of people with her. I really think it’s best not to try,” the boy protested, regretting that he could not do more.

“All right, then. At least I haven’t been abandoned by you.”

Genji had the boy lie down beside him. It is said that because Genji’s splendid, youthful appearance delighted the boy, he found the lad far more lovable than his frigid sister.

¹ The tale of the amorous Lesser Captain of Takano referred to here has not survived.

² *Tales of Ise*, section 1: “Like the wild patterns on my robe made by the purple dye of the gromwell that grows in Kasugano, the turmoil of my secret yearning knows no bounds.”

³ A directional taboo/prohibition (*kataimi*) refers to the belief that under certain circumstances and occasions a particular direction on the compass was inauspicious, and that travel or movement in that direction was to be avoided. Several types of *kataimi* were recognized during the Heian period: a permanent and universally unlucky direction (e.g., the northeast—a belief that helped determine the location and spatial orientation of Kyoto, which was protected from inauspicious influences by Mount Hiei, which is northeast of the capital); unlucky directions that might affect an individual at certain ages in his or her life; and temporary unlucky directions that were determined when deities that were believed to be in constant movement around the points of the compass stopped for a period of time.

⁴ In Buddhism the five evils are lust, wrath, greed, worldly attachment, and pride (ego).

⁵ A reference to a poem on marriage included in the collected writings of Bai Juyi, *Hakushi monjū* (白氏文

集) 3564.

6 Tanabata is a festival on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month that celebrates the annual meeting of the young lovers Orihime (the Celestial Weaver Maid, i.e., the star Vega) and Hikoboshi (the Celestial Oxherd, i.e., the star Altair). Because their love distracted them from their heavenly responsibilities, they were separated by the Milky Way and are allowed to meet only once a year, crossing over a bridge formed by the wings of a flock of magpies.

7 The genre of music referred to here, the *saibara*, was a popular form in which the lyrics of folk songs (usually) were set to Chinese music. Lines from various *saibara* appear throughout the narrative.

8 *Kokinshū* 287 (Anonymous): “The autumn has come, the foliage falls in the garden ... yet no one cuts his way through the path to this abode.”

9 This is one of six modes (or keys) used in *gagaku*, Japanese court music, which is based largely on the court music of T'ang China. The various modes usually had seasonal or poetic associations.

10 The word I have translated as “wild pink” is *nadeshiko*. In the two poems that follow immediately below, the word for wild pink is *tokonatsu*. Although the two names refer to the exact same flower, Murasaki Shikibu uses both in this sequence of poems to distinguish between mother and child. In the first poem, *nadeshiko* refers to Tō no Chūjō’s child by his lover, while in the second and third poems *tokonatsu* refers to the woman. Both *nadeshiko* and *tokonatsu* may be identified as other flowers (e.g., a carnation or a gillyflower), but both are generic names for pinks. I have chosen to use the name “wild pink” to suggest the well-worn theme in the tradition of Japanese literature that Murasaki Shikibu drew on of a beautiful lover who is discovered by a man in an out-of-the-way place, like a wildflower growing in a hidden spot. The two poems below also play on the word *tokonatsu*, which is a homophone for “never-ending summer,” and which has an element, *toko*, that is a homophone for “bed.”

11 *Kokinshū* 167 (Ōshikōchi no Mitsune): “I long to stop even a mote of dust from settling on this bed of pinks that have come into bloom since first you and I lay on our bed.”

12 Bai Juyi, *Hakushi monjū* 75.

13 The lyrics are as follows: “I have hung the curtains around the dais of her bedchamber, so come my lord, be my daughter’s husband. And what will you desire for your wedding feast ... abalone, turban snail, sea urchin?” These foods all had erotic associations.

14 *Shūishū* 735 (Minamoto no Shitagō): “Because of sleepless nights I cannot dream of you, so what comfort does my love for you bring?”

15 Broom cypress is a shrub sometimes associated with Sonohara. Its poetic significance is tied to the belief that the plants could be seen by travelers from a distance but would disappear as the traveler approached. The young wife’s aloofness calls up the image to Genji.

III

Utsusemi

A Molted Cicada Shell

GENJI COULD not sleep.

“Never before,” he complained, “have I been rejected by such a woman. Having tasted the sorrows of love for the first time this evening, I am ashamed and feel I can no longer remain in this world.”

The boy, prostrate and in tears, looked quite adorable—what with his figure, slight and slender to the touch, and his short hair. Perhaps it was the working of Genji’s imagination, but the lad’s resemblance to his older sister was deeply moving. Genji knew it would harm his reputation if he allowed an unreasonable obsession with the woman to drive him to seek out the place where she was hiding, so he spent a sleepless night resenting her damnable scruples. Just before dawn, while it was still dark, he left without engaging in his usual banter. The boy, who was filled with regret, didn’t know what to do.

The young wife was also wracked with unusually troubled thoughts, since she had no tidings from Genji. She assumed he was angry with her and that it was over between them, and yet it depressed her to think he might treat her coldly from now on and that their affair would amount to nothing more than their one tryst. On the other hand, if he recklessly pursued his outrageous behavior, then her situation would go from bad to worse. Torn by such conflicting thoughts, her heart was in turmoil even though she knew this was the right time to end the affair once and for all.

For his part, Genji may have found her behavior disagreeable, but he was loath to give up on the affair. At the same time he worried about his reputation, and so he told the boy, “As much as I’d like to forget about her altogether, I cannot because my hopes have been so cruelly dashed. I’d like you to find another opportunity, then use all your wits to arrange a meeting with your

sister."

A daunting request, no doubt, but the boy was thrilled that Genji had taken him into his confidence and asked him to carry out this scheme.

While the younger brother was waiting in childish anticipation for an opportunity to present itself, the Governor of Kii left on a trip to his province. Choosing a night when the moon rose late and all the women in the Governor's residence were settled in early, the boy escorted Genji there over roads obscured in darkness.¹ Genji did not have full confidence in the boy because of his inexperience, and he worried what might happen. But because he could not calm his emotions, he got dressed eagerly, disguising himself so as not to be recognized, and hurried to arrive before the gates were shut. His carriage was drawn into an out-of-the-way spot and Genji dismounted. Because the younger brother was still a child, the guards paid little heed and did not bother to greet him, which was a relief to both him and Genji.

The boy left his lord standing at the hinged double doors in the corner on the east side of the main hall. He then proceeded around the southeastern corner and entered the aisle room through a space between the pillars. He was admitted into the inner chambers after pounding on the lattice shutters and calling out loudly. The older women scolded him.

"You're leaving the shutters wide open! The whole world can see right in!"

"Why are they closed in the first place? It's really hot."

"Because the Governor's younger sister has come over from the west hall to play Go.² They've been at it since noon," he was told.

Wanting to catch a glimpse of the two women sitting across from each other, Genji quietly entered through the hinged wooden doors and stole up to a space behind some blinds. Because the shutter where the boy had been let in was still raised, he sidled over to the opening where he could get a better view. Looking in toward the west, he saw that one leaf of the screen nearest him had been folded back, and the curtain that should have blocked the women from view had been raised, perhaps because of the heat. As a result, he had an excellent view of everything.

A lamp had been set next to the Go board. While trying to make out the figures in the dim light, he guessed that the woman lying in profile near one of the central pillars was the young wife who preoccupied him, and so he ran his eyes over her first. Her under robe appeared to be a singlet of simple design, dyed a deep violet hue. He could not clearly make out the pattern or color of the outer robe. She did not strike him as an exceptional beauty, but her head was slender, she was of slight build, and she was careful to keep her face hidden even from her playing partner. She also went to great lengths to make sure her hands

and wrists did not protrude from her sleeves. The other woman was facing east, so he could see all of her. She wore a white silk singlet over which she had casually slung a shorter robe dyed a shade of fuchsia. She was in dishabille ... so much so that her robes, which were loosely open down to the cords securing her trousers at the waist, partially exposed the front of her body. She was tall and fair-skinned, plump and voluptuous. Her head and forehead were elegantly sculpted, her eyes and mouth inviting. All in all, she struck a rather gorgeous pose. Although her thick, flowing hair wasn't especially long, it was stylishly parted at the front in the contemporary fashion and fell luxuriantly across her shoulders. Nothing was out of place or amiss, and she looked stunning. *No wonder her father treats her like a priceless treasure!* Genji thought, savoring the pleasure of gazing at her. He would have preferred it had she behaved a little more demurely, but she certainly wasn't lacking in spirit. As the game neared completion and the outcome still hung on the last stone, she seemed quick-witted and nimble, and her demeanor was brisk and cheerful.

The woman opposite her was quiet and unruffled. "Wait a minute," she said, "that area of the board is still in play. If you place your stone there, we'll end up with a perpetual taking of stones. You'll have to make a play elsewhere."

"Oh, in that case I've lost, haven't I? Let's see what I've got in the corners. Ten ... twenty ... thirty ... forty ..."

Bending her fingers as she counted, she looked like she was taking inventory of all the tubs at the hot springs in her father's province of Iyo.³ Her gestures struck Genji as a little vulgar.

In contrast to this flamboyant beauty, the woman he had come to see kept her sleeves to her face so that she was not clearly visible. When he gazed more closely at her, however, he could make out her profile. Her eyelids were a little puffy, her nose did not have a vivid shape, and her features generally lacked a fresh glow, creating the impression that she no longer possessed the bloom of youthful charm. She was, in all honesty, a little on the ugly side. Compared to her voluptuous companion, however, she did not come across as heedless, but was rather more careful about her appearance—a woman of evident modesty and refined grace.

The younger woman had a lively charm and beauty, and as she grew more confident and casual in manner she laughed and teased, radiating a sensuality that, in spite of her lack of breeding, aroused Genji's interest. He considered her nothing more than a trifle, but even to a heart as fickle as his, she was not someone he could just dismiss out of hand.

The noble women he was used to seeing were never relaxed and never let their guard down. He had only glimpsed their faces, which they always kept averted.

This was the first time he had ever spied on women in such an unguarded, casual moment, and though he felt a sense of pity and endearment for the two, who were unaware they were being watched, he wanted to continue gazing on them for a while longer. Just then, however, the boy appeared and he had to quietly withdraw.

Watching Genji move back to the door leading to the eastern wing of the residence, the boy felt guilty that he had not arranged things better for his lord, and said, “An unexpected visitor is with her and you cannot go in yet.”

“So you’re telling me,” Genji replied, “that my efforts will be in vain tonight as well? It’s shocking, really, and quite intolerable.”

“No, no,” the boy responded, “it’s not like that. As soon as the visitor withdraws to her quarters, I’ll figure out some way to get you inside.”

Perhaps things will turn out as the lad says, Genji thought. After all, even though the boy was young, he was self-possessed, which enabled him to size up the intentions of others and grasp the situation.

It sounded as though the game was finally over, since they could hear the smooth sound of silk rustling as the women got up to leave.

“Where has that boy gone to? I suppose I’ll have to close up the shutters,” he heard someone say, followed by a rattling sound.

“She’s settling in for the night,” said Genji to the boy. “Go in and do the best you can.”

Knowing that his sister was a deeply serious woman not easily swayed from her convictions, the boy figured it would be useless to try to persuade her, so he decided he would simply let Genji in when there were fewer people around.

“Is the younger sister of the Governor still inside?” asked Genji. “I’d like to take a closer look at her as well.”

“I don’t know how you’ll manage that,” replied the boy. “She’s already retired behind a screen set up just inside the shutters.”

She may be out of sight for now ... Genji laughed to himself, though he felt a bit guilty for not telling the boy that he had already seen the young lady. He did, however, tell him how eager he was for the night to deepen.

At this point the boy rapped lightly on the double doors at the corner of the room and entered. The women attendants were all asleep.

“I’m going to lie down next to the sliding doors,” he said to no one in particular. “I’ll let the breeze blow through here ...”

The boy cleverly found an excuse for leaving the door open. He spread his bedding on the floor and stretched out. Most of the women had gone to sleep under the eaves of the veranda on the east side. The girl who had opened the door for him thus moved over there as well. The boy pretended to fall asleep, but

after a while he got up, spread open a folding screen to block the brightest lamp and, with the room now darkened, stealthily admitted his lord. Genji, who was wondering how this escapade would turn out and worrying that he might be acting rather foolishly, felt somewhat hesitant as the boy guided him into the woman's chamber. Lifting up the summer curtain of raw silk that had been draped over a screen, he slipped inside, anxious that in the stillness, when everyone was asleep, the soft, aristocratic rustle of his robes might give away his identity.

All this time the young wife had been trying hard to convince herself she was better off now that Genji had forgotten her—though recently, for some strange reason, she could not get that earlier encounter, which was like some vague dream, out of her heart. Like the lover in the poem—lost in reverie by day, lost in wakefulness at night—she could not rest peacefully,⁴ and though it was no longer springtime, her eyes, like fresh buds on a tree, had not a moment to rest.⁵ She was in torment. In contrast, her stepdaughter, her companion at Go who had decided to spend the night here, had chattered away in her carefree, modern manner until she fell into an innocent, untroubled sleep.

Hearing the soft rustle of Genji's robe and catching the scent of his perfume, the young wife lifted her head to look around. Though it was dark, she could make out through an opening in the screen where the single silk curtain hung a figure moving about, drawing closer. Alarmed and perplexed, she did not take time to consider the appropriate course of action, but quietly got up and slipped away, wearing only a single sheer robe of raw silk.

Genji crept in and was relieved to see only one woman lying there. Two of her attendants were asleep on the veranda to the north, which was a step below the floor of the room. Sweeping aside the lady's bedclothes, he lay beside her. He realized at once that she was fleshier than he had remembered, but it did not occur to him right away that he had made a mistake. He began to have doubts, however, when he realized that she was sleeping soundly and was unprepared for his visit. Then it gradually dawned upon him who this woman really was, and he felt both shock and consternation. It would be idiotic to let on that he had made a mistake, for she would surely take it badly. He had intended to sleep with the young wife, but she had made her feelings toward him clear by fleeing, and so it would have been useless to try to pursue her now, since she must think him foolish. If, on the other hand, the woman here was the sensual young thing he had spied in the lamplight earlier in the evening, then he figured he might as well not waste an opportunity. Such a conclusion, of course, merely revealed the shallowness of his fickle heart.

The young woman finally woke up, and though she was startled and dismayed

at this unexpected visit, she also gave no indication that she would resist him. Despite the fact that she had little experience with men, she was a fashionably modern woman, and so she did not shrink from him or lose her self-composure. For a moment he considered not revealing his identity, though he assumed that she would eventually guess who he was and figure out why he had come and what had happened. That by itself didn't matter so much to him personally, but he felt sorry for the coldhearted young wife who had gone to ridiculous lengths to preserve her reputation. Thus, to prevent any idle speculation, Genji lied, telling the stepdaughter about how often he had used the excuse of a directional taboo to come to this residence in hopes of meeting her. He was shamelessly convincing, though any woman with an ounce of experience would have seen right through his brazen lies. She, however, was young and naive, and for all her sassiness, she didn't have a clue about what was really going on.

Genji's feelings were ambivalent. He didn't dislike this girl, but then again there was nothing especially appealing about her either. In any case, he was still stewing over the exasperating behavior of the young wife he had come to see. She was probably hidden away somewhere, thinking him a pathetic fool. It was rare for a woman to be so obstinate, and he could not drive her spitefulness from his thoughts. Given his mood, the guilelessness and youthful looks of the girl with him now took on a sublime charm that moved him deeply. Thus, even though he had not been all that attracted to her earlier, he was now plighting his troth with great tenderness.

"People of old," Genji purred, "used to say that a secret affair like ours has more true emotion than one that is out in the open. Be as considerate of me as I am of you. Because I am in a position where I must protect my reputation, I cannot always freely give in to my desires. It breaks my heart to think that the people around you are not likely to forgive our affair, so please wait ... and do not forget me."

He spoke his practiced lines as if he were going through the motions, but she doubted not one word and replied innocently, "It's so shameful just imagining what people might think if they found out. I won't be able to send letters to you."

"Why of course, we certainly wouldn't want this to get about," he replied. "I'll communicate with you by way of my little page. Take care not to let on."

He left, taking with him as a memento a thin gown, which, he surmised, had been left behind by the young wife when she fled.

The boy was lying down nearby, and when Genji roused him he woke with a start, since he had been sleeping fretfully, worried about what would happen. As they quietly slid the door open, the cronelike voice of one of the older ladies sleeping under the eaves on the east side rang out: "Who's there?" The words

sounded so absurdly loud that it startled them.

“It’s just me,” the boy called back.

“Why are you wandering about this time of night?” The old busybody, thinking she might be of some assistance, was coming toward the door.

What a nuisance, the boy thought.

“It’s nothing at all. I’m just stepping out over here,” he said, as he pushed Genji out the door.

Though dawn was approaching, the moon was out and bright enough that the old woman caught a glimpse of Genji and asked, “Who’s that with you?”

A moment passed.

“Oh, it must be Minbu no Omoto. Who else could it be, given such lofty stature?” Under the misperception that the boy was escorting an attendant whom the others always teased for being so tall, she continued to chatter on. “Soon you’ll be as big as she is.”

She started out the same door they were using, which put them in a real bind. The boy couldn’t just push her back inside, so Genji drew himself up close to the entrance of the passageway to hide. The old woman came closer and began complaining, “Have you been in service to her ladyship tonight? I’ve been so sick to my stomach since the day before yesterday I couldn’t stand it and had to withdraw to my quarters. But then I was called back because there was a shortage of help, and so last night I was in service again ... but I really can’t take too much more of this.” Not hearing any reaction, the old woman left them, mumbling, “Ah, my tummy, my tummy. I’ll talk to you again soon.”

Genji was finally able to make his escape. His rash nocturnal adventures were proving dangerous, and he began to have second thoughts about them.

He returned to his villa at Nijō with the boy riding in the back of his carriage. Relating the twists and turns of the previous night, he muttered, “You really are inexperienced in these matters, aren’t you?” As he flicked his thumb with the nail of his forefinger in a show of exasperation, his resentment toward the overly proper young wife flared up again. The boy felt terrible for him, but there was nothing he could say.

“She seems to have taken such an intense dislike of me that I am now put out with myself and must accept my failure,” Genji complained, absorbed in unpleasant thoughts. “It’s one thing to avoid meeting me, but couldn’t she at least have the kindness to respond to my letters? It’s obvious she thinks I am not as worthy as that old husband of hers!”

In spite of his bitter words, he spread the robe he had taken from her quarters underneath his own robes as he lay down to rest, hoping that by doing so they might dream of one another. He had the boy sleep next to him, and continued

expressing his disappointment and engaging in pillow talk about their own relationship.

“You are quite dear to me,” said Genji, “but given your connection to such a cruel person, I wonder how I can continue to feel that way about you?” His expression was so serious that the boy took his words very hard.

Though he tried to get some rest, Genji could not sleep. He demanded an inkstone be brought at once, and, as if he were practicing his calligraphy without any apparent purpose in mind, he composed a poem, which he set down informally on the folded paper he carried in the breast of his robe:

*A cicada's molted shell beneath a tree
Is all that's left ... like your insubstantial robe
The empty remains of my wistful longings*

The boy took the poem, put it in the breast fold of his robe, and delivered it to his sister. Genji was curious about the other young woman and felt sorry for her, wondering what she must be thinking. After mulling over the situation, he decided to send nothing to her. The thin robe was suffused with the evocative scent of the young wife, and so he chose to keep it close to him, where he could gaze at it from time to time.

When the boy arrived at his sister’s residence, she was waiting for him. She chastised him severely: “Even if I manage to cover up this little escapade, I’ll never escape the suspicions of others. It’s unforgivable! And what must he be thinking of you, as incompetent as you’ve been!”

The boy was catching it from all sides. He pulled out the letter. Despite her chagrin she took it from him. Genji’s allusion to the empty cicada shell called to mind a poem by Fujiwara no Koremasa—the one about a robe left at a lady’s house.⁶ The poet had worried that his robe, like a robe abandoned by a fisherman in Ise, might smell a little briny. She was confused and distracted. Had the robe he snatched smelled of perspiration?

The other young lady was feeling remorseful and had returned to her own chambers in the west pavilion. No one else knew of her encounter with Genji, and she was lost in pensive thoughts she could share with no one. On seeing the boy walking about, she felt her chest constrict. But he brought no tidings for her. She did not have the capacity to grasp that Genji had behaved badly by toying with her, and so even though she had a playful disposition, the situation was bound to make her melancholy.

The woman who acted so heartlessly toward Genji remained outwardly calm and collected. But whenever she recalled the way he looked that night, she could

not convince herself that his feelings were altogether superficial. She would then yearn to go back to that time when she was still unmarried. Unable to suppress her emotions, she wrote out a poem along the edge of Genji's letter to her:

*On the sheer wings of a molted cicada shell
Dew settles, concealed beneath the shade of a tree
Like secret tears saturating gossamer sleeves ...*

¹ *Kokin rokujō* 371 (Ōyake no Iratsume): “Your path, my love, will be obscured in darkness ... so wait for the moon to rise before you leave that I may gaze on you a while longer.” (A similar poem is *Man'yōshū* 709.)

² Go is a two-player board game that originated in China approximately 2,500 years ago. It arrived in Japan in its present form sometime between the seventh and ninth centuries CE. The board is a 19×19 grid on which players alternately place white and black stones on unoccupied intersections (“points”) of the grid. The object is to use the stones to surround and capture a larger area of the board than one’s opponent. Though the rules are simple, gameplay is complex and requires sophisticated strategic skills.

³ This is an allusion to a particular *saibara*, vocal music sung to instrumental accompaniment. The lyrics were often drawn from folk music, while the accompaniment was based for the most part on the style and instruments of court music from Tang China. The *saibara* as a genre is one of many examples of the fusion of Japanese and Chinese (*wakan*) aesthetic practices during the Nara and Heian periods.

⁴ *Shūishū* 727 (Anonymous): “On a winter evening when my tears of yearning for you are frozen, my heart aches and I cannot sleep.”

⁵ *Ichijō no Sesshōgoshū* 132 (Fujiwara no Koremasa): “At night I cannot sleep, and I pass my days gazing out without pleasure, seeing no buds on the trees.”

⁶ *Gosenshū* 718: “Will my love look on the robe left behind by the fisherman at Ise as something dear, or something briny?”

IV

Yūgao

The Lady of the Evening Faces

GENJI WAS secretly paying visits to a certain lady whose villa was on the eastern edge of the capital on Rokujō Avenue. One evening, while on his way to see her, he thought he should first stop by the home of his old nurse, the wife of the Senior Assistant Governor General for Kyūshū whose residence was now on Gojō. She was in poor health and had taken vows as a nun.

When he arrived, the gate where he usually entered was bolted shut, and so he ordered one of his attendants to go call for his nurse's son, Koremitsu. While he was waiting, he glanced around at the dilapidated state of the main thoroughfare. He noticed that next to the nurse's house was a rustic enclosure recently constructed. The bottom half was made of thin slats of *hinoki* cypress that formed a diamond-pattern trelliswork, and the upper half consisted of a row of shutters hanging from a lintel. The shutters were attached at the top by hinges, and four or five of them had been propped open. The new blinds just inside gave off a fresh, cool appearance, and he could make out the lovely foreheads of several women who were peeking out at him. They seemed to be moving about, but when he tried to picture the lower half of their bodies, it occurred to him that they must be abnormally tall. He had a strange feeling, wondering what sort of women would be gathered in such a place.

He had chosen an informal, inconspicuous carriage and had sent no advance party, so he was sure there was no one around there who would recognize him. Feeling relaxed, he stuck his face out from behind the blind to take a better look. The shutterlike wicket on the gate had been propped open, and the space between the gate and the residence was narrow. It was a small, humble abode and its pitiful appearance moved Genji as it brought to mind a line of verse: "What home can I call my own?"¹ A tumbledown house like this, or a bejeweled

palace—they were all the same, since no abode built by mortal humans ever lasts.

A pleasant-looking green vine was creeping luxuriantly up a horizontal trellis, which resembled a board fence. White flowers were blooming on the vine, looking extremely self-satisfied and apparently without a care in the world. Genji murmured another line of verse: “I shall ask that lady so far away, what do you call these flowers?”²

One of the four guards accompanying him overheard the line and replied, “Those white flowers, my lord? They’re called evening faces.³ Their name would suggest a person of some consequence, and yet here they are blooming in front of this run-down, rustic dwelling!”

The man had spoken the truth. The house was small and shabby, and the neighborhood was ramshackle and squalid. The facades of some of the buildings seemed on the verge of collapse. Vines crept over sagging eaves, looking anything but stately.

Genji glanced about. “What a sad fate for a flower. Please pinch one off for me,” he ordered.

The guard stepped inside the gate with the raised wicket and plucked a flower.

It may have been a rustic dwelling, but just then a pretty young girl wearing long yellow trousers made of a single layer of raw silk appeared just inside the tastefully refined, unvarnished entrance and motioned with her hand for the guard to enter. She handed him a heavily perfumed white fan and said, “It isn’t elegant to give someone a flower with the stem attached. Place the one you picked on this and present it to your lord.”

She was still a child, so it was not at all improper for her to hand him the fan directly. The guard then passed it on to Koremitsu, who had just opened the gate to his mother’s house and stepped outside. Koremitsu in turn presented it to Genji.

“We misplaced the key,” Koremitsu apologized, “and have greatly inconvenienced your lordship. There is no one of discriminating judgment here, and so your carriage has been kept waiting on this noisy street.”

As befitted Genji’s status, the carriage was drawn inside the gate before he dismounted. Several members of Koremitsu’s family—his older brother, who was a high-ranking priest, and his sister and her husband, the Governor of Mikawa—were all gathered there to express their deepest gratitude that he should deign to visit them in such a place.

Koremitsu’s mother came out to greet him: “I have no regrets about renouncing my former status, though when I took my vows I found it hard to leave behind the chance to ever again appear in service before your worship. It

made me feel restless knowing I would not be able to see you as before. But now that I have taken my vows, to see you calling on me in this way makes me feel as though I can await the gracious coming of Amida Buddha with a pure heart unburdened by regrets.”

She wept softly as she spoke. Genji teared up as well.

“I have been in a state of constant anxiety,” he replied, “worried that your recovery was taking so long. And I feel nothing but sorrow and regret now that you’ve turned your back on the world and assumed this guise. I want you to live a long life so that you’ll be able to watch me rise through the ranks. If you live to see me achieve good fortune, you will have no regrets to hinder you and will surely be reborn into the loftiest realms of Amida’s Pure Land. I’ve heard that it won’t do to hold even the slightest attachment to this world.”

The old nurse’s tears were understandable. After all, a nurse will always dote on a child in her care—sometimes to an absurd degree—even if the child is less than perfect. So how ennobled and blessed she must have felt to have had the opportunity to serve such a marvelously splendid young man! Her children, however, considered her blubbering in front of her lord graceless and unseemly, especially now that she had taken the vows of a nun and had supposedly abandoned the world. They exchanged furtive glances, indicating how awkward they felt.

Genji was deeply touched: “When I was just a toddler both my mother and grandmother passed away and left me alone. Many people took care of me after that, but in my heart I will always be closest to you. You are irreplaceable, but once I reached manhood it has been my lot to be constrained by my status, and I’ve had to serve at court from morning to night. I haven’t been able to see you, to ask after you, or to honor you with a visit as I would have liked. It makes me feel lonely to think I can only meet you once in a great while, and I can’t help recalling Narihira’s poem: ‘Would that the inevitable parting never come, a son laments, hoping his mother might live a thousand years.’”⁴

He spoke tenderly. When he wiped his eyes with his perfumed sleeves, the scent wafted up and permeated the air around him. The old woman’s children, who had been put out by their mother’s apparently unseemly behavior, now saw her in a different light. She was clearly someone whose karma was extraordinary, and so they too were moved to tears.

Genji ordered a continuation of the prayers and rites that had ceased when it looked like the nun’s condition was improving. Then, as he was about to part, he asked Koremitsu to bring over a small wooden hand torch so that he could examine the fan he had received. It was scented with the perfume of the lady who had given it to him, and it bore a seductively charming verse:

*In the dazzling light of pearly dew
Is it not you who adds such luster
To the bloom of evening faces*

The handwriting suggested that the author wanted to conceal her identity, but even so, it exuded a graceful modesty that struck him as unexpectedly interesting.

He turned to Koremitsu and asked, “Who lives in the house next to you on the west side? I’d like to inquire after her.”

Here we go again, Koremitsu thought. *The usual flirtation ... what a bother!*

“I’ve been here five or six days,” he replied, “but I’ve been looking after my mother so I haven’t had a chance to ask about the person next door.”

Because he sounded a little put out, Genji cajoled him: “You think I’m going to misbehave, don’t you? But I’ve got good reasons to look into the person who presented this fan to me, so fetch someone who knows the neighborhood and ask them about her.”

Koremitsu went back in and summoned one of the watchmen at his mother’s house. After questioning the man, he came back out and reported to Genji: “The house evidently belongs to a man who purchased the title of honorary Assistant Governor. He’s away in the provinces right now, and his wife is young and fond of elegant things. Her sisters serve at the court, so they are always coming and going. That’s all I could learn ... but, then again, an underling is not likely to know all that much.”

Genji guessed that the woman who sent him the fan was probably a lady-in-waiting. Since she was being forward—her poem having addressed him a little too familiarly—he assumed she was the kind of court lady who did not know her place. Even so, it was hardly unpleasant being singled out for a poem that way, and that made it hard to just let the matter slide. As usual, when it came to women he could not resist the impulse to undertake the chase. He pulled out a piece of folded paper from the breast of his robes, and, taking care to disguise his own distinctive handwriting, set down his reply:

*I long to draw near, to learn for sure ...
Was that glimmering evening face
Briefly glimpsed in twilight really you*

He handed the poem to the guard who had brought the fan out earlier.

Although the lady had never met him before, when she caught sight of his profile she recognized him at once. She couldn’t let him pass without seizing the

moment and trying to capture his attention with her poem. However, since a fair amount of time passed with no reply from Genji, she began to feel embarrassed and gave up, assuming she had been ignored. Now, upon seeing that he had gone out of his way to reply, her mood brightened up and she asked her attendants, "How should I respond?"

The women around her had a lively discussion about the matter—so lively, in fact, that the guard grew bored waiting on them and went back to Genji empty-handed.

In the dim light of the torches his escorts were carrying, Genji discreetly began to make his way to the residence of the lady at Rokujō. As he left he noticed that the shutters on the house to the west side of his nurse's home were now lowered. The lamplight seeping out from the cracks in the shutters was fainter than the glow of a firefly.

The villa at Rokujō had been his intended destination all along. The groves and shrubbery of the gardens were extraordinary, and the lady lived in an exceptionally relaxed and dignified style. Her distant, unapproachable bearing was even more pronounced on this particular night, and so he gave no more thought to the evening faces on the fence he had seen earlier. The next morning he overslept a little, and did not leave until the sun was already up. His appearance in the dawn light was so strikingly handsome it was obvious why people spoke highly of him.

On his way back, he again passed that shuttered enclosure. It was a place he must have seen many times on his various adventures, but now on account of that small incident with the evening faces and the poem he was intrigued, and from then on whenever he passed by he would glance over and wonder what sort of woman lived there.

Several days later Koremitsu called on Genji at the palace.

"My mother is still not well," he said, "and so I have been looking after her. By the way"—here he drew up to Genji and whispered quietly—"I found someone who is well informed about the house next door and asked him about it. He couldn't give me a lot of specifics, but apparently the lady moved in there secretly around the fifth month. The man wasn't able to get the people in the house to divulge where she was from or what kind of person she is, so I've peeked through the enclosure from time to time and found it's just as he described. There are young women in there who wear *shibira* aprons, so their lady must be someone of rank since they're looking after her in a formal manner. Yesterday, as the sun was setting, the slanting rays filled the rooms and I caught a glimpse of the lady as she sat there writing a letter. She has a very beautiful face, but she seemed lost in a reverie, with her attendants quietly weeping

around her."

His curiosity aroused, Genji smiled—a smile that prompted Koremitsu to observe that even though his lord had a weighty reputation befitting a man of lofty status at court, it would be somehow regrettable, almost as if something were amiss, were he not to pursue all these affairs, especially since his youth and extraordinary good looks made women willingly yield to him. After all, even a commoner who is allowed to keep only one wife—and who thus has no idea what it means to have more than one lover—is attracted to beautiful, noble women.

"I thought I might be able to find out something more," Koremitsu continued, "so I came up with some trivial excuse for writing to her. She replied right away in a rather practiced hand. Her attendants are quite exceptional as well."

"Let's contact her again," Genji replied, "and try to get closer to her. I won't be satisfied until I find out who she is."

Her residence was the kind of place that Tō no Chūjō would dismiss as the lowest of the low. For Genji, however, finding a woman who would not disappoint him in such an unexpected place was nothing short of a marvel. Previously, he had never given much thought to women of lower rank or status, but after that rainy night's discussion his curiosity about the qualities of women of various classes grew ever more insatiable.

His thoughts wandered back to the shocking coldness of the young wife of the Vice Governor of Iyo—his lady of the molted cicada shell. Her behavior deviated greatly from the norm. *If only she had paid heed to my humble entreaties*, he thought, *it would have been enough to have made a regrettable error with her that one night and then abandon the affair. But to have been so utterly rejected and then have to accept defeat ...* well, he resented it, and didn't let a moment go by without obsessing over his failure.

He felt sorry for the cruel lady's stepdaughter, with whom he had mistakenly slept that night. She had such an innocent, expectant look on her face as she vowed she would wait for him. Later, however, as he reflected more deeply on the situation, he was embarrassed to realize that her stepmother may well have been nearby listening coolly to all he had said. So now he felt that he had to discover the young wife's true intentions above all else. While he was mulling this over, however, her old husband, the Vice Governor of Iyo, returned to the capital.

The first thing the Vice Governor did was hurry over to Genji's residence. The old man's complexion was dark because he had been sunburned on the sea voyage home and his appearance was haggard. He was of stout build, not at all fashionable or pleasing to Genji's eyes. Still, he was not a man of uncouth

lineage, and though he was older he was well groomed for his age and his looks were not average. As the Vice Governor was droning on about business in his province, Genji was tempted to ask him how many hot-spring baths there really were in Iyo—but then certain memories came floating up and he couldn't look the man in the eye. It was absolutely ridiculous to think these things in front of such a straitlaced official, and he felt a little guilty. Recalling the Warden's admonition against pursuing serious affairs with women who were off limits, he concluded that his experience was the sort that justified the warning. Genji felt sorry for the old man, and though he was put off by the coldness of the young wife, he admired the fact that she had rejected him for the sake of her husband. Looking at the affair from a different point view, his feelings changed and he was touched by her decision.

The Vice Governor announced that he had come back to the capital with the intention of finding a suitable husband for his daughter and that after he had married off the girl he would take his young wife back with him to Iyo. Genji was now feeling agitated and wondered if he would be able to see his lady of the molted cicada shell one more time. He approached her younger brother—his page—and raised the possibility of arranging a meeting; but even if the lady were of like mind and inclined to see him, it would be no simple matter keeping the affair secret and hidden from prying eyes. Moreover, even if they were able to arrange a tryst, the lady, who was so far beneath him in status, considered their relationship inappropriate and unseemly and was convinced they should put the affair out of their minds. Still, her womanly feelings gave her pause and made her fretful about completely breaking off with him, since he would then surely forget about her. Just the thought of being abandoned was indescribably distressing. Buffeted by such contradictory feelings, she would reply in a warm, friendly manner every time she received a message from him, and her phrasing, written in a casual hand, contained eye-catching flourishes designed to create an alluring aura. As a result, Genji continued to find it hard to put her out of his mind despite her aloof behavior.

He was not particularly bothered by the news that the Vice Governor's daughter was about to be married off, because even if the old man found a strong-willed husband for the girl, Genji was confident that she was the kind of young woman who would be eager to receive him, just as she had been that evening he had taken her by mistake.

Autumn arrived and Genji was feeling the strain of conducting several difficult affairs at once—a problem for which he had only his own passions to blame. He had not bothered to visit his wife in ages, and both she and the household of the Minister of the Left resented his neglect. To make matters

worse, just when he succeeded in melting the icy reserve of the lady at Rokujō so that she finally yielded to his desires, his ardor for her abruptly cooled and his attitude changed. What could it mean that the reckless infatuation he felt for her before making her his woman was now gone? She was much older than he and given by nature to pensive, melancholy moods. An affair between a woman her age and a young man was not proper, and she was terrified that their relationship would be discovered and she would become an object of common gossip. She would spend her nights in agony, sleeplessly waiting in vain for him to show up, and as her lonely nights continued, she grew increasingly despondent, lost in a welter of emotions.

One morning, following one of his now infrequent visits to Rokujō, a heavy fog blanketed the surroundings. Genji was being urged repeatedly to get up and make his departure before dawn. Still sleepy, he sighed in protest at having to prepare to leave his lover. One of the ladies-in-waiting drew up the lattice blinds, as if to suggest to her mistress that she really should see Genji off. When the woman next pulled aside the curtain to the sleeping chamber, her mistress raised her head and gazed languidly outside. Genji had paused to take in the variegated autumn foliage of the garden. He looked incomparably handsome. The lady-in-waiting followed him out as he made his way along the corridor leading to the main hall and the central gate. She was wearing a lined robe in the “aster” style, light purple lined with blue-green, which was a perfect match for the colors of the season; and the long silk-gauze skirt she had tied over her robe was willowy and elegant. Genji turned back to look at her. He pulled her over and had her sit next to him on the railing of the veranda in a corner of the passageway. Her reserved, deferential manner and her hair, trimmed to fall neatly around her face and shoulders, were lovely beyond words. He took her hand and composed the following:

*How tempting I find these bellflowers ...
Though I fear some may think me wanton
It's hard to pass and not pluck a bloom*

“Do you think I should?” he asked.

The lady-in-waiting was practiced in the art of such exchanges, so she skillfully parried his poem by taking it to refer to her mistress:

*Why make such haste to leave when morning fog
Has not yet lifted ... is it that your heart
Is no longer drawn to the flower here*

A young page entered the garden. He looked charming with the cuffs of his trousers cinched up and wet from the dew. He plucked some bellflowers and brought them over. It was just the kind of elegant scene Genji would like to have sketched.

Even people who had no special connection to Genji, or who caught a mere glimpse of him, could not help but find him attractive. After all, even an uncouth peasant who lives in the mountains enjoys resting in the shade of a flowering tree. So it was hardly surprising that a gentleman who saw the wonderful Radiant Prince would—in a manner suitable to his station of course—seek permission to give his precious daughter to the young lord. Further, any man of lower status who had a worthy younger sister wanted to place her in service to Genji. That being the case, how could a woman of rank with a modicum of sensitivity and breeding possibly forget him after he sent her some poem or message appropriate for the occasion? No doubt a woman of superior sensibility like this lady-in-waiting must have found it vexing that Genji felt constrained and did not visit her mistress more often.

But before I forget, let me return to the matter of the lady of the evening faces. Our Koremitsu, having done as he was told and spied through the enclosure of the house next door to his mother's residence, was able to give Genji a fairly thorough account of the place.

"I haven't figured out who she is," he told his lord, "but apparently she is trying to hide herself away from the world. Her attendants don't have much to do, so to relieve their boredom they come over to the residence hall—you know, the one that has the half-shuttered enclosure on the south side. Whenever they are there, the younger women always peek out at the sound of a passing carriage. I've observed that when that happens, even the lady of the house will sometimes take a furtive glance outside. I haven't been able to get a good look at her face, but my impression is that she is quite pretty. Just the other day a carriage with an advance escort went by, and when they saw it the young women scurried about, saying, 'Hurry, Ukon, look at this. It's his lordship, Tō no Chūjō.' Then an older, more distinguished attendant appeared and asked what all the fuss was about and motioned for them to be quiet. 'How do you know it's he? I shall take a look,' she said, and came out toward the enclosure. But as she was hurrying along the passageway, the hem of her robe caught on something and she tumbled over and fell. She was quite put out, and I heard her mutter, 'What a mess! Someone's going to get killed on this thing! You'd think this inept carpenter was the god of Kazuraki himself—so ugly he must have only worked at night!' At that point she had lost all interest in the carriage, but then one of the younger women enumerated all she had seen, telling her how Tō no Chūjō was in his court robes

and how he had his attendants with him, and there was so-and-so and such-and-such."

When Koremitsu finished, Genji said, "I would really have liked to have seen that for myself."

If it was indeed Tō no Chūjō, he thought, then isn't it possible the woman living in Gojō is the one he mentioned on that rainy evening—the one he felt sorry for and couldn't stop thinking about?

Seeing the look of deep curiosity on Genji's face, Koremitsu smiled and continued his account. "I did manage to win the heart of one of her attendants, and so I've been able to scout the layout of the residence. The women now think of me as part of the household, so the younger girls will talk about things in front of me. I pretend I don't understand and go about quietly without attracting attention. They think they are keeping their confidences, but they're young, so naturally they let things slip out. When one of them does, the others try to cover for her, and let on like there is no woman of higher rank in the house."

"The next time I call on your mother," Genji said, "I'll take a peek myself."

Even if the lady was using the house as temporary lodging, Genji could only conclude, given the humble state of the place, that she must be the woman Tō no Chūjō had made light of during their discussion that night. Might she not be an unexpectedly alluring find?

Koremitsu never wanted to do anything contrary to Genji's desires, so he loitered about the house of the evening faces, using all his courtly charms and exerting all his wiles to concoct a scheme that would somehow get Genji into the place. It would be tedious to go on at length about Koremitsu's efforts, so as I've done before, I'll spare you the details.

Genji surmised that the woman had been Tō no Chūjō's lover, but he made no effort to pry into who she was or where she was from. And he did not allow himself to be identified. He went to extremes to disguise his appearance, wearing informal clothes and taking the extraordinary measure of setting out on foot rather than traveling by ox-drawn carriage. Koremitsu was convinced his young lord would look ridiculous walking, and so he insisted that Genji take his horse.

"This will be hard for me to live down," Koremitsu complained, though his tone was warmly good-humored. "I'm having an affair with one of the women in that house, you know. What will she think when she sees me coming on foot and looking so shabby?"

In order to keep his identity secret, Genji set out accompanied by only two other people—the guard who on that previous visit had pointed out the evening faces, and a young page who would not be recognized by anyone in the lady's residence. He decided against stopping by the house of Koremitsu's mother,

worried that a visit there might give away his identity. The lady did not understand what was going on, and she found Genji mysterious. Later, in an attempt to trace the road he took at dawn and find his place of residence, she had some of her servants follow his messengers as they returned after delivering the morning-after letter. But try as they might, they were unable to learn anything. All the while Genji maintained his secretive relationship with the lady by keeping his identity from her, but as time went on he gradually became enamored and could not stay away. He was troubled by his attachment and consumed by the concern that his obsession was reckless and inappropriate. After all, the difference in status between them was very great. Still, he continued his clandestine visits.

There are instances where even the most serious of men lose their heads in the course of an affair, but until now Genji had always been prudent and in control. He had never behaved in a way that people could criticize or fault. Now, however, he was troubled to an extraordinary degree by unbearable emotions. From the moment he left her in the morning he would fret throughout the day, waiting impatiently for evening to arrive. He berated himself for acting like a lunatic and tried to convince himself this was not the kind of affair over which he should lose his head. Try as he might to give her up, however, he found her amazingly soft and yielding. She may have lacked depth and dignity, and she was still young and immature, but she was hardly inexperienced in relationships with men. She couldn't possibly have come from a high-ranking family. *So what is it about her*, he asked himself time and again, *that she should so bewitch my heart?*

He always wore informal hunting robes when he went to her, as though he were deliberately making a show of his efforts to disguise himself, and he took care never to reveal his face. Because he would only visit late at night after everyone had settled in, the lady became more and more despondent, wondering if he might not be one of those shape-shifters of ancient times that had taken on human form. Of course, she knew very well that he was human, having reached out for him in the dark, and she wondered what kind of person and how high a rank he might be. Had that rakish gallant, Koremitsu, been behind all this? She suspected as much, but he seemed completely impassive and unconcerned as he flitted about the residence, pretending he had no idea what was going on. Unable to sort everything out, she would fall into a reverie, lost in fantastic speculations.

Genji was also pondering the situation. What if the lady, by virtue of her innocence, managed to get him to relax and let down his guard in order to slip away and hide from him? How would he ask after her, where would he search? Her current residence looked like a temporary hideaway, and so he was fretful

and uncertain, not knowing when she might leave. If she moved away, he wouldn't know what to do, no matter how much he would want to pursue her. It was now impossible for him to think of her as just another woman who could be dismissed as a superficial fling. Those nights when he did not go to her out of fear that people might be watching him were excruciating. His torment was so great he considered secretly moving her to his residence on Nijō. Tongues might begin to wag if he did, and making the arrangements would certainly prove a little tricky, but he thought he could handle the matter simply by saying their relationship was a matter of karmic destiny—that it was meant to be. Since he had never felt this way before, he was compelled to ask himself what sort of bond might he have shared with the lady in a previous life to make his heart susceptible to such obsessive feelings in spite of his efforts to control himself.

"Let's go somewhere quiet where we can talk at our leisure," he prodded her.

"What you're asking is unheard of," she responded. "You plead with me like this, but what you're asking isn't normal. It frightens me."

He smiled at her innocent, childlike way of speaking. He had to admit, however, that her apprehension was understandable, and so he spoke in soothing tones: "Now I see what's troubling you. One of us must be a fox spirit ... am I right? Well, there's nothing either of us can do about it now, so you might as well let yourself be possessed."

The woman was completely under his spell, and she felt that she had to do as he said. He found her easy willingness to accommodate him a little unseemly, but he was utterly enchanted by her desire to follow him so earnestly. Was she that "wild pink" hidden away that Tō no Chūjō had described? Why was she in hiding? He did not press his questions on her. Her gestures and manner of speech did not give the impression of someone who would impetuously turn her back on a lover and go into hiding, though perhaps if he stayed away from her for several nights she might have a change of heart. If it were up to him, they would never be apart for that long, though the thought did occur to him that perhaps his feelings for her might grow even stronger were he to engage in a trivial dalliance with someone else.

It was the evening of the fifteenth day of the eighth month—the night of the Harvest Moon, which is said to be an inauspicious time for lovers to take vows. Moonlight streamed in through the cracks between the wooden planks of the roof, illuminating every corner of the woman's residence. Unaccustomed to seeing things so clearly, the place seemed unfamiliar to Genji. Dawn must have been approaching, for he heard the rough voices of lower-class men waking up in the neighboring houses.

"Damn, it's cold!"

“Business is sure bad this year and there’s not much hope of doing any better in the provinces. I’m really worried, but what can I do?”

“Hey! You on the north side! Can you hear me?”

The lady was deeply ashamed that the hurly-burly of uncouth men getting up to go about their menial lives should be happening so near her quarters. Moreover, the appearance of her house would have made any woman with pretensions to refinement want to fade away out of embarrassment. She nonetheless remained outwardly calm and gave no indication that she was perturbed in any way. Her comportment and demeanor continued to be elegant and innocent, and while they listened to the commotion in the neighborhood, her indifference to what was happening made her seem more genuinely sweet and blameless than if she had blushed out of shame.

Someone was using a foot-operated mortar and pestle to hull rice, and the startling *thump, thump, thump*, which was louder than thunder, seemed to reverberate right next to their pillows. It set Genji’s teeth on edge, and he thought if ever there were such a thing as a racket, this was it. As he listened, he did not actually know what was causing these noises, but he did know they were oddly unpleasant and tiresome and that they woke him up. There were many such annoying sounds.

The dull thud of rollers striking robes on a fulling block could be faintly heard all around him. The cries of wild geese flying overhead mingled with these other sounds to stir secret emotions that were hard to bear. There was a place to sit near the veranda, and so he opened the door and together they looked out at the stylish Chinese bamboo in the garden. Even in a place like this the dew sparkled on the tips of the leaves, just as one would have expected. To Genji’s ears, which had only ever heard the voices of crickets chirruping in a wall in the distance, the rasping of the many different insects here was a veritable cacophony. Still, because his feelings for the woman were anything but ordinary, he found all these noises a marvel and was able to overlook a myriad of flaws.

The lady wore a soft pale violet jacket over a white lined robe. Her modesty and lack of ostentation were sweetly endearing and created an impression of delicate grace. There was no one thing about her that was truly exceptional—she was slender and supple, and the way she spoke to him was touching and utterly appealing. As he gazed on her, he wished that somehow she would assume a prouder bearing. He decided that he must get to know her better and break down her reserve.

“I know of a more comfortable place nearby,” Genji said. “Let’s run off and greet the dawn there. It’s intolerable to have to meet you in a place such as this.”

“I don’t know what to say ... it’s so sudden.”

She continued to sit passively, but when he promised her that his love would last not only for this lifetime but also for all lives to come, her innocent, unguarded demeanor underwent a peculiar change. Convinced that she was unsophisticated when it came to men, he no longer hesitated over concern about what people might think. He summoned Ukon and immediately had her convey an order to his attendants to bring his carriage round. Although everyone in the household was anxious over what was happening, because his intentions were clearly serious they felt reassured and put their trust in him.

Dawn was approaching. They had not yet heard the crowing of the cock, but they could hear the voice of an old man—a pilgrim on the way to the Mitaka Shrine in Yoshino? He was purifying himself by continually praying as he moved along very slowly, prostrating himself before the Buddha, standing back up to take a few more steps, and then prostrating himself again. The man repeated these actions over and over, and the ritual seemed unbearably painful. Genji listened to him, deeply moved. *What in this fleeting world, he pondered, could be so desirable that a man should labor like this over his prayers?*

“*Namo Tōrai dōshi!* Hail Holy Miroku, Bodhisattva of Worlds to Come!” the old man intoned.

“Hear that?” said Genji. “Just like us, he is thinking not only of this life.”

Powerful emotions prompted him to compose a verse:

*Like pilgrims who follow a holy path
Let us never stray from the path of love
But be true to our bond in worlds to come*

Genji intentionally avoided making any facile allusions to the *Song of Everlasting Sorrow* and the Palace of Long Life, where Yang Guifei and the Emperor Xuanzong swore eternal love, because he felt it would be inauspicious. Unlike those ill-fated lovers in China, who compared their love to Hiyoku birds that share a wing, Genji chose to invoke Miroku and the promise of future worlds. She, however, thought that future vows were too extravagant:

*If a vow I made in a former life
Has brought me to my present wretched plight
Should I believe in future promises*

Apparently she did not put much faith in the truth of the paths of the Buddha.

The moon seemed to be hesitating, unwilling or unable to set, and she too felt indecisive, mulling over his dizzying and unexpected proposal. While he was

pleading with her, trying to convince her to go with him, the moon suddenly went behind a cloud and the morning sky took on an exquisite appearance as it gradually brightened. Knowing that they must leave before it grew light and people could see them, he got up to leave hurriedly, as he always did. This time, however, he swept the woman up in his arms and carried her with ease to his carriage. Ukon got in with them, and he took them to a certain riverside villa nearby.⁵ Upon arriving, he called for the steward of the estate. While they waited for the man to appear, they looked out over the *shinobugusa* ferns—a plant whose very name called to mind yearning passions⁶—shooting up in a wild tangle beneath a weathered gate. The thick shade of overgrown trees made the scene indescribably gloomy. Heavy morning fog and dew drenched everything, and the moment they raised the blinds on the carriage their sleeves were soaked.

“I’ve never stolen away like this with a woman before. It makes one feel anxious, don’t you agree?” Genji asked. His feeling prompted the following:

*Taking this unknown path of love at dawn
I wonder ... did lovers in olden days
Lose their way in such torments of passion*

“Have you ever experienced anything like this?”

The woman blushed, then replied:

*Though the true intentions of the mountain’s rim
Appear uncertain, the moon draws closer still ...
Will its light fade before it crosses the sky*

“I feel alone and frightened,” she said.

Genji found her girlish fears charming. She had grown so accustomed to living in a smaller residence, with many people around her, that she found this villa foreboding.

He had his carriage drawn in and parked with its shafts propped up on the railing of a veranda. Meanwhile, his attendants readied a room in the west hall. Ukon was in a lively mood, recalling to herself all the things that had happened up to now. She divined the high status of her lady’s lover just by observing the appearance of the steward, who was scurrying about busily taking the utmost care to execute Genji’s orders.

As everything around them gradually became visible in the dim, early morning light, they dismounted from the carriage. In spite of the short notice, the lodgings—which were, after all, only temporary—were clean and tidy.

“Doesn’t his lordship have any female servants with him?” the steward asked.
“This is all rather inconvenient.”

The man, who worked as a lower-ranking attendant at the residence of the Minister of the Left and was thus familiar to Genji, next approached Ukon and said, “Shall I go and call for the appropriate people?”

Genji forbade him from saying anything to anyone. “Obviously I’ve gone to the trouble of finding a hideaway where no one can trouble us. Keep all of this to yourself and don’t say a word.”

The steward hurriedly prepared a breakfast for them, but he did not have the proper servants to help him bring out the meal. Under such circumstances, Genji, who had never before experienced sleeping on the road like this, could do nothing more for the lady than swear that their love, like the waters of the Okinaga River, would flow on forever.⁷

The sun was already high when they got up, and Genji raised the shutters himself. He glanced out over the garden. It was overgrown and desolate and gave no sign of human presence. The unpleasant stand of old, withered trees beyond the garden looked weirdly disturbing. The trees and grasses closer to the villa were not especially attractive either, and the turgid pond was choked with weeds. The effect these plants created was like what a poet once described as “a bleak moor in autumn.”⁸ All in all, the place was dark, deserted, and a little terrifying, and though it appeared that someone was using part of an outlying storehouse as living quarters, even that was some distance away.

“An eerie place,” Genji remarked, “but I don’t mind. No demons or spirits will trouble me.”

It occurred to him that if he kept his face covered in disguise, the lady might come to resent him. Under the circumstances—given how far their relationship had come—it no longer seemed appropriate, really, for him to keep his identity from her. While uncovering his face, he composed this verse:

*A flower’s face opens to twilight dew
During a chance encounter and exchange
To show itself to you by the wayside*

“How does the shimmering dew strike you now?” he asked, turning toward her. She gave a shy glance up at him from the corner of her eyes, then whispered:

*The dew on evening faces
That seemed to me so radiant ...
An illusion of the twilight*

Her response amused him. Seeing him relaxed and intimate in this way, she realized that his looks and talents were peerless—so peerless, in fact, they made the villa seem all the more ominously uncanny.

“It hurt that you always kept your identity from me, so I kept mine secret as well. Tell me your name, now. Your coyness is beginning to make me nervous. You make me think that maybe you really are a fox spirit.”

Though he pressed her for an answer, she seemed reluctant to open up to him and replied in a fawning manner by citing a line of verse: “I am but a fisher’s child.”⁹

When she refused to reveal anything more, Genji said, “All right, then, if you’re the fisher, then I suppose I’m those tiny shrimp in the seaweed whose name, *warekara*, means ‘it’s my own fault.’”¹⁰ He spent the day at times reproaching her, at other times expressing sweet affection.

Koremitsu found out where they were and brought them fruits and sweets. Feeling a little guilty over how Ukon had been treated, he wondered how she would take his presence there and was reluctant to approach too close to serve Genji. He was delighted that Genji would go to such lengths to bring his lady here, and he could only guess how alluring she must be to have justified such action. He upbraided himself as he realized what he had done: *To think I might have had the woman all to myself! I am much too bighearted, having yielded her to him.*

Genji and the lady were gazing up at the sky. The evening was exceptionally still. The interior of the villa was dark, and because she was frightened, he raised the outer blinds. They lay down together and stared into each other’s faces, which had taken on an ethereal beauty as they seemed to drift in the twilight. The woman was struck by how mysterious and unexpected it was that she should be there. Gradually she let go of all her anxieties and warmed up to him, which he found endearing. She clung closely to him the whole time, and he found her terrified reactions to the least little thing achingly sweet and childlike. He had the shutters closed early and lamps brought in.

“Though we’ve grown closer, it hurts me that there should still be some distance between our hearts,” he said reproachfully.

The Emperor would certainly be looking for him now, and he imagined all the places where his father’s attendants might be searching. He was baffled by his own feelings, which had led him to run off with a woman to a place like this. More than anything else, it bothered him to think how the lady at Rokujō would be tormented by jealousy and resentment. She had just cause to feel that way, and so he felt sorry for her. Captivated by the gentle, artless woman with him now, he couldn’t help comparing the two. *Why*, he asked himself, *does the lady*

at Rokujō always have to dwell on things so obsessively? Why can't she rid herself of that possessiveness, which is so uncomfortably stifling?

As evening gave way to night, Genji was beginning to doze off a little when he saw an extraordinarily lovely woman sitting by his pillow.

"Though I lavish you with deepest feelings of affection, you never even think of visiting me," she said. "Instead you bring this common little thing here and pamper her. The injustice is too much to bear." The woman began clawing and pulling at her rival to get her up.

Terrified, Genji woke with a start and realized the lamps had gone out. The atmosphere was so sinister that he drew his sword, placed it beside him, and called for Ukon. She moved over to him, evidently feeling quite alarmed herself.

"Go out to the passageway and wake the guard. Tell him to have lanterns brought in here," he ordered.

"How can I go out there? It's so dark," she whimpered.

"Don't be childish." He laughed, then clapped his hands. The reverberating echo sounded ominous. No one could hear him, so no one answered his call. Meanwhile, the woman beside him began to convulse terribly, and he was at a loss what to do for her. She was perspiring heavily and was unconscious.

"She's always so fearful and timid. How terrible must it be for her?" Ukon asked.

The lady had been so listless during the day, staring distractedly at the sky. Genji pitied her.

"I'll go get the guards up," he said. "I clap my hands for them, but an echo is all the answer I get. It's very annoying. Stay here beside her for a few moments."

He pulled Ukon over to the woman and went toward the double doors on the west side of the room. Pushing them open, he saw that all the lamps in the passageway had gone out as well. A light breeze was blowing, and it appeared that no one was there, since his three attendants had all fallen asleep. One of them was a young man, the son of the steward of the villa, who had grown quite close to Genji. Another was a page from the palace, and the third was a faithful guard, the very man who had conveyed Genji's first poem to the lady. Genji called out to them, and the son of the steward responded and got up.

"Have someone light some lanterns and bring them in to my quarters. Tell my guard to go about plucking his bowstring and shout warnings to frighten off any spirits that may be lurking," Genji ordered. "Why have you carelessly gone to sleep so far from my room? I thought Lord Koremitsu was here. Is he gone?"

"He was here," the guard replied, "but because he had had no word from your lordship, he left, saying he would return just before dawn."

The man was a warrior in the Imperial Guard, so he was well trained for the

task of going about plucking his bowstring and shouting as if he were on a fire watch. His voice faded away as he headed toward the steward's quarters. It occurred to Genji that it was just past the time when guards began reporting for duty at the palace, calling out their names as they arrived for the change of guards. It couldn't have been all that late, perhaps 9:30 or 10:00.

He groped his way back to his room, where he found the woman lying prone with Ukon facedown beside her.

"What's wrong? Are you *that* scared of this dilapidated old villa—afraid that some fox spirit will show up to bewitch you? Well, don't be. As long as I'm here, such creatures would never harm you." He pulled her up.

"I was feeling so bad I couldn't stand it and had to lie down. My lady seems petrified with fear," she answered.

"You're right. Why is she so still?" Genji said, feeling around for the lady.

Then he discovered she was not breathing. He shook her, but she was limp and unconscious. He was shocked to think that a spirit could take a woman so young. The lanterns arrived. Ukon was unable to move or do anything expected of her, so Genji drew open the curtains.

"Bring the lanterns closer, over here!"

This was all out of the ordinary for the steward's son, who normally refrained from approaching too close to his lord. He hesitated, making no move to cross the threshold and enter the room.

"Bring it here! There's no time for formalities!" Genji snapped.

Just as he seized the lantern, he caught a glimpse of the phantom woman who had appeared in his dream sitting by his pillow. She immediately disappeared. He had heard of this kind of thing happening in old romances, but such bizarre and disturbing incidents were rare. He was close to panic now, his mind focused exclusively on what would become of his lover, so he had no time to consider himself or his position. Ignoring his own safety and dignity, he lay down beside the lady and tried to wake her up, calling out, "I'm here, I'm here." But her body grew colder and colder, and finally her breathing stopped altogether.

He was at a loss for words and had no one he could turn to, no one to tell him what to do. He should have remembered that a priest or exorcist is needed at a time like this, but he was too young and inexperienced, notwithstanding how commandingly he had spoken just moments earlier. He watched his lover slip away helplessly until he couldn't bear it any longer, whereupon he cradled her body in his arms and pleaded unashamedly: "Please, my love, come back. You mustn't do such a dreadful thing to me."

By now, however, her body had grown cold, and with her humanity gone, she was becoming repulsive to touch.

Ukon's feelings of fear and apprehension gave way to despair, and she broke down sobbing, completely beside herself in grief. Genji recalled the brave example of Fujiwara Tadahira, who had once confronted a demon in the Ceremonial Hall at the palace, and recovered his manliness.

"Whatever has happened," he chided Ukon, "she can't have died just yet, not like this. Voices sound louder than normal at night, so control yourself and be quiet!"

But for all his bravado, things had happened so quickly that Genji was flustered, in a state of shock, and not thinking clearly.

He summoned the steward's son again and said, "Something strange has happened here. The lady was assaulted by a spirit and is suffering. Go to Koremitsu's residence and tell him to come at once. His older brother is a senior priest of the Tendai sect. He is visiting Koremitsu, so ask him discreetly to come as well. Their mother may well hear what's going on, so don't make a fuss or let on about the situation. She doesn't approve of affairs like this."

Genji spoke as though he were in control, but his chest felt constricted, and even as he gave his orders he was thinking how terrible it would be were the lady actually to die. The eeriness of the surroundings was beyond description. Was it past midnight now? The wind was beginning to pick up and howl, and the rustling of the pines made it seem as though the villa was located deep in thickly overgrown wilderness. He could hear the unearthly, husky cry of a bird. *Is that an ill-omened owl?* he wondered. With all these thoughts passing through his agitated mind, he couldn't help berating himself and regretting his impulsive decision to bring his lover to a desolate villa so isolated that no other human voices could be heard nearby.

Ukon, out of her mind with fear and grief, clung desperately close to Genji. She was trembling so violently that she seemed on the verge of death herself. Genji was stunned by this and, worried what might become of her, held her as if he were in a trance. He alone had to stand firm, but he had no idea what to do. The lanterns were flickering, casting shadows here and there above the folding screens that had been placed at the edge of the room between them and the main hall. In that otherworldly visible darkness, he could hear what sounded like the scuffling of the feet of spirits, which, he sensed, were coming closer to them from the rear. *If only Koremitsu would get here soon,* he thought. *But the man was always gadding about on some amorous quest, so who knew where he would be staying tonight?* With his messengers searching here and there, it seemed to Genji like a thousand nights were passing as he waited impatiently for dawn to break.

At long last a cock crowed in the distance. He pondered his circumstances.

What karmic bond could have brought me to this life-threatening pass? If I look honestly into my heart, I must acknowledge that this is retribution for my reckless affairs and improper affections. This incident will be the stuff of scandalous gossip about me for all eternity. I tried to be discreet, but it's impossible to cover up anything that happens in this world. Word of this will surely reach my father first, then it will become a topic of speculation and rumor among the courtiers and finally end up in the mouths of common gossipmongers. When it's all over, I'll have a reputation as an out-and-out fool.

Koremitsu finally arrived. He had always served Genji faithfully, whether late at night or at dawn, doing just as Genji wished. But as fate would have it, on this particular night he was not in service, and Genji was furious at his negligence. He called him in but was so dejected that, when he tried to explain what happened, words failed him and he no longer felt like talking. Ukon, realizing that Koremitsu was there, was suddenly overcome anew by all that had taken place from the beginning, and she burst into tears. Genji on his own had acted bravely and properly by holding and comforting Ukon, but now that Koremitsu was with him, he too lost control. Waves of sadness washed over him as he pondered the tragedy, and, no longer able to hold back his emotions, he wept uncontrollably.

When he at last calmed down, he explained the situation: "Something terrible has happened here. Something shocking. Words can't do it justice. It's the kind of crisis that requires exorcists chanting sutras, which is why I sent for your older brother as well."

"He returned to his temple in the mountains yesterday," Koremitsu said. "But that can't be helped now, so first things first. This is all so peculiar. Was she feeling ill or strange before last night?"

"No, there was nothing like that."

Genji started to cry again. His grieving figure was at once so pitiable and charming that it moved Koremitsu to tears of sympathy. Koremitsu had come to help, but on this occasion an older man, one with a wealth of knowledge gained through bitter experience of the world, would have been more useful. As it was, both of them were young, and so they had no idea what they should say or do.

"The steward of this villa," Koremitsu resumed, "must know nothing at all about this. He can be trusted to keep a secret, but he has relatives and workers coming and going here, and they would naturally talk about what has happened. We must leave this place at once."

"That's all fine and well, but where are we going to find a more out-of-the-way place than this?" Genji objected.

"That's true ... we can't take her back to Gojō. The houses are just too close

together in that neighborhood. The women there will be so upset that their wailing will alert everyone around that something is amiss, and the secret will be out. Perhaps we should take her to a temple in the mountains. Priests are accustomed to handling such matters—and the location would be inconspicuous.”

Koremitsu paused, mulling over the idea, then continued: “A woman I knew long ago has become a nun and moved to a temple in the vicinity of Higashiyama. She used to serve as my father’s nurse, so she’s extremely old. I know there are a lot of people living in that area, but the temple itself is set back and secluded.”

The carriage was brought round as the sky brightened. Various sounds of people rising and stirring mingled together. Genji had swept her up in his arms when they left for this villa, but he was now incapable of carrying her, so Koremitsu wrapped the body in a padded mat trimmed with brocade, brought it outside and placed it in the carriage. She was so small and delicate Koremitsu felt not the least sense of revulsion, but was instead filled with a painful sense of loss. He had wrapped her up so roughly that her hair came tumbling out.

The whole world seemed dark in Genji’s eyes. He was so distracted and his grief so much more than he could endure that he wanted to see her body off to its final destination.

Koremitsu disabused him of the notion: “It’s best for you to take a horse and go straight to Nijō before the roads are filled with people.”

He had Ukon stay in the carriage with her mistress’s corpse. After giving his own horse to Genji and pulling up the cords that cinched the bottoms of his trousers to his ankles, he went on foot. He was doing all he could for Genji, but the strange-looking procession was unbecoming of their status. Koremitsu, however, could not concern himself with such matters just then, for Genji was so distraught that he was unaware of himself and everything around him. At last he arrived at Nijō.

“Where have you been, my lord?” the female attendants asked him. “You seem to be in pain.”

He ignored them and went in behind his curtains. Clutching at his chest, suffering the extremes of grief, he was tortured by his confused thoughts: *Why didn’t I accompany her? Suppose she revives? What would she think if I’m not with her? It would hurt her to think I had left and abandoned her, and she’d surely hate me then.* Turning himself inside out, he felt his emotions welling up in his chest. His head throbbed, his body felt feverish, and he was wracked with pain. He was extremely confused, convinced that his life was in vain and that he too would die before long.

Although it was now midday, he did not get up. The attendants found this odd. They tried to get him to eat something, but he was in agony and severely depressed. A messenger from the palace arrived, reporting that His Majesty was anxious because they had not been able to locate Genji when they searched for him the day before.

Genji's brothers-in-law called on him, but he spoke only to Tō no Chūjō: "Please come in, but stand over there."

Genji had been defiled by his contact with death, and he did not want to defile Tō no Chūjō as well. So he talked to him from behind a blind.

"The woman who once served as my nurse," Genji began, "fell ill during the fifth month, so she took vows and the tonsure and became a nun. She eventually improved, perhaps as a result of her piety, but then her illness flared up again recently and left her weakened. She asked me to visit her one more time, and since I've been close to her since childhood I went to see her. I worried that if I didn't go she might take it hard and have some lingering resentments in the next life. As it turned out, a servant in her household was ill and took a sudden turn for the worse while I was there, dying before I had a chance to leave. Mindful of my presence and out of deference to me, they waited till sundown to dispose of the body, but I found out about it anyway. This is really quite inconvenient, especially during this season when there are so many observances and ceremonies. Still, I'm afraid I've been defiled and must not attend court. I'm very sorry. I know it's rude to keep you standing over there, but I think I've also caught a cold. I'm coughing, my head aches, and I haven't been feeling well since early this morning."

"Very well," Tō no Chūjō said. "I'll report your condition to His Majesty. There was musical entertainment last night, and he was looking all over for you; he did so want you to play. He was quite put out."

With that, he started to leave, but then turned around, came back in, and said, "Just what sort of defilement did you say it was? I don't believe a word of your story."

For a second Genji was caught off guard, but he collected himself and replied coolly, "You don't have to go into all the details. Just say I met with an unexpected defilement. It's unfortunate and negligent of me."

As he brooded over the lady's tragic death, he thought it useless to try to speak about it. He was suffering so much pain in his heart that he could not show his face to anyone. Worried that Tō no Chūjō might expose him, he summoned another of his brothers-in-law, a young man who was serving as a Middle Controller in the Council of State. With a serious expression on his face, Genji told the young man to convey to the Emperor the same message he had given Tō

no Chūjō. He also sent word to his father-in-law, the Minister of the Left, that he could not appear at court because of what had happened.

Koremitsu came by at sundown. There was no sign of anyone around. Genji had told everyone who came to visit him that he had been defiled by contact with death, and so they had all left without so much as taking a seat. Genji summoned Koremitsu.

“How did it go? Is there no chance of recovery?” He covered his face with his sleeves and wept.

Koremitsu, who was crying as well, replied, “I’m afraid it’s all over. It won’t do to keep her body hidden away for too long in the temple. Tomorrow is an auspicious day on the calendar, so I took the liberty of requesting a very distinguished senior priest to make the necessary arrangements.”

“And the woman accompanying her?” Genji asked. “How is she?”

“I’m not sure if she’ll survive. She was so upset at being left behind by her mistress, I thought she was going to throw herself off a cliff into a ravine this morning. She asked me to inform the people at Gojō what happened, but I calmed her down and told her to consider the circumstances and wait quietly for a while.”

Genji found this all too sad and regrettable: “I am deeply upset myself and don’t know what I should do.”

“It’s too late to brood about it now,” Koremitsu said. “What’s done is done. All things are fated by karma and must turn out as they do. Please leave everything to me, Koremitsu, so no one will ever hear about this.”

“You may be right,” replied Genji, “but though I try to believe it’s the working of karma, I’m still tormented by the knowledge that my own frivolous actions and fickle heart have brought calamity and death to a woman. Your sister, Shōshō no Myōbu, must never hear about this, nor your mother. If she ever found out she would be angry with me, and it would be too shameful to hear her tell me I shouldn’t have done such a thing.”

He swore Koremitsu to silence.

“Don’t worry. I concocted a convincing story for my sister, my mother and the priests in the temple,” Koremitsu reassured Genji, who took heart from his words.

The female attendants could just barely make out their conversation, and they whispered among themselves:

“How strange!”

“What happened, do you suppose?”

“He says he was defiled and can’t attend court.”

“Listen to how they’re whispering in grief again.”

The whole situation was vaguely suspicious.

"Take care of the remaining details as well as you have handled things to now," said Genji, who then proceeded to give elaborate instructions for the funeral rites.

"But my lord," protested Koremitsu, "there is no need for such an extravagant ritual. Her status wasn't that high." As he stood up to leave, Genji felt devastated.

"You may think it's too much trouble," he said, "but I'll never get over these feelings if I can't at least view her body one last time. Let's go together on horseback."

Koremitsu thought this an outrageous request, but he eventually gave in, saying, "If that's what you want, so be it. We must leave at once, though, so we can get back before the night is over."

Genji put on the informal hunting robe he had used when he went in secret to visit the woman. When he left he was in dark despair, and his sorrow was unbearable. The dangers he had faced the night before had been a bitter experience, and, setting out on this bizarre mission, he was anxious about what might happen. There was nothing that could assuage his grief, but he could not suppress the desire to look upon her one last time—for if he didn't, when, and in what life to come, would he be able to see her again? Genji set off, accompanied by Koremitsu and his trusted guard.

The road seemed to go on forever. A seventeenth-day moon rose. They reached the banks of the Kamo River, and the torches his outrunners were carrying flickered dimly ahead of them. Heading south along the river toward Higashiyama, he glanced off to the east in the direction of the cremation grounds at Toribeno, but he was too numb to feel any reaction to this eerie, unsettling sight. With his thoughts and feelings in turmoil, he arrived at the temple.

The surroundings were sublimely desolate. There was a hut, shingled in wooden planks, where the nun who had once been the nurse for Koremitsu's father now dwelled. Next to it was a shrine where she practiced her devotions. The place was a poignant reminder of the sad transience of life. Genji peeked through the blinds into the hut, where a lamp was casting murky shadows. All he could hear was the sound of a lone woman crying. Two or three priests were murmuring together outside the shrine. At the same time they were silently praying the *nembutsu*, invoking the name of Amida Buddha in accord with funerary customs. The various temples in the vicinity had finished with early evening sutra readings and were now perfectly still. Genji could see numerous lights off in the direction of Kiyomizu Temple, and there were signs of a crowd of people there. The priest of the temple here, who was the son of the nun living

in the hut, was a man of great virtue. He was intoning a sutra in a venerable voice, and as Genji listened he felt as though he would weep until he had no more tears left to shed.

Genji entered the hut. The lamp was turned so that it would cast its light away from the body. Ukon was lying on the other side of a folding screen. He imagined how much she must have suffered. His feelings of fear and revulsion gone, his dead lover now looked precious and sweet to him, the same as when she was alive.

Genji, who had been crying all this time, took his lover's hand. It was obvious from the tone of his voice that he found it impossible to let her go.

"Let me hear you speak again. What bond from the past would bring us together for such a short time? I loved you so dearly and devoted myself to you with all my heart. It's wrong of you to abandon me, to let me wander, lost in misery."

The priests had no idea who he was, but they found him wondrous, and tears fell from their eyes.

Genji next spoke to Ukon, telling her, "Come to my residence at Nijō."

"How can I be taken from the lady I served for so many years?" she responded. "I was always by her side. We were never separated for a moment. Where shall I call home now? I should tell the people at Gojō what happened. They will be heartbroken, of course, and I'm not sure I could stand the fuss that everyone will make."

She broke down and began sobbing again: "How I long to drift up with the smoke from her pyre and go with her to the next world."

"I understand how you feel, but this is the way of the world. To be parted by death is sad, to be sure, but whether our lives are long or short, we will all die someday. Console yourself with that truth, and put your trust in me."

Genji tried to comfort her, but his words didn't sound quite so convincing after he added, "No matter what I say, I feel I'm not long for this world myself."

"It will soon be dawn," Koremitsu interjected. "We must be getting back."

So they set off again, and Genji, his heart full, kept glancing back at the temple. As if to match his distraught mood, the road was drenched in dew, and the morning fog was heavier than usual. He had the sense he was wandering lost, not knowing which way he was going. As they traveled along, many thoughts passed through Genji's disordered mind: *Lying there in the hut my love looked just as she did the night we slept together. She was wearing the crimson robe I gave her when we made our lovers' exchange. What karmic bond brought us together?*

It looked as though Genji would not be able to stay securely on his horse, so

Koremitsu rode alongside to help steady him, just as he had on the way to Higashiyama. But, despite his assistance, when the party reached the embankment of the Kamo River, Genji slipped off his horse and fell.

Distraught and in despair, he lamented, “Am I fated to die by the side of this road? I don’t think I can go on any farther.”

Genji had insisted he was steady enough to make this journey, but Koremitsu, who was at his wits’ end, should have trusted his misgivings about bringing Genji out to a place like this. He was so flustered that he washed his hands in the sacred river and prayed to the infinitely merciful Kannon Buddha of the Kiyomizu Temple. But once he finished, he still had no idea what to do or how to proceed. Genji somehow found the strength to pull himself together and, praying silently to the Buddha, managed with Koremitsu’s help to return to his residence at Nijō.

When his attendants saw him, they assumed he had been out on one of his questionable nocturnal adventures and grumbled among themselves.

“What an indecent spectacle he’s making.”

“Recently he’s been so restless, going out more than usual on his secret wanderings. He didn’t look at all well yesterday.”

“Why is he acting like this?”

Eventually Genji took to bed and, just as everyone feared, fell seriously ill. In his weakened state he collapsed for two or three days. His father heard about this and, deeply concerned, did everything he could to help, having priests pray nonstop at a number of shrines and temples and commissioning Shinto priests, Buddhist clerics and Chinese philosophers to perform innumerable rites and exorcisms. There had never been anyone as handsome as Genji in the world, and since good looks are unlucky, His Majesty had always felt anxious, doubtful that his son would live long. Thus he caused a great commotion among everyone serving in and around the palace.

Despite his suffering, Genji summoned Ukon and brought her into his service, setting her up in chambers near his own. Koremitsu was beside himself with worry, but he kept his emotions in check. He felt sorry for Ukon, who had no place to go and no one to rely on. He thus did his best to be of use and help her serve Genji.

During spells when Genji was feeling better he would call for Ukon, and she quickly grew accustomed to her duties. She wore black robes of mourning, and though she was not especially beautiful, she was still young and not at all an unattractive attendant.

“We were drawn into a relationship that was inexplicably short-lived. I will likely not live much longer myself,” Genji said, taking her into his confidence. “I

feel sorry knowing how sad you are to have lost the one you depended on for support for so many years. To comfort you, I thought that as long as I'm alive, I would look after and protect you every way I can. But now, unfortunately, it seems that I will soon follow her in death."

As she watched him shed tears in his weakened condition, she set aside thoughts of her lady's death, which she could no longer do anything about, and imagined how dreadful it would be if Genji were to die.

Everyone in the household at Nijo was dismayed. It seemed the Emperor's messengers descended from the palace more often than drops of rain from the sky. Realizing how anxious his father was, Genji was humbled. He was grateful for the attention, and so he did all he could to recover his health. His father-in-law's household did everything in their power to help, and the Minister himself dropped in on Genji every day and ordered various things for him—medicines, prayers, exorcisms. Though Genji remained ill for twenty days, he eventually recovered—no doubt because of all these efforts on his behalf—without suffering any apparent lingering aftereffects.

A month had now passed since the lady's death. Genji's period of confinement, necessitated by his defilement, came to an end, and that evening he left for his quarters at the palace. He felt he had no option but to go out of deference to his father, who had been so worried for him. The Minister of the Left came in his own carriage to accompany Genji and was so solicitous, asking about his period of defilement and other matters, that Genji found him cloying. For some time he had the sensation that he didn't know himself any more—that he was coming back to life in a completely different world.

By the twentieth day of the ninth month Genji had completely recovered. His face was drawn and thin, which gave him a youthful, ethereal beauty. He had grown pensive and withdrawn, and his sentimental moods would cause him to weep aloud. Those who witnessed his behavior were concerned, thinking that some spirit must have possessed him.

One day early in the evening, when he was feeling calm, he summoned Ukon and they talked quietly about what had happened.

"It was all so queer," he said. "Why did she keep her identity hidden from me? Even if she had been a fisherman's child, as she told me, it was still cruel of her to ignore my feelings and keep her distance."

"Why would she want to keep her identity from you?" Ukon responded. "When did she ever have the opportunity to reveal herself? After all, she was a person of no special consequence. From the beginning she felt that her affair with you was strange and suspicious and even told me once that she couldn't believe it was real. She guessed your identity, and it hurt her a great deal that

you continued to disguise yourself, since she could only conclude that you were treating her as a casual fling.”

“We were foolish to allow a clash of wills that went against our truest desires. I had absolutely no intention of abandoning her, but I also had no experience conducting the sort of affair people would censure. My status demands that I behave properly in everything I do, that I do nothing to invite reproach, especially from my father. A man in my position cannot do just as he pleases. I’m constrained by my concern that I’ll be subjected to malicious gossip for exchanging even the most trivial of pleasantries with a woman. From the moment I had that chance encounter with the evening faces, my heart was mysteriously drawn to her. I felt I had to see her no matter what. Just the thought that our love was destined by a karmic bond forged in a previous life moves me to sweet sorrow. At the same time, it makes me suffer because I know I will never see her again in this life. If our love was doomed to be so short, why did she touch my heart so profoundly? Please tell me what you know about her ... what is there to hide now? I’m having images of the thirteen Buddhas drawn for each week of the forty-nine-day mourning period and for the memorial anniversaries. So it’s crucial that I know, at least in my heart, the identity of the woman for whom these services will be held.”

“Why keep secrets now?” Ukon sighed. “My mistress went to such lengths to avoid being the subject of idle gossip that I have been reluctant until now to say anything about her. Both of her parents died young. I’ve heard that her father was a Middle Captain of the third rank. He doted on her, but he was evidently troubled by his low status and lack of support at the court and eventually wearied of life. After he died, a passing stroke of good fortune brought Tō no Chūjō to her when he was still a young Captain. Their relationship continued for three years, and he seemed very affectionate. But then, during the autumn of last year, she received some threatening messages from the household of the Minister of the Right. She was badly shaken by this—being by nature extremely timid and fearful—and didn’t know how to react. So she secretly ran off to the residence of her nurse in the western side of the capital. It was such a poor, shabby place that she considered moving to a village in the mountains. Unfortunately, the deity Taishōgun Maō Tennō was blocking the direction to that village for her this year,¹¹ so she moved instead to the residence on Gojō. She was mortified that you should have discovered her in such a peculiar place. She was different from the others, shy and diffident, and she found it embarrassing if anyone caught her looking pensive or depressed. No matter how much she suffered, she pretended all was well and never let anyone see her unhappy.”

Genji had expected to hear some such story about the lady’s background, but

all the same, the details now made him feel sad for his lost love.

Genji prodded her to tell more: “Tō no Chūjō once claimed that he had a child by her and was tormented because he had lost track of the baby. Is there a child?”

“Yes,” Ukon answered. “The baby was born in the spring of last year. A sweet little girl.”

“Where is she now? Bring her to me, but don’t tell anyone about this. It would give me great joy to have her as a memento of our brief, tragic affair. I really ought to tell Tō no Chūjō,” he continued, “but if I did, I’d have to listen to his complaints. Whether you think of the baby as his or hers, either way there is nothing to keep me from raising the child. So make up a good excuse for the nurse looking after her and bring her here.”

“I shall be happy to do so,” Ukon replied. “It would be a shame if she were brought up in the western part of the capital. The only reason she’s there is that she has no one else to look after her.”

In the still of the evening the sky took on a poignant aspect. The plants in the front garden of the palace were withering, crickets were chirruping, and the Japanese maples were gradually turning color. Looking around at the beguiling scene, so like a *Yamato-e*-style painting,¹² Ukon marveled that she should have been brought so unexpectedly to such a wonderful place. She blushed as she recalled that little house of the evening faces. The homely cry of a dove cooing in the bamboo grove brought to Genji’s mind the achingly beloved specter of his lost love, who had been so frightened by the cry of a dove at that villa.

“How old was she?” Genji asked. “She was so oddly different from others ... so weak and helpless. No wonder she did not live long.”

“She must have been about nineteen,” Ukon said. “My mother, who died and left me behind when I was just a toddler, served as her nurse. The lady’s father, the Middle Captain I mentioned to you, had grown to cherish me and raised me together with his own daughter. So I was always by her side. As I look back on it now, I wonder, how can I go on? I had grown so accustomed to being with my lady that I’m now filled with regret. I spent all those years dependent on the spirit of a woman who was fragile and helpless.”

“Her frailty made her precious to me,” Genji declared. “I don’t care much for women who are clever and learned and won’t do what they’re told. By nature I’m not very good at being responsible, about looking after every last detail, so I prefer a woman who is soft and gentle—the type who, in a careless moment, might allow herself to be fooled, but who in fact remains guarded and constant and acts according to the desires of her man. If I had a wife I could mold to fit my ideal, I would love her dearly.”

Ukon began to cry: “It is sad knowing that my lady would have been the perfect match for your preferences.”

The sky was clouding over, and a cold wind was beginning to blow. Genji looked up, depressed and sick at heart.

*Are those evening clouds I gaze upon
The smoke that arose from my lover's pyre ...
How close and intimate the sky seems now*

He spoke in a barely audible whisper. Ukon was unable to compose a reply. Choked with emotion, she thought, *If only my mistress were here to see this.*

Genji fondly remembered the dull thud of the fulling blocks, which he had found so noisy at the time. It brought to mind a line from a poem by Bai Juyi in which a wife grieves over her absent husband as she is fulling cloth: “How truly long are the nights of the eighth and ninth months!”¹³ Muttering this line, he lay down to sleep.

From time to time his page, the brother of the young wife of the Vice Governor of Iyo, would come to the palace. Because Genji was no longer using the boy as a messenger, the lady assumed, with considerable regret, that he was put out and had given up on her. She was then grieved to hear that Genji had been ill for a month. Soon she would be leaving for her husband’s far-off province, and she felt lonely, worrying that perhaps Genji had forgotten their affair. To test the validity of her concerns and find out the truth, she sent a letter:

“After hearing that you have been ill, how can I put my feelings into words?”

*So much time has passed, yet you do not ask
Why I did not write to ask how you fare ...
How troubled all my thoughts and feelings are*

“Like that lover at Masuda Pond who has no reason to live, truly I suffer more than you.”¹⁴

Genji was surprised by this rare message, but he had not forgotten his tender feelings for the lady. He sent a response:

“No reason to live? Who could have spoken those words?”

*I know the evanescence of this world
Empty as a molted cicada shell
And yet your words give me reason to live*

“Are my hopes really in vain?”

Still weak from his illness, his hands trembled, making his brushstrokes a little wild. They were quite exquisite all the same, and she found it delightful and poignant that he had not forgotten her. His letter also showed that he did not despise her, and even though she had no desire to meet him, neither did she want him to consider her utterly worthless and contemptible.

And what of the young wife’s stepdaughter? Genji found out that she had been betrothed to a Lesser Captain in the Palace Guard. He felt a little sorry that he might have hurt the young man, who must have wondered with some suspicion how his wife had lost her virginity. Genji was curious about her situation, so he sent her a message as well:

“Did you know, my little reed beneath the eaves, that I long for you so much I could die?”

*Had we not taken vows to seal our love
By binding reeds beneath dimly lit eaves
Would I complain with dewy leaves of words*¹⁵

He attached this to a tall reed, subtly teasing her about her height, and told his page to deliver it in secret. Genji figured that even if the boy slipped up and the Lesser Captain found the letter and guessed the identity of the author ... well, he would probably be generous about it. Genji may have been right, but his smugness was insufferable. The page showed the stepdaughter the letter when her husband was out, and even though it made her feel wretched, she was happy that he had remembered her like this, and she quickly gave the boy her reply—a rather sloppy letter that could only be excused because she had to write in haste:

*A soft breeze whispers vows among the reeds
But now that frost has settled on their leaves
No longer can they be bound together*

In an effort to distract his attention from her atrocious brushstrokes, she had written in a rather brash style. But there was no substance to it. He remembered how her face looked in the lamplight. Her formal, cold stepmother, sitting across from her at the Go board, had certainly cut a figure that he had found not disagreeable. She, on the other hand, had been less reserved, had been so gregarious and proud. Thinking back on the scene, he did not find either of them unpleasant. Obviously, he had not learned his lesson from the tragedy of the lady at the house of the evening faces, for he was still prone to give in to impulses

that would inevitably earn him a reputation as a flirtatious and fickle lover.

On the forty-ninth day following his lover's death Genji privately arranged for rites to be held in the Lotus Hall of the Enryaku Temple on Mount Hiei. No detail of the service was overlooked. From the vestments of the priests to the altar cloths for the sutra scrolls, he had everything needed meticulously prepared. Superior scrolls and images of the Buddha were carefully selected, and he had Koremitsu's older brother, a noble priest of high virtue, conduct the ceremony. He commissioned a doctor of letters—a former teacher with whom he was still close—to compose the prayer of supplication to Amida in Chinese. With an aura of sadness about him, Genji wrote out what he wanted in the prayer—that the person who died was beloved by him, even though he would not reveal who she was or where she came from, and that he wanted to commend her to the care and mercy of Amida Buddha in the afterlife.

Upon reading this note, the doctor of letters said, "What you've written is fine as it is. I can do nothing to add to or improve on it."

Genji had been fighting back his tears, but when they finally fell, the doctor was moved to sorrow.

"Who might she have been?" he said. "I have never heard anything about her, but she must have lived a noble past life to make you grieve so much for her now."

Genji did not have any articles of her clothing, so he secretly ordered a pair of trousers to be made in her name and brought in as an offering.

*Tying the cords of these trousers alone
Shedding endless tears and wondering when
In what world will I untie them again*

A spirit wanders for forty-nine days before taking a path that leads to one of the six realms—the realm of Heaven or Hell, of hungry ghosts or demonic warriors, of human or beast. Genji wondered which path she was destined to take. Keeping the name of the Buddha in his heart, he prayed and recited the sutras.

When he next saw Tō no Chūjō, he felt his chest pounding. He wanted to tell him about the little girl, the "wild pink" who had been left behind, but he chose not to out of concern over Tō no Chūjō's reaction. He would likely resent Genji for being kept in the dark about the woman's death.

The women at the house of the evening faces were upset. They had no idea where their lady had gone, and there was no way for them to find out. Because Ukon's whereabouts were also unknown, they all complained about the suspicious circumstances. The affair had been improper, they whispered among

themselves, and they guessed that their mistress's lover was Genji. But when they pressed Koremitsu about the matter, he brushed their questions aside as if they were ridiculous and pretended to know nothing about the matter. He continued his own affair with the woman he had been seeing at the house, and after a while it all began to seem like a dream to everyone. In the end, they imagined that the man was the amorous son of some provincial official who, being fearful of Tō no Chūjō, had left the capital for the countryside and taken their mistress with him.

The owner of the house of the evening faces lived in the western part of the capital. She was one of three daughters of a woman who had served as nurse to Genji's deceased love. Ukon was their half sister by a different mother, but the three daughters were all estranged from her. In grief over the missing lady, they were sure Ukon wasn't telling the truth about what had happened. For her part, Ukon figured that if she said anything at all it would cause a tremendous fuss. Genji insisted on keeping the affair secret so that the incident would not become widely known. Consequently, Ukon found it impossible to ask about the little girl who had been left behind, and so sadly the days passed, and she was never able to find out what became of her.

Genji longed to meet his lover in a dream, but one night, after the forty-ninth-day observances were complete, he dreamed instead of the woman he had seen at the villa. She was sitting by his pillow again, exactly the same way she had been sitting that terrible evening. A spirit living in that desolate, run-down place must have been attracted to him. It felt weird and uncanny to think this was the reason for his lover's death.

The Vice Governor of Iyo departed from the capital around the beginning of the tenth month to take up his provincial post. Genji sent him the customary gifts for the journey, taking extra care in choosing them and attaching a note: "For your women's journey from the capital." He also secretly sent special presents to the young wife. These included a number of exquisite combs, fans for good fortune on the return trip, and streamers of specially made cloth and paper to be used as offerings to the gods along the way. She could see they had been crafted with great care.

He also returned the robe he had taken from her that night with this poem attached:

*A keepsake till we meet again, or so I thought ...
But while I waited for you its gossamer sleeves
Soaked by my tears disintegrated and vanished*

He sent many other things besides, but it is too troublesome to write them all down.

She sent nothing back with Genji's messenger, but had her younger brother, Genji's page, convey her reply:

*I weep that you've returned this summer robe
Wispy as a cicada's molted wings ...
For like such wings, it is out of season*

Mulling it over, Genji concluded that it was undoubtedly her remarkable strength of will—a trait rare among women—that enabled her to shake him off and keep him away. Today marked the start of winter, and a chill rain fell off and on throughout the day. The sky was bleak, and he spent the time staring out in dark contemplation.

*The one who died, the one leaving today
Follow separate paths ... who knows their fate
In the twilight of this dying autumn*

He now understood, perhaps all too well, the painful sorrow of a secret love.

Up to this point I had refrained from exposing all his messy, sordid affairs, which he tried so hard to keep hidden from prying eyes. I did so in part because I felt sorry for him, but then people started criticizing me, saying that my account was just so much fiction and asking me, “Is it because he is the child of an Emperor that people like you, who know him, feel compelled to sing his praises as if he were perfect in every way?” Well, now I suppose that by exposing his sins I will be censured for having said too much, or for being spiteful.

¹ *Kokinshū* 987 (Anonymous): “In this world, what home can I call my own? Wherever I stop on my journey I shall choose that spot as my abode.”

² *Kokinshū* 1007 (Anonymous, a *sedōka*, a less common poetic form with the syllabic metrical pattern 5–7–7–5–7–7): “I ask the one who stands at a distance gazing out: Those flowers, the ones blooming white over there, what are they called?”

³ I have chosen to translate *yūgao* by its literal name. The plant is sometimes called a moonflower, but *yūgao* probably refers to a more humble gourd vine, which is in keeping with the setting. This vine produces bell-shaped flowers that resemble morning glory but open in the evening.

⁴ *Kokinshū* 901 (Ariwara no Narihira). Narihira was an important ninth-century poet who had a legendary reputation as a courtly lover. He is the protagonist of many of the sections in *Tales of Ise* and a literary prototype for Genji.

⁵ Traditionally this villa has been associated with Kawara no in, a villa built by Minamoto no Tōru (822–

895) and given to Retired Emperor Uda in 895. It fell into disrepair but would have been known to Murasaki Shikibu.

⁶ This plant is also known as weeping fern or hare's foot fern. The name *shinobugusa* permits a play on the word *shinobu* meaning "hidden away/retiring" or "forgotten," if written with the character (忍ぶ), and "yearning/longing (for the past or for a love)," if written with the character (懨ぶ).

⁷ *Man'yōshū* 4482 (Umanofuhito Kunihito): "Even if the Okinaga River, river of the deep-diving grebes, were to cease flowing, my words of love for you would continue forever." *Okinaga* is a homophone for "long breath" and refers to the ability of the grebes to hold their breath while diving for food.

⁸ *Kokinshū* 248 (Bishop Henjō): "The house is desolate, the lady grown old, the garden and enclosure have become a bleak moor in autumn."

⁹ *Wakan rōei shū* 722 (Anonymous): "I am but a fisher's child living on the strands where the white waves break, and so I have no home of my own."

¹⁰ *Kokinshū* 807 (Fujiwara no Naoiko): "Lamenting that it's my own fault, I recall the name of the little shrimp, *warekara*, that live amid the seaweed the fishermen harvest ... and no longer wish to resent them."

¹¹ This is a reference to a long-term (though not permanent) *kataimi*, a directional taboo or prohibition (cf. the note on p. 22).

¹² This term refers to a native Japanese style of painting, distinguishing it from Chinese styles.

¹³ Bai Juyi, *Hakushi monjū* 1287.

¹⁴ *Shūishū* 894 (Anonymous): "You claim that you suffer terribly, but it is I, here at Masuda Pond, who suffers more and has no reason to live."

¹⁵ Because she was sleeping under the eaves on the veranda when Genji first came to her, the stepdaughter of the lady of the molted cicada shell has been known traditionally as *Nokiba no ogi*—the lady of "the reeds under the eaves."

V

Wakamurasaki

Little Purple Gromwell

GENJI WAS suffering bouts of ague. He had exhausted all manner of prayers and charms to cure his illness, and had even tried an esoteric healer, but there was no sign of improvement and his fevers kept coming back.

Finally, someone offered him advice: "I know of a venerable ascetic at a temple north of here in Kitayama. During that epidemic last summer people were trying all sorts of spells, but nothing really worked and they continued to suffer with their fevers. But this ascetic I mentioned was able to cure many of them right away. You really ought to give him a try as quickly as you can. Otherwise, if you don't do something about it now, you'll just get worse."

Genji sent a message asking the ascetic to come to him, but the man declined, declaring, "I am getting much too old to leave my cave any more."

When he heard this response, Genji said, "It can't be helped, I suppose. I shall have to make a private visit to him."

He left before dawn that day, taking along four or five of his most trusted attendants. The temple was located a short distance away in the recesses of the mountains north of the capital. It was near the end of the third month, so the cherry blossoms in the city were already past their peak. The cherry trees in the mountains, however, were still in full bloom, and as Genji's party wended its way deeper into the mountains, the cloudy mists rising at the peaks were breathtaking. Genji's status constrained him from traveling far from the palace, and so he was not accustomed to such vistas, which he found an invigorating marvel. The sight of the temple also stirred keen emotions in him. The ascetic lived secluded amidst the crags of a high peak. Genji, who had taken the trouble to change into humble garb as a disguise, did not identify himself to the man. For all that, it was still quite obvious to the ascetic who he was.

"Oh my ... I'm not worthy of the honor of your visit. You're the lord who sent for me the other day, aren't you? I'm just an old man who has renounced the world, and I've been so preoccupied with preparing for the next life that I've practically abandoned my devotions and forgotten all my healing practices. So why did you come all the way here?"

By turns surprised and flustered, the old man, whose great virtue had made him an efficacious healer, smiled as he studied Genji's appearance. By the time the ascetic finished preparing the appropriate charms, which he had written in Sanskrit on small slips of paper, the sun was already high overhead. He presented the charms with instructions that Genji was to swallow them.

Genji stepped outside to inspect the area around the temple. From his high vantage point he could clearly make out the quarters of the temple monks located in various spots below. A fence made of a wattle of branches had been erected immediately below the mountain path, winding along the slope like a vine. It was similar in style to the fences that enclosed the monks' quarters, though neater and more carefully constructed, and it surrounded a pretty little house with a veranda situated amidst a fine stand of trees.

"Who lives there?" Genji asked.

"I've heard it's the residence of a certain renowned bishop," one of his attendants offered. "He's been living in seclusion here for the past two years."

"Just the kind of person I don't want to meet right now," Genji said. "I'd have to behave formally in his presence, but I'm not presentable in this disguise. I don't want him to know I'm here."

Just then, right before his eyes, a group of pretty little girls came out to fetch water and pick flowers to make offerings to the Buddha.

His attendants spoke among themselves:

"There must be a lady living there."

"Don't be ridiculous. His Holiness wouldn't be keeping a woman."

"Perhaps not, but still, I wonder what sort of people live there?"

Some of the attendants climbed down to take a closer look, and one of them reported back to Genji, "We saw some attractive little girls, a few older girls, and some young women."

Genji continued with his devotions to the Buddha, which were part of the healing ritual. The sun was now high overhead. Because he looked anxious, afraid that he might suffer another bout of fever, the old ascetic reassured him: "Just let your mind wander and relax. It's much the best if you don't worry so much."

So Genji went up the mountain behind the temple grounds and looked out in the direction of the capital. The spring mist hung over everything as far as he

could see, and the treetops all around him, with their fresh buds, looked softly indistinct in the haze.

As he surveyed the scene, he remarked, "Just like a painting. The people who live here lack for nothing, since they can admire this beauty to their heart's content."

"This vista isn't all that much. Really, it's rather uninspired," one of the attendants responded. "My lord, you are without question skilled at painting, but if only you could view the spectacular seashores and mountains in other provinces, how much more accomplished your drawings would be."

"Yes, yes, Mount Fuji, and other famous peaks," another attendant chimed in.

The party then began to speak of the many beautiful bays and inlets and craggy shores in the provinces to the west. Their descriptions of these scenes helped Genji take his mind off his concerns.

"There's a place closer to the capital we shouldn't overlook," offered Yoshikiyo, a young official. "The bay at Akashi in Harima Province. It may have no single outstanding feature, but just gazing out over the seascape ... well, it's mysterious somehow, serene and calm like no other place. There's also a spectacular residence at Akashi, built by the former Governor of Harima. He took vows and renounced the world, and now he's raising his daughter there with the greatest care. One of his forebears was a Minister, and so he ought to have been able to rise at the court. But he has a perversely sullen personality and wouldn't mingle with others. He gave up his posting as a Captain of the Inner Palace Guard—a position of the fourth rank, mind you—and of his own volition asked for a new posting as provincial Governor at the fifth rank! Unfortunately, the people in Harima belittled him and treated him like a fool, so he was not successful as a Governor either. He reportedly said, 'I would be shamed if I had to go back to the capital again,' and so he took the tonsure and became a priest. But instead of taking up residence in the mountains, which would have been the normal thing to do, he took the unusual step of setting up his household on the seashore at Akashi. Of course, there are many places in Harima Province that would make a suitable religious retreat, but a village deep in the mountains is isolated and terribly lonely, and he knew that his young wife and daughter would have found it unbearable. He was also mindful of his own desires and concluded that a house by the seashore would be more conducive to his peace of mind. I recently journeyed down there and stopped by to take a look at his residence. He may have had misfortune in the capital, but one look at his villa and it was clear to me that he's managed to establish an extensive and dignified estate. No matter how much people may have belittled him, a provincial Governor still has influence, and he has obviously taken the attitude that he should prepare to live

his remaining years in wealth and comfort. On top of that, he's now so conscientious about his religious devotions that his personality has improved, and he makes a much better priest than he ever did a courtier."

"And what about his daughter?" Genji asked, his curiosity aroused.

"As far as looks and disposition go, she isn't all that bad," Yoshikiyo continued. "The men who have succeeded her father as Governor have all treated him with special consideration and deference in hopes of taking his daughter for a wife, but he won't give them even the time of day. Here's what he reportedly tells them: 'It's regrettable that my status in life has been reduced to nothing, but I still have this one daughter, and I have special expectations for her that go well beyond the role of a provincial Governor's wife. If I should die before I realize my dream and she survives without fulfilling the destiny I foresee for her, then I have ordered her to throw herself into the sea.' They say he's always telling her this, as if it's his last will and testament."

Genji was amused as he listened to the story.

"Such a precious daughter," joked one of the attendants. "She's bound to become the consort of the Sea-Dragon Emperor!"

"Vaulting pride is such a terrible burden to bear," laughed another.

The man telling this story, Yoshikiyo, was the son of the current Governor of Harima. Just this year he had been capped and promoted to the fifth rank.

"You're always after the ladies," teased one of his compatriots. "You're probably hoping to violate her old man's wishes."

"So that explains why he's always loitering around the old priest's villa," laughed another.

"Come now, Yoshikiyo," said a third, "just what kind of nonsense are you handing us? No matter what you say, any woman who lives in a place like that, obeying everything her old-fashioned parent tells her, is bound to end up an uncouth country wench."

"Not necessarily," Yoshikiyo retorted. "Her mother comes of good stock and uses her family connections and relatives to find pretty ladies-in-waiting and young page girls, all of whom come from families of high rank in the capital. She's bringing up her daughter in dazzling style."

"That may be, but all it takes is for some unscrupulous, hardhearted man to be appointed Governor, and then the old man won't be able to live so comfortably, will he?"

"What do you think he's up to," Genji broke in, "to be so preoccupied with the ocean depths and the Sea-Dragon Emperor? After all, any affair conducted in a place like that would have to be quite as tangled as the seaweed they harvest along the shore there."

The story held a peculiar fascination for Genji, and his attendants correctly surmised that he had been listening so attentively to the account because he was by nature attracted to such eccentric matters.

"Evening is drawing on, and your fever has not come back. Perhaps we should return soon," suggested one of the attendants.

"My lord has been possessed by some spirit," the old ascetic interjected, "so you really must complete the healing rituals quietly tonight before you return to the capital."

They all agreed this was a reasonable thing to do, and Genji, who had no experience spending the night on the road like this, was very much looking forward to it.

"Very well, then," he said, "we will leave at dawn."

Genji dismissed his attendants and sent them back home. With no one to talk to and idle time to kill after the healing rites were completed, he stepped out under cover of the heavy evening mist and set off with Koremitsu toward the fence he had spotted earlier. Peering at the bishop's residence through gaps in the fence, he could see into a room on the near side that faced Amida's Pure Land in the west. The blinds had been raised slightly, which allowed him to observe a nun performing religious devotions before her own personal image of Amida Buddha. She was apparently making an offering of flowers. Leaning against one of the central pillars, she had placed a sutra scroll on top of an armrest and was struggling to read the scripture. She did not look like a common woman. She was probably over forty, her complexion exceptionally fair and graceful. Though she was thin, her cheeks were plump, and the strands of her hair, which had been cut attractively to neatly frame the area around her eyes, struck Genji as more distinctively fashionable than the long hair that was the common style. Watching her, he was touched by her appearance.

Two pretty adult attendants, also neatly turned out, were with her, and some young girls were playing there, running in and out of the room. One of them, who must have been about ten years old, was wearing a white singlet under a soft, crinkled outer robe dyed the rich yellow of mountain rose and lined with a yellow fabric. She didn't look like the other girls at all; her features were so attractive that Genji could tell at once that she would grow up to be a woman of surpassing beauty. Her hair flowed out behind her, spreading open in the shape of a fan as she stood there, her face red from brushing tears away.

"What happened?" the nun asked her. "Did you get into a quarrel with the other girls?"

When the nun looked up to speak, Genji could see the resemblance in their faces and assumed that they must be mother and daughter.

"Inuki let my baby sparrow out of the cage and it flew away." The girl was pouting.

One of the young women sitting there said, "Careless as usual. Inuki's in for a real scolding this time. What a nuisance she is! So where did the sparrow go? It's such a darling little thing; it would be horrid if the crows get to it."

She stood up and went out, her hair quite long and luxuriant. *Certainly easy on the eyes*, Genji thought. Apparently her name was Shōnagon, and she was the nurse who looked after the little girl.

"How childish!" the nun said. "Really, this whole thing is just too petty. You pay no heed to me, even though I could pass away any day now, and instead go running about chasing after sparrows. How many times have I told you it's a sin in the sight of Buddha to capture living creatures. It's deplorable. Come over here!"

The girl knelt down beside her. Her face was remarkably sweet, her unplucked eyebrows had the most charming air about them, and the cut of her hair and the look of her forehead, with those bangs swept up so innocently, were unbearably cute. Genji couldn't stop gazing at her. *I'd really love to see her when she's grown up*, he mused. It occurred to him that his desire to see her grown up was kindled by her uncanny resemblance to Fujitsubo, the woman to whom his heart was eternally devoted. It was thus natural that his gaze would be drawn to the girl, and tears came to his eyes.

Stroking the child's hair, the nun told her, "You may not be fond of combing your hair, but it's so lovely. You're such a silly girl, and your childishness weighs heavily on my mind. Other children your age don't act like this. Even though your mother was only ten when her father passed away, she still understood everything going on around her. It won't be long before I die and you'll be left completely alone in the world. How will you ever manage to get by?"

Seeing the nun weep so bitterly, Genji felt a pang of sympathetic sorrow. The girl, with her childish emotions, stared at her grandmother, then hung her head and stared at the floor. Her hair came cascading down around her face. It was splendidly lustrous.

Just then the nun composed a verse:

*The evanescent dewdrop tarries, reluctant
To disappear into the sky and abandon
The tender shoot of grass to its uncertain fate*

The other young woman, who was still sitting in the room, was now crying.

“How true!” she said, and composed this reply:

*How could the dewdrop disappear
Without knowing the destiny
Of the shoot of grass it clings to*

Just then the bishop entered and said, “What are you doing? You’re clearly visible from the outside. Why, today of all days, are you out on the veranda? I just found out from the ascetic who lives up the mountain that His Lordship, Captain Genji, has arrived to receive treatment for his fever. He arrived in such secrecy that I knew nothing about it. I’ve been here all this time and didn’t pay my respects to him.”

“How awful,” the nun said, lowering the blinds. “Has anyone seen us like this? We’re not at all presentable.”

“Don’t you want to take this opportunity,” asked the bishop, “to catch a glimpse of the Radiant Genji? After all, he has such a noble reputation at the court. His looks are enough to make even the heart of a monk who has renounced society forget the sorrows of life and desire to live on in this world. I shall send him a letter.”

Upon hearing the bishop stand up to leave, Genji also retired, delighted at the thought that he had discovered such a gorgeous child under these circumstances. His amorous companions were always going out, and so they were skilled at finding the kind of unusual woman that one rarely meets at court. Genji, however, could only go out occasionally, and so he was even more delighted to have the unexpected good fortune to stumble across a girl like this. She was certainly lovely, but her beauty made him curious. Who was she? She resembled Fujitsubo so closely that he was completely taken with the notion that he might be able to make her a replacement for the woman he loved, keeping the girl by him mornings and evenings as a comfort to his heart.

Genji had withdrawn and was lying down and resting when a disciple of the bishop called out for Koremitsu. They were close by, so Genji could hear everything they said. The disciple was apparently reading aloud the bishop’s message:

“I just now learned that His Lordship has passed by my residence, and though I was caught by surprise, I still should have called on you. However, as you know, I have secluded myself in this temple, and so I regret that you have traveled here in secret, for I could have made my abode, rough and humble though it is, ready for you. I feel this is truly unfortunate, for it was in no way my intention to slight you.”

Genji sent back a reply:

"Starting around the tenth of this month I began suffering repeated bouts of ague. The attacks were so frequent I found them hard to bear, and so on the advice of others I came discreetly to see the ascetic here. I chose to keep my journey a strict secret, because if the ascetic's spells were ineffective for me, it would certainly damage his reputation. It would be a much greater pity if such a venerable ascetic were to fail than it would be if the healer were some ordinary priest, and so I wanted to exercise some caution. I shall go to your residence presently."

The bishop himself appeared soon after. Even though he was a priest, he had a reputation at court as a man of flawless breeding and dignity, and his bearing was enough to put people to shame. Genji, who was dressed in humble fashion, felt awkward before him. The bishop spoke of the time he had spent in seclusion here, and then insisted repeatedly that Genji pay him a visit.

"My house is but a rustic hut," he said, "not all that different from this abode here, but at least it will provide you a view of the cool stream there."

Genji felt embarrassed as he recalled the fawning manner in which the bishop had described his radiant looks to the women, who had never seen him. Still, he was eager to learn more about the lovely little girl, and so he went with the bishop.

Just as the bishop said, the garden at his residence exuded an air of elegance. The trees and grasses, which were familiar varieties, had been cultivated with special care. Because it was the night of the new moon, cressets had been set along the banks of the stream, the light from their fires reflecting in the water, and oil lamps were hung beneath the eaves. The room facing south at the front of the house had been cleaned and neatly prepared. The refined scent of incense wafted out from the interior and mingled with the scent of the ritual incense offered to the Buddha, suffusing the entire area around the residence. Genji's perfumed robes carried their own special scent, which the people in the house could not help but notice.

The reverend bishop instructed Genji on the evanescence of this world and on the worlds to come. Genji, with some trepidation, was forced to acknowledge to himself the gravity of his sin of loving Fujitsubo, and it was torment knowing he could do nothing about the one thing preoccupying his heart. It seemed that he was doomed to suffer obsessively on account of his sin for the rest of this life; and what made it worse for him was always imagining the kinds of terrible retribution that awaited him in future lives. He thought he would like to leave the base temptations of this world and retreat to a humble abode like this, but then he found it hard to concentrate on the bishop's lesson, since the alluring vision

of that young girl he had spied on during the day lingered in his heart alongside the image of the woman, Fujitsubo, the girl so resembled.

“Who lives here?” Genji asked. “Upon arriving today, I was reminded of a dream I wanted to ask you about.”

The bishop smiled. “So you want to suddenly change the subject to your dreams, do you? Well, you can ask, but I’m afraid I’ll disappoint you. You probably didn’t know the former Major Counselor, since he passed away some time ago, but his primary wife is my younger sister. After he died, she took religious vows and left her household to become a nun. She’s been suffering from a variety of ailments recently, and since I no longer go back to the capital she has decided to go into seclusion, using my residence as her haven.”

Genji said, “I’ve heard that the Major Counselor had a daughter. My motive in asking about her, by the way, is quite sincere. It is *not* frivolous curiosity.”

“He did indeed. One daughter. Let’s see ... it’s been more than ten years now since she died. The late Counselor intended to send her into service at the court, and so he raised her with the greatest care. When he passed away before he could realize his hopes and dreams, my sister ended up raising her daughter by herself. When the girl reached womanhood Prince Hyōbu, who was Minister of War at the time,¹ was able to conduct a clandestine affair with her, using one of her scheming ladies-in-waiting as his go-between. Prince Hyōbu’s primary wife, however, was a woman of impeccable birth, and as a result my niece suffered various insults that brought worry and grief. She grew increasingly despondent day by day, until at last she died. I have witnessed with my own eyes how sick from worry a person can get.”

Genji gathered from the bishop’s story that the little girl he had seen was the granddaughter of the nun. The Prince in question was the older brother of Fujitsubo, which explained the resemblance between the woman Genji loved and the little girl. Now he felt an even stronger desire to see the girl and make the child his own. She was possessed of both a noble lineage and extraordinary beauty, but she also had an obedient temperament and was not impudent or forward. He wanted to get close to her, raise and train her in accordance with his own desires and tastes, and then make her his wife.

“A sad tale, indeed,” Genji remarked. Since he wanted to find out for sure what had become of the little girl he had seen earlier, he added, “Did your niece leave any children behind to remember her by?”

The bishop told him, “A child was born just before my niece died ... a girl. The child is the cause of terrible worry for my sister, who as death approaches fears she will leave her granddaughter in an unsettled situation.”

So she’s the one I was looking at, Genji thought.

"I know this will sound like a bizarre request, but would you do me the kindness of asking the girl's grandmother to consider allowing me to take charge of the child? I have good reasons for this request. I do call upon my primary wife from time to time, but we really don't get along so well, and I live alone for the most part. You may not consider her the proper age for such an arrangement, and you may think I am motivated by some common, base desire. But if you do, you are being unkind and dishonoring my intentions."

"Such a proposition would normally be met with great joy, but the girl is still so innocent it would be difficult, would it not, to take her as a wife—even if the whole thing was done in jest? A woman becomes an adult when a husband looks after her, and so it is not my place to deal with the details concerning such a matter. If I may, I will consult with her grandmother and try to obtain an answer for you."

The bishop was so forbiddingly sincere and stiffly formal in his manner of speech that it made Genji's youthful spirit feel small, and he was unable to come up with a clever response.

"It's time," continued the bishop, "to perform my devotions before the shrine of Amida Buddha in the prayer hall. I have not finished early evening services yet, but I will call on you again when they are over."

The bishop left and Genji was feeling ill. It had started to rain, bringing a cooling breeze. Moreover, the water in the pool of a nearby waterfall had risen with the spring runoff, and the roar was clearly audible. He could just barely make out the sound of sleepy voices reciting sutras, a sound that sent chills through him. The atmosphere of the place would have affected even the most insensitive of people, and, coupled with his preoccupation with both Fujitsubo and the girl, it prevented him from getting any sleep at all. The bishop had told him that he was off to early evening devotions, but it was already late at night. Genji could clearly sense that the women who resided in the interior of the house were not asleep, and though they were trying to be quiet he could make out the clicking of rosary beads rubbing against an armrest and the elegant, inviting rustle of robes. Because they were near him, he slid open ever so slightly the center panels of the screens that had been set up outside his room and lightly tapped the palm of his hand with a fan in order to draw their attention. Apparently they thought it unlikely that anyone would be there, but at the same time they couldn't very well ignore his summons. He heard one of the women moving over toward him.

Apparently confused, she retreated a bit and said, "That's odd. I thought I heard something. I must be deluded."

Genji spoke up. "They say the guiding voice of the Buddha will never delude

you or lead you astray, even in the darkest places.”

His voice was so youthful and aristocratic that her own voice sounded hesitant and embarrassed in response. “Guiding to where?” she asked. “I’m not sure I understand you.”

“You probably think something is amiss, which is reasonable, since I called out so suddenly. Please present the following to your mistress.”

*Glimpsing that sweet child so like a shoot of spring grass
The sleeves of my traveling robes never dry out
Damp as they are from dew and my own endless tears*

The woman responded, “You surely must know there’s no one here who would accept that kind of message. To whom should I give it?”

“It so happens,” Genji explained, “that I have reasons for my entreaty, and so I ask for your understanding.”

The woman retreated back into the interior of the house and spoke with the nun, who was confused by the request. It was, after all, shocking in so many respects.

“Really, these young people and their modern ways!” she grumbled. “Apparently this lord is under the misapprehension that the girl is old enough to understand the relationship between men and women. And how did he come to hear about our poems that referred to her as ‘spring grass’?”

She was confused but realized it would be rude to take an inordinately long time to respond. So she sent the following:

*Are you comparing the dew-soaked pillow
Of a single night’s journey to these sleeves
Covered by the moss of ancient mountains*

“Unlike your robes,” she added, “it seems that mine will never dry.”

“I’m not very experienced at communicating this way through a messenger,” Genji answered. “Please forgive me, but I would be grateful if you would allow me a moment to speak with you about a serious matter.”

The nun turned to her attendants. “I’m afraid he’s mistakenly heard that the girl is older than she is. He seems such a high-ranking lord that I feel humbled before him. How should I respond?”

“You must answer him,” one of her women advised. “It would be a pity if you made him feel awkward.”

“Yes, I suppose you’re right,” the nun relented. “But if I were still a young

woman, I'd find it rather improper to meet him. His words are so earnest they make me feel unworthy."

She rose and moved nearer to him.

"I realize that this is all quite sudden for you," Genji said, "and that under these circumstances you must think my request rash and immoderate. But I assure you, I have no base desires in my heart, and swear to you that the Amida Buddha himself understands the depths of my feelings, which you seem to find incomprehensible."

He spoke in a very respectful manner, since he himself was feeling awkward about raising the subject so directly in the presence of her quiet dignity.

"I must admit I never imagined that we would meet," the nun responded, "but that doesn't mean I consider the karmic bond between us to be shallow. Why should I, since we are speaking to one another like this?"

"I was moved when I heard about the painful struggles the girl has endured," Genji continued, "and wondered if you would consider me a substitute for the mother who has passed away. I was at a very tender age myself when I lost my mother and grandmother, the ones who should have looked after me most closely. As the months and years have passed I feel I have been living in a peculiar, drifting state. The girl's situation is so similar to my own that I sincerely ask permission to be her companion. Because I'm concerned about how you will interpret my request, I feel constrained in bringing it up. However, I'll have very few opportunities to approach you."

"I know I should be overjoyed by your request, but I'm reluctant to grant it. I don't know what you've heard about the girl, but isn't it possible that you are misinformed about how old she is? Insignificant though I am, the girl who lives here is completely dependent on me for support, and she's so young, I couldn't possibly agree to your request."

"I know all about her," Genji pressed his case. "If you'll just consider the depths of my feelings, which are anything but common, you will put your reservations aside."

In spite of his insistent pleadings, the nun was convinced that Genji was unaware of the inappropriateness of the request and would not give her assent. When the bishop returned, Genji at once closed up the folding screen. *Well, at least I've pleaded my case. At least I can feel relieved about that.*

With the arrival of dawn the sound of monks confessing their sins in the hall where they devotedly chanted the *Lotus Sutra* came drifting down the mountainside. Their voices mingled nobly with the roar of the waterfall.

Genji sent a verse to the bishop:

...

*Voices of atonement waft down the mountain ...
As I awake from dreams and earthly desires
The sound of falling waters calls forth my tears*

The bishop replied:

*Purified in these mountain waters
My own heart is unmoved by the sound
That calls forth those tears that soak your sleeves*

“Have my own ears grown accustomed to the falling waters?” he added.

The sky brightened to reveal an overcast day. The continuous crying of mountain birds mingled together so that Genji could not tell from which direction they were coming. The various blossoms on the trees and grasses, whose names he did not know, were scattering in wild profusion, making it look as though someone had spread a brocade cloth over the landscape. He looked on in wonder at the deer ambling about, pausing here and there as they moved along. The scene was a diversion from his illness.

Normally, the old healer wasn’t able to get out and about very easily, but somehow he managed to make his way to the bishop’s residence and performed a protective spell. He was hoarse and missing so many teeth that his pronunciation was a little off, but he read the *dharani*² in a voice that possessed the august quality appropriate to a priest of great distinction and merit.

The party that would escort Genji back to the capital arrived and, after offering their congratulations on his cure, presented him with a message conveying best wishes from the Emperor. The bishop busily prepared delicacies not normally served at court, offering unusual types of fruits and nuts that had been harvested from various places, including the deep valley below.

“I have made a solemn vow to remain here for the year,” the bishop told Genji, offering him some rice wine, “and so I will not be able to see you off. Ironically, my vow is now making me regret having to part with you.”

“The waters of this mountain will remain in my heart. I have been undeservedly blessed by a gracious message from His Majesty, who is anxiously awaiting my return. However, I shall come here again before the season of spring blossoms has passed.”

*Returning to court, I shall tell them
You must go see the mountain cherries
Before the breeze scatters their petals*

Genji's manner of speaking and the tenor of his voice were dazzling.

The bishop replied:

*The udumbara blooms once in three thousand years
When a perfect lord appears ... having looked on you
I no longer have eyes for those mountain cherries*

Genji smiled and sagely remarked, "The *Lotus Sutra* teaches that the flower of the udumbara blooms only once and in its proper time, which is quite rare. You flatter me."

The healer received the winecup and looked at Genji in tearful reverence:

*The pine door waiting deep in the mountains
Has now been opened so that I may see
The face of a flower ne'er glimpsed before*

As a memento of their meeting, he presented Genji with a *tokko*.³ The metal rod, with its diamond-shaped points at both ends, was one of the implements he used in his esoteric rituals to symbolize the strength and wisdom needed to break free of earthly desires.

The bishop also presented several appropriate gifts. One was a rosary made of embossed seeds from the fruit of the bodhi tree that the famed Prince Shōtoku had acquired from the Korean kingdom of Paekche. The rosary had been placed in a Chinese-style box that was wrapped up in a gauze pouch and attached to a branch of five-needle pine. Another gift was a set of medicine jars made of lapis lazuli, which were filled with medicines and attached to branches of wisteria and cherry.

Genji had arranged to have gifts and offerings brought from the capital for the healer and for the monks who had chanted sutras for him. He presented the required gifts to everyone there, even the woodcutters who lived in the vicinity, and after making an offering for continued sutra readings, he prepared to leave.

The bishop went inside with Genji's message and conveyed it directly to the nun. She replied to him, "No matter what he says, I couldn't possibly give him an answer now. If his heart is really set on the girl, then maybe we can consider it in four or five years."

The bishop agreed with her and told Genji how matters stood. Genji was deeply dissatisfied that the nun had thwarted his desires and responded by having one of the pages serving at the bishop's residence take a note to her:

As I travel home through morning mists

*Having seen the flower's hue at dusk
How painful to have to leave it now*

Though the nun dashed off her reply, the brushstrokes were elegant and her characters truly graceful:

*It may be hard for the mist to leave the flower
But gazing at the sky obscured by morning haze
I can judge neither what it portends nor your aims*

Just as Genji was about to board his carriage, a crowd of people, including his brothers-in-law, arrived from the palace to greet him.

“You left without bothering to tell any of us where you were going!” Tō no Chūjō complained.

He and his brothers had wanted to accompany Genji, and so they vented their grievances: “We would have loved to join you on your excursion here, but you heedlessly abandoned us. It would be a shame to return to the capital without resting for a while in the shade of these stunningly beautiful blossoms.”

They all sat down on the moss in the shade of some craggy outcroppings and passed around the winecups. The cascading waterfall behind them made an elegant backdrop.

Tō no Chūjō pulled a flute from the breastfold of his robe and began to play clear, dulcet notes. Sachūben kept time by tapping a fan on the palm of his left hand and sang the line “West of the temple at Toyora” from the *saibara* “Kazuraki.” The men in the party were all extraordinarily handsome, but Genji, still listless from his fever and leaning against a boulder, was incomparable. His looks were so awesomely superior that no one could take their eyes off him. Tō no Chūjō was gifted at playing the flute, so he had made certain to bring with him attendants who could accompany him on the double-reed *hichiriki* and the seventeen-pipe *shō*.⁴

The bishop brought out his own seven-string koto and insisted that Genji play it: “Please, just one song for us. I’d like to give the birds in the mountains a surprise.”

Genji demurred, saying, “I’m not feeling all that strong.”

Still, he managed to pluck out a not uncharming tune before they all set off.

Even the humblest monks and pages wept tears of regret that Genji should be leaving so soon. Within the bishop’s residence some of the older nuns, having never before seen a man of such extraordinary appearance, remarked, “He surely cannot be a person of this world.”

The bishop wiped away a tear and said, “Ahh, it makes me terribly sad to think that such an impressive, handsome man should have been destined by his karma to be born during the final period of the Dharma in this troubled realm of the rising sun.”⁵

To the little girl’s innocent heart, Genji seemed a paragon of beauty. “He is even more splendid than my father, the Captain of the Guards,” she gushed.

“If that’s how you feel,” said one of the female attendants, “then why don’t you become his child?”

The girl nodded, thinking how wonderful it would be if only she could. Subsequently, whenever she played with her Hina dolls or drew pictures of the court, she pretended that the lord was the Radiant Genji, and she would dress him in the finest attire and treat him most solicitously.

Genji first went straight to the palace to inform his father of all that had happened in recent days. The Emperor thought his son looked thin and haggard and worried that it might be something serious. He asked Genji about the effectiveness of the venerable healer, and, on hearing the details, remarked graciously, “We must promote him to a more senior rank as a priest. He has apparently accumulated much merit through years of austerities, so why have we never heard of him before?”

The Minister of the Left arrived at the palace as well and spoke to his son-in-law: “I thought about coming to meet you, but since you had gone off in secret I hesitated, not knowing what you were doing. Why don’t you come and spend a leisurely day or two at my residence? I can escort you there right away.”

Genji did not feel much like going with him and left the palace reluctantly. The Minister had his own carriage brought around and humbled himself by getting in second. His deferential gesture was a polite way of showing the care and consideration with which he was treating his son-in-law, but it made Genji feel uncomfortable.

Once they arrived at the Minister’s residence, Genji could see that they had made preparations for his visit. It had been a long time since they had last seen him, and in the interim they had refurbished everything, adding decorations so that the place shone like a burnished jewel. As usual, Genji’s wife stayed in her quarters and did not come out to meet him. She finally appeared only after her father had coaxed her repeatedly. Genji watched as she sat there stiffly, not moving a muscle, so prim and proper, arranged like some fairy-tale princess in a painting.

I doubt if it would do any good to tell her what’s in my heart, he brooded, or to speak about my trip to the mountains, but it would be wonderful if she would

just respond to me in a pleasant manner. Still, the plain truth is that she remains cold and remote in my presence, and we're becoming increasingly distant and estranged as the years go by.

He considered the situation unfair and intolerable.

"Just once in a while I'd like to see you acting like a normal wife. I've been quite ill recently, but you couldn't be bothered to even ask how I was. I know that such callous behavior isn't rare for you, but I resent it all the same."

She paused for a moment, then responded, "Yes, I know how you feel. As the poet put it, 'How hurtful it is to be ignored.'"⁶ She cast a sidelong glance at him —an expression that gave her face an air of extreme reticence and an affect of grace and beauty.

"You so rarely speak to me," Genji shot back, "so why is it that when you do, you have to say such strange and unpleasant things? You cite the line 'How hurtful it is to be ignored,' but that poem referred to lovers having an affair, not to married couples. What a deplorable thing to say! You're always doing things to put me off, to make me feel awkward. And all the while I've tried various things hoping that the time will come when your attitude toward me changes. But now I see that you have grown even more distant. All right then, perhaps some day, in some life to come ..."

He withdrew to their bedchamber for the night, but she did not follow after him. He couldn't bring himself to call for her, and so he sighed and lay down. He pretended to fall asleep, even though he was thoroughly disgruntled, his mind troubled by all the difficulties that may arise in relationships between men and women.

He couldn't get the girl out of his mind, and he was curious to see what that little shoot of grass would look like when she was fully grown. The nun, acting as the girl's grandmother, had not been at all unreasonable in thinking that the child was not an appropriate age for him. It would thus be difficult to make any hurried advances at this stage. So how could he contrive to bring her with him and always have her as a comfort and joy? The girl's father, Prince Hyōbu, was certainly a refined and graceful man, but his looks did not possess her lambent sheen. So how could it be that the girl bore such a striking family resemblance to Fujitsubo? Was it because the girl's father and aunt were both born to the same imperial consort? Mulling over these points, the family connections made him feel closer to her, and somehow his desires became more urgent.

The day after returning from his mountain retreat, Genji sent letters to the house in Kitayama. His letter to the bishop merely implied what his intentions were. In the letter to the nun he wrote:

Awed and constrained by your august countenance, I was unable to express my thoughts clearly and openly to you. I would be overjoyed if you could at least understand that my decision to address you in this manner is evidence of the depth of my feelings and the sincerity of my motives.

He enclosed a letter to the girl as well, which he had folded up in a knot:

*The vision of the mountain cherry
Continues lingering inside me
Though I left my feelings there with you*

“As Prince Motoyoshi put it, ‘I fear the wind that blows in the night.’⁷ I too worry that the wind might scatter the blossoms so that I may no longer view them.”

The handwriting was of course magnificent, and even though the letter had been wrapped casually, to the eyes of the older people there it was startlingly beautiful. They were troubled and perplexed by the situation, unsure how to respond.

The nun sent a reply:

I did not give your proposition any serious consideration after you left, and now, even though you have so graciously written to us, I have no idea how to respond. She is not even capable of writing the *Naniwazu*⁸ in *kana* yet, and so even though she now has your letter, it really does no good.

*You left your heart just before
The mountain blossoms scatter
Short-lived like your devotion*

“I am now all the more concerned,” she added.

The bishop’s reply was essentially the same, and Genji was frustrated. After a few days he sent Koremitsu off with the following instructions: “There should be a person there, a nurse named Shōnagon. Meet her and find out what you can.”

It’s his nature, I suppose, Koremitsu thought. *He can never let anything go.* Koremitsu had caught only the briefest glimpse of the girl—and thought she looked very young—but it was pleasant to recall the moment he had seen her.

Receiving yet another letter of proposal from Genji, the bishop thanked Koremitsu, who then met with Shōnagon and conveyed Genji’s wishes. He spoke in detail about Genji’s feelings and told her about his status and

circumstances. He was a smooth, glib talker and was able to put together quite a convincing case for his lord. For all that, the girl was absurdly young to be married off, and everyone there felt that the request was somehow ominous, even distasteful, and they wondered what Genji had in mind.

Genji had poured his soul into his letter, which was written with deep sincerity, and as he had done before, he included a folded note for the little girl:

*"I know you do not yet write in cursive style, but still I long to see those characters you practice when you copy the lines: *My love for you is not shallow like the reflection of Mount Asaka you see when you peek into the mountain spring.*"⁹*

*What does shallow Mount Asaka have to do
With these deep feelings ... why is the reflection
Of your face in the mountain spring so distant*

The nun replied for the girl:

*They say one feels regret after drawing water
From a mountain spring ... so how could you see the face
Of a lover in a spring as shallow as this*

Before Koremitsu returned to Genji, Shōnagon, the girl's nurse, told him, "Once we have spent some time here and my young lady's grandmother is feeling better, we will travel to the capital and definitely be in touch with you then."

Genji was irritated and dissatisfied when he learned from Koremitsu's report that his proposal had been rejected.

Fujitsubo was ill and had withdrawn from the palace to her home. Genji could see his father's anxious, grieving expression, which aroused great feelings of pity. Yet he also considered it an opportunity, and was soon lost in a reverie, as if his spirit had drifted out of his body. He stopped calling on his various women and instead idled away the days at the palace or at his own villa, dreamily gazing out until evening, when he would then pester one of Fujitsubo's ladies-in-waiting, Ōmyōbu, to intercede on his behalf. It is not clear how she managed to arrange a tryst, but after some truly outrageous and exhausting machinations she pulled it off, and Genji was able at last to be with the woman he considered perfect. His meetings with her were so brief, however, they merely intensified the pain of his lonely yearnings. Were these trysts real, or were they a dream? He could no longer tell.

Her Highness was in a state of constant distraction, for she was all too aware that her unimaginable affair with Genji was genuinely shocking. She was determined to put an end to their relationship, since she found the prospect of continuing to meet him extremely unpleasant and depressing, and her appearance betrayed just how difficult it was for her to cope with the situation. Still, she somehow managed to maintain a sweet and familiar attitude toward Genji, and her dignified demeanor and discretion put him to shame. Her behavior only made him realize that there was no one like her in the world, that he could find no flaws in her—and that realization gave rise to a wistful anguish as he was left to wonder why it was that the woman who turned out to be his ideal was forbidden to him.

How could he possibly tell her all the things he wanted to say? He wished he might reside in obscurity in the perpetual darkness of the Kurabu Mountains. Unfortunately, his nights were short, and brought him nothing but sorrow and pain.

*Though I am with you here and now
So rare are these nights that I long
To lose myself inside this dream*

He was sobbing now.

Feeling pity for him, she replied:

*Will we not be forever the stuff of gossip ...
No one has ever suffered the anguish I feel
Trapped in a dream from which I never awaken*

Fujitsubo's turmoil was understandable, and he felt ashamed before her. Ōmyōbu gathered up his robes and brought them to him.

Genji returned to his residence and spent a tearful day in bed. When he was told that Fujitsubo would no longer accept his messages, even though he knew she had always refused to read them anyway, he was hurt and could not focus his thoughts. He did not appear at court but locked himself away for two or three days. His Majesty was worried by his son's absence and wondered if something was wrong, if he had fallen ill again. In the face of what Genji had done with Fujitsubo, his father's concern terrified him.

Fujitsubo was distressed by her plight, and her illness, which had prompted her to withdraw from the palace in the first place, worsened. Messengers arrived one after another urging her to return, but she refused. There could be no doubt

that she was not feeling normal, but no one knew what was wrong with her. As it turned out, she had already secretly surmised her condition, and the shock of realizing that she was expecting a child upset her. She was now panicked and confused. *What will become of me?* More and more, as the summer progressed, she refused to get up. She was now in her third month, and her condition was obvious. Her ladies-in-waiting observed this and grew worried and suspicious. She lamented that she should have to suffer such a strange and unhappy fate.

Because no one guessed what had actually happened, Fujitsubo's attendants were surprised to learn that their lady had said nothing to His Majesty until now. Only Fujitsubo knew, in her heart of hearts, what had happened. Her closest attendants, Ōmyōbu and Ben, the daughter of Fujitsubo's nurse, tended to her intimately in the bath, and so they had clearly seen her condition and recognized what was happening. They were troubled, because they knew they did not dare discuss the situation between themselves. Ōmyōbu in particular felt sad that her lady's inescapable karmic destiny had brought her to this pass. In order to explain the delay in reporting the pregnancy, they had no choice but to tell the Emperor that they had been beguiled by a spirit and had not recognized their mistress's condition right away. The women who served Fujitsubo all assumed that that was indeed the case, and the Emperor, overwhelmed with even more feelings of pity and concern, was constantly sending messengers to ask how she was doing. Their visits, however, only kept her in a constant state of dread and depression.

One night Genji had a weird and terrifying dream. He summoned a diviner who interpreted the dream to mean that Genji would become the father of an Emperor. This was shocking and unthinkable.

The diviner added, "Your dream also means that your fortunes are crossed and that you must exercise caution and good behavior."

Genji felt awkward, and so he told the diviner, "This isn't my dream. I have merely relayed to you what someone of very high rank told me. So until the dream actually comes true, don't say anything to anyone about it."

Genji was trying to make sense of things in his own mind, but when he heard that Fujitsubo was pregnant, he realized that her child might be what his dream portended. He sent increasingly desperate messages to Fujitsubo, but Ōmyōbu was now having second thoughts. Communicating like this was extremely risky and difficult, and she found that she could no longer act as a go-between for Genji. Even her brief one-line replies, which had always been infrequent at best, stopped altogether.

Fujitsubo returned to the palace in the seventh month. Because he had not seen her for so long, His Majesty's desire had only grown stronger, and he

lavished his gracious affection on her. She was now a little plump, and her face had grown thin and careworn, but her appearance was truly, incomparably lovely. As he had done before, the Emperor would spend the whole day in her chambers. The early autumn sky signaled to them that it was the appropriate season for musical diversions, and so His Majesty was constantly calling for Genji, who had a talent for performance, to come and play various pieces on the koto or the flute. Genji had to struggle to keep his emotions in check on these occasions, though there were moments when his expression betrayed the feelings he found so hard to suppress. For her part, Fujitsubo would obsess over things she wished had turned out differently.

The health of the nun who had been staying at the mountain temple in Kitayama improved, and she finally returned to her residence in the capital. Genji inquired after her and sent her letters from time to time. It did not surprise him that in her replies she continued to refuse his proposition, but it didn't bother him that much because he was preoccupied by his concern with Fujitsubo and had little time to think much about other matters.

By the ninth month, as the end of autumn was approaching, Genji was lonely and depressed. A gorgeous moonlit evening inspired him at last to go to the place of a woman he had been secretly visiting. But then the weather changed—it turned stormy and a chill evening rain began to fall. The lady lived in the vicinity of Rokujō and Kyōgoku, and as he left the palace her place began to seem a little too distant. On the way he saw a weather-beaten house standing in the gloomy shade of an ancient grove of trees.

Koremitsu, who was accompanying Genji as usual, said, "That used to be the house of the late Major Counselor. I guess you should know that I visited it recently and learned that the nun has taken a turn for the worse. They have no idea what to do for her."

"What a pity," Genji replied. "I must pay her a visit. Why didn't you tell me about this earlier? Have a message taken to her."

Koremitsu sent one of the attendants in with instructions to say that Genji had arrived with the express purpose of calling on the nun. When the messenger entered and announced his lord's visit, the women were caught off guard.

One of them said, "This is most awkward. Our lady has been feeling much worse these last few days and couldn't possibly meet your lord."

It would have been rude and uncouth to send him away, however, so they prepared a space on the veranda under the eaves on the south side of the house and invited Genji to enter there.

"Frightfully untidy, I'm afraid," another of the women remarked, "but my lady wanted to show some gratitude for your visit. Your arrival was so

unexpected, however, that you caught us unprepared. So please forgive the dark and gloomy atmosphere of this chamber."

The place did strike Genji as quite odd, but he answered, "I've been meaning to visit you all this time, but I refrained from doing so because I've been treated in a such a way as to make me believe nothing would come of it. I'm anxious about you, having just learned that your illness has taken a turn for the worse."

"My ailments are no worse than usual, though I do sense now that I am nearing my end," the nun told him. "You have been gracious enough to call on me, but I'm not able to greet you directly. With regards to your proposal, the girl is still at an innocent age and lacks judgment, but once she is a little more mature, by all means think of her as you would any other woman and take her as one of your own. I'm so worried about leaving her behind in this world, isolated and helpless, that my anxiety creates a burden of attachment for me that will surely be a hindrance on the path to the salvation I pray for."

Because she was in a room close by, Genji could catch fragments of her weary voice.

"We are not worthy of this, and should be grateful for his attentions," she added. "If only the girl were old enough to be able to thank him properly."

Genji was keenly moved.

"If my feelings for the girl were truly shallow, then why would I embarrass myself by coming here and possibly looking lecherous? The moment I recognized there was some kind of karmic bond between us, I was deeply attracted to the girl and convinced to an almost mystical degree that our bond was not something that belonged to this world."

He turned to one of the attendants and continued, "My visit here may have been in vain, but may I ask for a word with the girl herself?"

"Oh, I don't know about that," one of the nun's attendants interjected. "She has been kept in the dark about all of this, and is now fast asleep."

Just as the woman spoke these words, the girl's voice could be heard from inside.

"Grandmama, Lord Genji is here ... you know, the man who visited us at the temple? So why haven't you gone out to meet him?"

The women were all mortified and tried to hush the girl, but she protested, "Didn't Grandmama say that the sight of him was always a comfort to her?"

She spoke as if she were informing them of something that would benefit her grandmother. Genji was utterly charmed, but he had to be considerate of the bruised feelings of the flustered women there, and so he pretended he hadn't heard a thing. After politely bidding farewell and leaving his best wishes for them, he made his way home. *She may be a little girl*, he thought, *but I can't*

wait to see her after she's been properly trained.

The next day Genji sent a most solicitous letter inquiring after the health of the nun. As always, he included a small folded letter for the girl:

*Hearing a young crane cry I long to go to it
But my boat tangled among the reeds is hindered
And I cannot leave this inlet to tend its needs*

"As the poet put it, 'I always yearn to go back to the same person.'"¹⁰

Genji deliberately composed his note in a childish hand that was so delightful the women told the girl to imitate it in her copybook.

Shōnagon replied, "Our lady may not make it through the day, and we are preparing to take her back to the temple in Kitayama. She may not be able to express in this world her gratitude for your visit and your expressions of concern."

Genji felt very sad when he heard this.

One autumn evening, when he was more preoccupied than ever with his longing for Fujitsubo, the woman who constantly tormented his heart, he felt his seemingly perverse desire to possess her little niece growing even stronger. He remembered a line from the nun's poem—"The evanescent dewdrop tarries, reluctant to disappear into the sky"—and thought lovingly of the girl. At the same time he was anxious and unsure, thinking that she might not live up to his expectations. An image of *wakamurasaki*¹¹—a little purple gromwell—popped into his head:

*How I yearn to quickly pluck up and make my own
That little purple gromwell sprouting in the wild
With roots that share their color with wisteria*

During the tenth month His Majesty decided to plan a visit to the Suzaku Palace. The dancers for the day of departure were to be selected from among sons of aristocratic families, high-ranking officials, and courtiers who had talents suitable for the occasion. From princes and ministers on down, each and every one practiced their skills. It was a hectic, busy time.

Because of all the preparations, it occurred to Genji that he had not contacted the nun in her mountain temple for some time. When at last he sent a messenger there, he received the following reply from the bishop:

"I am sorry to report that she passed away on the twentieth of last month. I know it is the reality of this world that we must all die, but still I cannot help

mourning her.”

After reading this, Genji experienced the poignant sorrow of the evanescent world and wondered what would become of the girl who had been the source of such worry for the nun. The girl was so young, she must be pining for her grandmother. Genji had vague memories of being left behind by his own mother, and so he sent his deepest condolences. Shōnagon composed a sympathetic reply.

Genji learned that after the twenty-day period of mourning and confinement was over, the girl came back to the capital and was now at the late nun’s residence. He waited until a seemly period of time passed, then went to call on her one evening when he had some free time. The place was run-down and desolate, and there were few people about—the kind of place that would surely frighten a child. Genji was shown to the same space on the south side of the residence that they had used on his previous visit. He was moved to tears by Shōnagon’s heartbreak account of her mistress’s final days.

“There is talk that the girl’s father would have her come to his villa,” Shōnagon told him. “But the nun was quite concerned about that prospect. After all, her own daughter, this child’s late mother, found that household unbearably cruel and depressing. The girl is now at that in-between stage, no longer a child, but not old enough to really understand the motives of other people. And with all the other children at her father’s residence, she is not likely to be welcomed with open arms, but will instead be belittled and treated as a stepchild. With so many indications that the girl will be badly served there, we are grateful for your passing words of kind consideration. Still, we cannot fathom your future intentions, and even though we should feel happy on occasions like this when you visit us, we remain extremely hesitant about your proposal ... after all, the girl is simply not appropriate for you. Her character is immature and undeveloped, even for someone her age.”

“Why do you continue to waver when I have repeatedly opened up to you like this? I know in my heart that my feelings of longing and pity, which her innocence stirs in me, are signs of a special bond between us from a former life. If I may, I would like to speak with her directly and tell her how I feel.”

*Seeing the young tangled seaweed struggle to grow
Amidst reeds in the bay of Wakanoura
Can the wave, once it has drawn near, recede again*

“It would be too hateful for the wave to have to withdraw now,” Genji concluded.

Shōnagon answered, “You are truly gracious, my lord, but ...”

*If the algae at Wakanoura yielded
Without knowing the true intentions of the wave
Would it not be set adrift upon the shallows¹²*

“It just isn’t reasonable.”

The polished manner of her verse made it almost possible for Genji to forgive her refusal.

“Why does the day when we may finally meet never come?”¹³ he murmured. The younger women in the house shivered in delight and admiration.

The little girl had been lying down, crying and grieving for her grandmother until her playmates told her, “A lord dressed in court robes has arrived. Perhaps it is the Prince, your father!”

She got up and went out to see for herself, calling out, “Shōnagon! Where is the nobleman in court robes? Is my father here?”

Her voice sounded achingly sweet as she approached.

“I’m not your father,” said Genji, “but that doesn’t mean you should treat me as a stranger. Come over here.”

The girl immediately recognized his voice and realized that this was the splendid lord who had called on them before. Embarrassed that she had spoken improperly, she went over to her nurse and said, “I want to go now. I’m sleepy.”

“Why do you want to hide from me? Please come over here and rest at my knees. Please, come closer.”

“As you can see,” said Shōnagon, pushing the girl toward him, “she really knows very little about the world.”

The girl sat innocently on the other side of the blinds from Genji, who put his hand through to search around for her. Her lustrous hair was draped over soft, rumpled robes, and even though he did not have a clear view of her, when he touched the rich thickness of the strands he imagined how attractive she must really be. When he tried to hold her hand she was put off that a stranger should have come so close to her and pulled away in fright.

“I told you I was sleepy,” she said to Shōnagon.

At that moment Genji slipped inside the curtains and told her, “You must think of me now as the one you will rely upon. So please don’t be distant or afraid.”

His actions were upsetting to Shōnagon, who exclaimed, “What are you thinking, my lord, impetuously barging in here like this during a period of mourning? It’s outrageous. You can talk to her all you like, but it won’t do you

any good. She's just too young to understand."

"You may be right," Genji answered, "but just what do you think I'm going to do with someone so young? Carefully observe the sincerity of my feelings, the purity of my heart, and you will realize that they are peerless, that you will find nothing like them in this world."

The wind was blowing violently and hail began to fall. It was a lonely, terrifying night.

"Why," Genji asked, tears in his eyes, "should she have to spend any more time in this isolated, deserted house?"

He couldn't stand the idea of going home and abandoning them here.

"Lower the shutters. It looks like it will be a frightful evening," he ordered. "I shall stand guard for you tonight. Please, everyone, gather closer to me."

With a remarkable air of familiarity about him, he went inside the curtained area where the girl slept. The women found his behavior shockingly abnormal, but they did not know what to do and did not even try to move from where they were sitting. Shōnagon couldn't stand it. She was beside herself, but she couldn't very well offer vehement objections or make a scene, and so she stayed put as well, sighing in lament.

The girl, not knowing what was going on, was truly scared and trembling. Genji felt sorry for her, thinking that her beautiful figure was shivering because of the cold, and he had a singlet brought in and wrapped around her. Genji knew perfectly well that his behavior was not normal, and so he spoke sensitively to the girl.

"You really must come with me. There are many gorgeous paintings at my residence and Hina court dolls to play with." His manner was kind and intimate as he spoke of things he was sure would appeal to her childish heart and allay her fears. Nonetheless, she still found it hard to sleep, and spent the night tossing and turning.

As the night wore on, the wind continued to gust and the women whispered among themselves:

"How forlorn we would have been had he not come here. If only they were a little closer in age, it would be so wonderful."

Shōnagon, worried about her charge, hovered just outside the curtains the whole time. When the wind began to die down a little, Genji got ready to go home. It was still dark, and he had a knowing look on his face, as if he were leaving some romantic tryst.

"Now that I've witnessed her situation with my own eyes," Genji said, "it's all too pathetic, and I will now be more anxious about her than ever. She should be moved to my residence, where I spend my days and nights in solitary reverie.

How can she remain here like this? It's a wonder she isn't in a constant state of terror."

Shōnagan replied, "Prince Hyōbu has hinted that he would come for her, but that won't happen until after the forty-nine-day period of purification is complete."

"He is the one who really ought to look after her," Genji agreed, "but they have grown accustomed to living apart and the girl most likely regards him as much a stranger to her as I am. I may have only just met her today, but my feelings and motives are not shallow—indeed, they are far more worthy than her father's."

Genji stroked the girl's hair, then glanced back repeatedly at her as he made his way out. The sky, obscured by a heavy fog, had an unusual appearance, and a pure white frost had settled all around. Normally he would have considered such an exquisite scene the perfect backdrop to set off his return from the chambers of a woman with whom he was having a genuine affair. In this case, however, Genji felt somehow anxious and dissatisfied. Remembering that there was a place along the way home that he had been visiting with utmost secrecy, he had one of his attendants knock on the gate and ask after the woman. No one answered, however, and so he had one of his escort—a man who had a superb voice—recite a poem that played upon the *saibara*, "My Lover's Gate."

*Having lost my way in the misty air
Of the early hours just before the dawn
How hard it is to pass my lover's gate*

The man recited the poem twice.

Presently a comely servant emerged and answered for her lady:

*If you find it so hard to pass that you pause
Outside this gate enshrouded in morning mist
Then how could a door of grass block your entry*

The servant went back inside, but no one came out again. Returning home was not exactly the most elegant thing to do at this point, but the dawn sky was beginning to brighten, and Genji had to return to his villa at Nijō.

Genji was lying down, smiling to himself as he lovingly recalled the sweet image of the girl. When the sun was fully up, he rose and sent off a letter. Because the poem he had to write this time was rather unusual, he frequently set his brush down and carefully contemplated his words. When he sent it off he

included some delightful paintings as well.

That same day the girl's father arrived at her residence. The house was extremely dilapidated after many years of neglect, and the old, expansive buildings looked deserted and lonely.

Prince Hyōbu glanced around and said, "How could a young child stand to live for so long in such a place as this? She is to come to my villa. There is no reason for her to feel uncomfortable there. I shall have quarters arranged for her nurse. There are other children for her to play with, and she should be perfectly content."

He summoned his daughter to his side and, catching the scent of Genji's perfumed robes, which had suffused the girl's hair and clothing, he exclaimed, "What a remarkable perfume! Your robes, however, are terribly worn and rumpled."

He felt very sorry for her and added, "You've had to spend all those years with that old ailing woman, haven't you? I insisted that you all move into my residence and get to know everyone there, but for some strange reason your grandmother remained aloof and apart. My wife was also rather cold and unfriendly, and so it seems that we have arrived unavoidably at our present situation ... you've lost your guardian, and now your stepmother must assume that role. It's a pity you'll have to move."

Shōnagon interceded, saying, "How could she possibly move now, my lord? This place may be desolate and lonely, but it would probably be best for her to live here a while longer. Don't you think she should move to your villa when she is a little older and more mature?" She added, "The girl pines all through the day and night for her grandmother, and she hardly touches her food."

Prince Hyōbu had noticed that his daughter's face was looking very thin, though it did make her look all the prettier for it.

"Why should you be so upset?" he asked as he tried comforting the girl. "There's nothing you can do about those who have departed this world. And besides, you still have me, don't you?"

As evening drew near, he prepared to leave. The girl was feeling bereft and terribly alone, and she started to cry. Tears came to his eyes as well and he consoled her, repeating over and over, "Now don't carry on so ... don't be sad. I'll send for you in a day or two."

With that he left, and there was no way to distract the girl from her dark mood. She wept inconsolably.

The girl gave no thought to what would become of her in the future but focused solely on the loss of her grandmother, the nun who had never left her side for a moment and who had always looked after her. The death of her

grandmother was an unending source of sorrow, even for her childish mind, and she stopped playing. She was able to divert her thoughts a little during the day, but at night she would fall into a deep depression. Shōnagon, unable to find a way to comfort the girl, would weep with her, wondering how the child could go on living like this.

Genji sent Koremitsu to the girl's residence with a message:

"I have been summoned to the palace and must attend court. I cannot visit you, but having seen how much you are suffering, my mind is not at ease."

"How callous and unthinking," Shōnagon remarked. "Even if he is treating you as a passing fancy, he knows very well that the custom is to visit at least three nights in a row in order to make the marriage. If your father learns about this he will certainly be angry and condemn those of us in your service as complete and utter fools. Whatever else happens, you must never ever let him find out."

She was speaking to the girl, and so it was rather shocking that she seemed not to have paid any heed to her own words. Shōnagon went on to tell Koremitsu some rather touching stories.

"At some point in the future, it's unlikely that she'll be able to avoid the destiny that must play out for her. After all, how else can we explain your lord's behavior if there isn't some bond between them from a former life? But at the moment their relationship is completely inappropriate, and there is no way for us to know the intentions behind his strange attachment to her. It is all so confusing. Just today the girl's father called on us and ordered us to serve his daughter in a way that there would be no cause for regrets later on. He said that we must not be careless with her, and so I am deeply troubled and more than a little worried about this sort of amorous affair."

She could not afford to speak in too aggrieved a fashion, since it would not do if Koremitsu were to think something might be afoot with the girl. And indeed, Koremitsu was unable to figure out what might be going on.

Koremitsu returned to Genji and reported what he had observed. Genji was sympathetic to their plight, but he felt that if he started visiting the girl frequently, it might look as if he really were a little perverted, and he was afraid that people at the court would start gossiping about him, saying that he was strange and lacked seriousness of character. So he was determined to bring the girl to his residence. He sent a number of letters, and then, at dusk, he dispatched Koremitsu with a note:

"Please do not think ill of me, but there are certain matters I must attend to that prevent me from visiting you."

Shōnagon told Koremitsu, "Prince Hyōbu sent us a message all of a sudden

saying he would be coming for the girl tomorrow, so now we're rushing about preparing for the move. This place may be run-down and overgrown with weeds, but we've spent so many years here it will be sad to leave. The attendants are all in a state of confusion."

She spoke briefly with him, but couldn't continue because she was busy sewing robes and making other preparations. Koremitsu returned at once to Genji.

Genji was at his father-in-law's residence on Sanjō, but as usual his wife saw no reason why she should see him when he had dropped by so suddenly. He found her coldness tedious, and when Koremitsu arrived, Genji was casually playing a six-string Japanese koto and murmuring in a sonorous voice a line from a *saibara*:

"I must till my field in Hitachi, yet you come across the mountain on this rainy night, thinking my love is faithless."

The lyrics were a sly way of mocking his wife.

Koremitsu explained the situation, and Genji, after hearing the details, considered it an unfortunate turn of events. *If she were to move to her father's residence, then my efforts would surely be viewed as lascivious, and I'd be condemned for robbing the cradle. I'll have to bring her to my place before that happens and make sure the girl's attendants don't talk.*

"I'll head over there at dawn. The carriage is fine as it is, so go tell one or two of my guards to prepare to escort me," Genji instructed Koremitsu, who left at once.

Genji experienced a swirl of conflicting emotions. There would be gossip about what was going on, and he would undoubtedly gain a reputation as a lecher. If the girl were of an age when she could understand these matters and consent to the relationship, then people would understand, and it would all seem normal. But she was not of that age, and if her father were to come searching for her, then Genji's own actions would be seen as wild and rash. Yet despite his reservations, if he were to let this opportunity slip away, he would have bitter regrets. And so he departed while it was still dark. His wife remained her usual sullen and distant self.

"I just remembered some pressing matters I have to attend to," Genji told her. "I shall return shortly."

After going to his own quarters in the house at Sanjō and changing his robes, he set off alone with Koremitsu, who was riding alongside the carriage on his horse. He left before the women attendants even realized he was gone.

He knocked on the gate and someone who had been apprised of the situation opened it. Genji had his carriage drawn inside quietly. Koremitsu tapped at the

double doors in the corner of the main hall, then coughed as a signal. On hearing this, Shōnagon knew who was there and came out.

“My lord has arrived,” Koremitsu announced.

“The girl is resting inside,” Shōnagon told him. “Why have you come out so late at night?” She assumed they were stopping by on the way back from their previous rendezvous at the palace.

“I have something I must tell her before she is moved to her father’s residence,” Genji replied.

“Whatever would that be? And how could she possibly give you a clear answer?” Shōnagon laughed and began to withdraw.

Genji suddenly barged in, and Shōnagon was completely taken aback. “The older women are in there! They are absolutely unpresentable!”

“She’s not awake yet, is she?” Genji said. “Well, then, I suppose I shall have to get her up. How can she remain asleep, oblivious to this lovely morning mist?”

He barged straight into the girl’s sleeping quarters. Shōnagon was so flabbergasted that neither she nor her women could utter a peep in protest.

Genji picked up the girl, who was sleeping innocently, and woke her in his arms. She was still half asleep, and so she thought her father had come for her. Stroking her tangled hair, Genji said to her, “Come with me. I’m acting as a messenger for your father.”

When she saw that it wasn’t her father holding her, she was startled and fearful. “Come now, is that any way to act? I am just the same as your father.” As he was carrying the girl out, Koremitsu, Shōnagon and the others all asked him what was happening.

“I told you I was worried about not being able to come here very often, and so I want to move her to my residence, which is much safer and more comfortable. If she were cruelly taken away to her father’s villa, it would be that much more difficult for us to communicate. One of you may accompany me if you wish.”

Shōnagon, who was now frantic, replied, “But today is the worst possible time you could have chosen. What should I say when her father comes for her? If it is, as you say, truly fated for her to be your wife, then surely that is how things will turn out later on. As it is now, she is just too young, and you have given us no time to think about things, which is putting all of the attendants in an awkward position.”

“Very well, then,” Genji responded, “some of you may follow later.”

He had his carriage brought around. Everyone there was stunned and at a loss as to what to do. The girl, who did not understand what was happening, was frightened and started to cry.

With no way to stop him, Shōnagon brought out the clothes she had been sewing the previous night and, changing into a not altogether unattractive robe herself, got into the carriage with him.

Genji's residence in Nijō was close by, and so they arrived before first light. The carriage was drawn up to the west hall and Genji alighted. He easily swept the girl up in his arms and brought her out.

Shōnagon wavered: "This is all like a dream. What should I be doing?"

"That's entirely up to you. Now that I've brought the young lady here, you may return if you wish. I'll be happy to have someone escort you back."

Shōnagon smiled bitterly at his words, for she had no choice but to resign herself to the situation. She got out of the carriage. This had all been so sudden and outrageous that nothing could be done about it. She could not calm her heart. *What will her father say? And what about my young mistress? What will become of her? To have been left behind by all the people who loved her ... it's just too much to bear.*

She could hardly hold back her tears, but she found a way to restrain herself, knowing that it would bring bad luck to cry on a momentous occasion like this.

The west hall was not usually inhabited, and there were no curtains or furnishings. Genji summoned Koremitsu and ordered him to have curtains, screens and the like placed here and there where he indicated. He had the silk blinds hanging between the pillars around the inner chamber removed, and he had his attendants straighten up the room. When they were finished, he sent for robes and bedding from the east hall, then went in to rest. The girl now found the scene genuinely menacing and, uncertain about Genji's intentions, she began to tremble. Still, she managed not to cry out loud.

"I want to sleep with Shōnagon," she whimpered in a girlish voice.

"You must no longer sleep with her," Genji instructed, and the girl fell prostrate, weeping and feeling completely forlorn. Her nurse couldn't sleep either and stayed up all night lost in her thoughts.

As the dawn broke, Shōnagon studied her new surroundings. The residence and furnishings gave off a resplendent air—even the sand in the garden looked like jewels scattered all around. She remained hesitant, but it appeared that there were no other women serving in this hall. It was a pavilion where Genji would receive less intimate guests who called infrequently.

There were male servants just outside the bamboo blinds, and one of the men, who had heard that his lord had brought a woman here, was whispering to the others, "I wonder who she is? She must be someone extraordinary."

Cooked rice and water for their morning ablutions were brought in, and the sun was already high when they finally got up. Genji said, "This won't do at all.

We have no one in service here. Choose those women at your former residence you would like to have as attendants for your young lady and I will send for them this evening."

Genji next summoned some page girls from the east hall, then told his servants, "Have these pages select several younger girls to serve over here."

Presently four captivating little girls appeared. The young lady was still asleep, her robes wrapped around her. Genji made her get up.

"This pouting and cold behavior will not do!" Genji scolded. "Would a man who is wild at heart have done all this for you? A woman must be kindhearted and obedient."

And with those words, from that moment on, her training began.

Her features were even more beautiful than when he had seen her from a distance. He spoke warmly to her, telling her stories and showing her all sorts of delightful pictures and playthings, which he had brought in for her, and did everything he could to soothe her feelings. Eventually she got up and inspected her quarters. She was wearing her dark mourning robes, soft and rumpled, and looked so adorable as she sat there with her innocent smile that Genji couldn't help smiling himself as he watched her.

Genji left for the east hall, and the young lady went over to the edge of the veranda and peeked out at the pond and the trees in the garden. She was fascinated by the grasses, which had been withered by the frost so that they looked like something out of a painting. A crowd of male courtiers of the fourth or fifth rank, none of whom she knew, bustled in and out, making her feel that she had come to some splendid world. She examined the captivating pictures on the folding screens and door panels, and with her childish disposition she was able quickly to comfort herself.

Genji did not go to the palace for two or three days so that he could spend time talking with the girl and making her feel at ease in her new surroundings. He wrote poems and drew pictures, presenting them to her with the thought that they might serve as a model for her own practice. He put them together to make a very charming collection. One of the poems, which he copied on purple-colored paper, was taken from *Kokin rokujō*.¹⁴

*I've never been there but lament my fate
Each time I hear the name "Musashino" ...
The place where little murasa ki grows*

The girl took up the sheet of paper and studied the unusual, exquisite brushstrokes. In smaller characters Genji had added his own verse:

*Unable to cross Musashino's dewy plains
I've yet to see the purple roots of the gromwell ...
How I long for the wisteria's little kin*

"Why don't you try writing something?" Genji encouraged her, though Fujitsubo was still obviously on his mind.

"But I can't write well," she protested, looking up at him. She was so lovely he couldn't help but smile.

"Even if you can't write well, you must at least try. You won't get better if you don't write anything. Let me show you."

He found it charming the way she held her brush and how she turned away from him when she wrote, and he thought it strange that he should have such feelings.

"I've made a mistake," she said, trying to keep him from seeing what she wrote. But he made her show it to him anyway.

*I worry, unsure why you grieve ...
Tell me again which plant is it
The one I am related to*

Her writing was quite immature, but he could see at once that she had the talent to be accomplished in composition. The lines of her brushstrokes were rich and gentle, and they resembled the hand of her late grandmother. If she practiced more modern models, he knew that she would be able to write very well.

He had court dolls and dollhouses made especially for her, and as they passed the time together he was able to distract himself from his painful longing for Fujitsubo.

The women who had remained behind at the girl's former residence were flustered and embarrassed when Prince Hyōbu came back and asked for his daughter, for they did not know what they should say to him. Genji had told them not to let anyone know what had happened—at least not for a while. Because Shōnagon agreed with him, she insisted that it was best to keep the matter quiet. Thus, all they could say to the father was that Shōnagon had taken his daughter into hiding, without telling them where.

Prince Hyōbu assumed that nothing could be done at this point, and he resigned himself to the situation. *Her grandmother was opposed to sending the girl to my residence, and so Shōnagon was moved to carry out her wishes, even if it meant going to this extreme. But why couldn't she just gently tell me that it would be too unbearable to move the girl, rather than willfully spiriting her*

away?

When he left the house he said tearfully, “Let me know if you hear any news of her.” This troubled the women.

He sent an inquiry to the bishop as well, but the bishop had no clue as to her whereabouts. Prince Hyōbu suffered longing and regret over the child’s beauty, which would now go to waste. The enmity his primary wife had harbored toward the girl’s mother had abated, and even she regretted that she would not be able to raise the child as she had hoped.

Gradually attendants arrived and gathered in the quarters of the girl—whom Genji called his little Murasaki. As a couple they possessed a rare, modern look. The youngest attendants and the little girls who were her playmates passed the time together without a care. Although there were lonely evenings when Genji was away and she cried out of yearning for her grandmother, she gave no thought at all to her father. From the beginning she had grown accustomed to not having him around, and she was now exceedingly close to the man who was her new father. Whenever he returned, she would be the first to go out to greet him. They would talk together lovingly, and she never felt distant or embarrassed when he held her to his bosom. Insofar as they looked like a father and a daughter, their behavior was quite endearing.

If a woman has a calculating heart and a troublesome disposition that makes an issue of everything, then a man has to take care that he not allow her emotions to lead her astray and keep her from fulfilling his desires. She will tend to be jealous and resentful, and difficulties he never imagined, such as a separation, will naturally arise. Murasaki, however, was an absolutely captivating companion for Genji. A real daughter, when she had reached this age, would not have been able to behave so intimately, to have gone to sleep or risen in such close proximity to him. Genji came to feel that his young Murasaki was a rare hidden treasure, his precious plaything.

¹ The name Prince Hyōbu is taken from the Ministry of War (*Hyōbushō*). Since this prince is identified by his position, I am using this name as a matter of convenience.

² *Dharani* are spells or incantations used for meditation, healing, or protection. They consist of a phrase or line originally in Sanskrit that encapsulates a central teaching of a sacred text in Buddhism. Often the syllables in the phrase had no semantic force, but *dharani* were used as an aid in meditation and, in this case, as a protective spell.

³ An abbreviation of *tokkosho* (Sanskrit, *vajra*).

⁴ The *hichiriki* is a type of flageolet. The *shō* is a mouth organ, similar to panpipes, made of bamboo.

⁵ A reference to the doctrine of *mappō* (末法), one of the Three Ages of Buddhism. *Mappō*, the age when

the law or Dharma is corrupted, is the final historical stage of Buddhism. Although various timelines were given, the most widely accepted view was that *mappō* would begin 2,000 years after Sakyamuni Buddha's passing and last for 10,000 years. The first two ages are the age of the correct Dharma/Law (正法 J. *shōbō*) and the age of the imitated Dharma (像法 J. *zōbō*). This doctrine was extremely influential during the Heian period when it was believed that *mappō* would begin in the year 1052 CE.

⁶ The source has not been identified.

⁷ *Shūishū* 29: "Anxious that the wind during the night may have scattered the blossoms of plum, I rise early to view them."

⁸ The *Naniwazu* refers to a poem in the *kana* preface to the *Kokinshū* that children in particular used, along with the poem on Mount Asaka that appears below, as a text to practice writing the *kana* syllabary: "The trees in bloom at the inlet of Naniwa announce that winter is over, spring has arrived! The trees in bloom!"

⁹ The place name Asaka plays on the homophone *asa*, meaning "shallow." The poem Genji cites that the girl would have practiced writing is *Man'yōshū* 3807 (Anonymous). The poems that follow make variations on similar lines in *Kokinrokujō* 985 and 987, respectively.

¹⁰ *Kokinshū* 732 (Anonymous): "I always yearn to go back to the same person, like a little boat that has made its way through the channel and comes rowing home."

¹¹ The Japanese species of gromwell is a small plant that produces white flowers in the summer. Its purple roots were used to make dye for clothing. As in other cultures, purple was associated with royalty, and so I have translated *murasaki* as "purple gromwell" to indicate both the rustic image of the word and its imperial associations. The Japanese name for wisteria is *fuchi*, alluding to the girl's aunt, Fujitsubo, and suggesting by way of the color purple shared by the two plants the nature of their relationship. That is, since *murasaki* (or *wakamurasaki*) is the smaller, more rustic plant, Genji's poem acknowledges a difference in their relative status. His poem alludes to *Kokinshū* 867 (Anonymous): "Because of this one purple gromwell, I look on all the grasses in Musashino with tender feelings."

¹² Both poems play on the homophone *waka*, meaning "youthful."

¹³ *Gosenshū* 731 (Fujiwara no Koremasa): "Though I keep my impatience a secret, as the years go by, why is it so hard to pass beyond the barrier gate of Ōsaka, the slope where we may finally meet?"

¹⁴ *Kokinrokujō* 3507 (Anonymous).

VI

Suetsumuhana

The Safflower

NO MATTER how much time passed, Genji could not forget the woman who had died, her life as fleeting as the dew on evening faces. She continued to stir in him thoughts of passionate attachment in spite of all the regrets he harbored, for the only other women he knew were cold and forbidding. His wife and the lady at Rokujō cut imposing figures and were so proper and competitive they made him yearn for his Yūgao, that lady of the evening faces who had been so gentle and yielding. Whenever he lovingly recalled their time together, he realized he had never known anyone quite like her.

Despite his repeated failures to find his perfect woman, he continued to dream that he would somehow, in some way, come across someone who did not have such a noble reputation, who was sweet and adorable, who could be his lover without reserve. It is said that he was always listening for gossip about any woman who had a reputation for being reliable, and whenever he heard some favorable report about a lady, he would get his hopes up, wonder if she might not be *the one*, and send the new prospect a short missive, sometimes just a single line. Of course, as you know by now, when it came to any relationship involving Genji, few women could resist the seduction of his words or keep their distance from him. Those women who were cold and strong-willed enough to resist were so serious that they seemed either to lack warmth and sympathy, or to have too high of an opinion of their own status in the world. Yet no woman can put off all suitors forever, and those who resisted Genji invariably ended up married off to some mediocrity—whereupon their willfulness and pride crumbled away. And in those cases, Genji simply cut off all contact with them before anything could develop.

From time to time he would think back with annoyance on his impertinent

lady of the molted cicada shell. There must have been moments when her stepdaughter—the voluptuous young thing he had taken by mistake beneath the eaves—would be caught off guard by one of his elegant letters, which would come wafting in to her on some appropriate occasion or other. He wanted to see her again as she had been in the lamplight that evening, her clothes and hair undone. In truth, he found it impossible to forget any of the women he had known, and so he was never without lingering regrets.

One of his former nurses was Saemon, an old woman who was second in his affections only after Koremitsu's mother. This nurse had a daughter in service at the court, a young woman named Taifu no Myōbu whose father, a Senior Assistant Minister in the Ministry of War, was of imperial descent. Taifu was very fond of facilitating affairs of the heart, and so Genji would often summon her to act as a go-between for him. Because Saemon had moved to the provinces as the wife of the Governor of Chikuzen, Taifu had to travel to and from the court from her father's former residence on the estate of the late Prince Hitachi.¹

Taifu once mentioned in passing to Genji that Prince Hitachi sired a daughter late in life. The Prince had raised her with considerable care, but after his death she was left in rather dire circumstances.

“How pitiful,” Genji replied.

His curiosity aroused, he asked for further details about the woman.

“I don't know much about either her temperament or her looks,” Taifu told him. “She spends all her time hidden away. She's shy and retiring, and on those evenings when it's appropriate to visit her, we always speak through her curtains. Sometimes I think that her only close companion is her seven-string koto.”

“Bai Juyi once wrote that the koto was one of his three companions, along with wine and poetry.² Of course wine would not be suitable for her,” Genji mused. “Let me hear her play. Her father was a skillful musician, so I'm guessing that her talents are not ordinary.”

“I doubt if her playing would sound all that wonderful to someone like you,” Taifu said coyly, intending to pique his interest.

“You really are teasing me, aren't you? Sometime soon I'll sneak over to the Hitachi villa on an evening when the moon is obscured by mist. You'll have to withdraw from the palace that night.”

Taifu thought that arranging an affair between Genji and the Hitachi Princess might be complicated, but she did not have all that many duties at the palace to keep her occupied. And so, on a calm spring evening, when there was nothing for her to do, she was able to slip away. Her father had moved to another residence when he took a new wife and came to visit her at Prince Hitachi's

estate now and then. It had been awkward for Taifu to live with her father at her stepmother's place, and she preferred staying at the residence of the Hitachi Princess, which was familiar and comfortable.

Just as he said he would, Genji visited when the moon, just one night past full, looked exquisite in the mist.

"I'm not so sure about this ... I wonder what she'll think when I ask her to play something. After all, a seven-string koto sounds purest when the air is dry, not on a humid night like this." Taifu no Myōbu was fretful.

"Go to her anyway," Genji urged her, "and have her play something, even if it's only one song. I'll be very put out if I have to go home without hearing her."

Taifu had him sit and wait in her own room. She had done nothing to tidy it up or prepare it for a visitor, and, feeling embarrassed and a little guilty, she went over to the main hall. The lattice shutters had not yet been lowered, and her lady was gazing out at the fragrantly scented plum trees in bloom.

Thinking this might be the right moment to ask, Taifu said, "I'm so moved by the elegant atmosphere this evening, and I can't help thinking how incomparable your koto playing is. I'm always rushing in and out, going to court. It makes me sad that I rarely have the chance to hear you play."

"There are people of keen judgment who appreciate the koto," the Princess replied. "I wonder how my playing sounds to someone like you, who comes and goes to the palace and hears many skilled musicians?"

She pulled her koto in front of her. Taifu was nervous. How would her lady sound to Genji?

When the Princess began to softly strum her instrument, Genji was delighted. True, her technique lacked depth of feeling, but the koto itself had a rare tonal quality that was not at all unpleasant. Her high-ranking father had raised his daughter with great care in this run-down, dreary residence. Hers was an old-fashioned, strict upbringing that had all come to naught. The Princess must be absorbed in sorrowful thoughts. The setting struck Genji as the type of place described in old romances where elegant and moving incidents occur, and with such ideas in his head, he wondered if he should try to approach the woman and say something. If he did, would she think him forward? Afraid he might shame himself, he wavered.

Taifu was a clever woman and she figured it would not be good to let Genji hear too much of her lady's playing.

"The sky is clouding over," she said, "and I'm expecting a guest tonight. It would be rude if I were not in for him when he arrives, so could you play again when I can be with you at more leisure? Allow me to lower your shutters." Without giving her lady much encouragement to continue, Taifu went back to

her own chambers.

"She stopped halfway through!" Genji muttered. "I couldn't tell if she was any good or not. It's really irritating."

Still, he found it all rather intriguing.

"I'd like to do the same thing again, but next time find some place closer for me to listen."

Taifu sensed from the nature of his request that Genji's interest was piqued, and so she replied, "I don't know if I can do that ... she's completely lost in her loneliness and is suffering so at heart, I'm worried that she is in no condition for you to look in on her now."

Genji had to admit that Taifu's concern was reasonable. Some women were of a status that allowed a man to speak intimately with them, even at the very start of a relationship. This lady, however, was of such high rank that he had to be especially sensitive about her position.

"All right, then," said Genji. "But at the very least do give her some hint of my intentions."

Genji was extraordinarily secretive as he readied to leave ... was there another woman he had promised to meet?

"It's amusing when I think about it," Taifu remarked, "but His Majesty often worries that you are too serious. What would he think if he were to see you in this disguise?"

Genji turned to her, smiling, and said, "You're a good one to talk about others' faults. If you think *I'm* promiscuous, then it must be hard for you to excuse the conduct of *a certain woman* I know."

Because Taifu could be a little too flirtatious, Genji would speak to her in this manner on occasion. She felt chastened and said nothing more.

Assuming that he might better catch the sound of the Princess playing at the main hall, he quietly left Taifu's quarters and approached a spot hidden in shadows, where there were a few broken remains of an open-gap fence. A man was standing there—perhaps some elegant paramour attracted to the Princess. Genji slipped back into the shadows. Unbeknownst to him, the man was none other than his brother-in-law, Tō no Chūjō, who had left the palace earlier that evening at the same time as Genji. Thinking it odd that Genji had wandered off without going to either his wife's residence at Sanjō or his own villa at Nijō, he was curious about his friend's destination. So he mounted an old nag, dressed in shabby hunting robes so as not to be recognized, and followed the Radiant Prince, even though he had his own rendezvous planned that night. Why Genji would have come to such a strange place as this was beyond him, and so he was standing there listening to the music of the koto, all the while waiting

expectantly for Genji to emerge.

Unable to identify who was standing there and reluctant to have his own identity revealed, Genji began to sneak away quietly. However, the man suddenly noticed him and approached.

“I’m very annoyed that you abandoned me so abruptly, so I decided to follow you here.”

*Though we left Mount Ouchi together
Like the sixteenth-day moon you hide your course
So that no one can tell where you will set*

Genji was irritated, but on seeing Tō no Chūjō he was also amused.

“You certainly know how to surprise a person,” he grumbled.

*The moon may shine the same on all
But who would think of seeking out
Mount Irusa, where it will set*

“What will become of you if people can just follow you like this?” Tō no Chūjō responded. “Seriously ... if you’re going to wander around, you ought to have a proper guard with you. Please don’t leave me behind the way you did.”

He then shifted the tone of his voice and reproached his friend: “Going about in disguise on these nocturnal adventures, you’re bound to be careless and cause some incident.”

Genji was a little miffed that his companion was always finding out things like this, but it gave him a pleasurable sense of superiority when he recalled that Tō no Chūjō had not been able to locate that wild pink, the little daughter of the lady of the evening faces.

Feeling a sense of warm camaraderie, the two young men did not go their separate ways to meet the ladies who were expecting them but got into the same carriage. Playing their flutes, they traveled along a road made all the more enchanting by the cloud-obscured moon. At last they arrived at the Sanjō residence and, because they had not sent anyone ahead, were able to sneak in and change back into court robes in a passageway where no one could see them. With innocent expressions on their faces, they pretended they had just arrived and entertained themselves with their flutes. The Minister of the Left could not pass up the opportunity and joined them, bringing out a short thin Koma flute from Korea. He was very skilled, and their concert was exceptionally graceful. The Minister then summoned some women to play the *biwa* lute, having them

perform from within the room just inside the blind.

One of the women, Nakatsukasa, was a virtuoso on the *biwa*. She had spurned Tō no Chūjō's advances because she could not get over her nostalgic yearning for those rare times when Genji had called on her. Inevitably her affair with Genji came to light, and Princess Ōmiya, Tō no Chūjō's mother, did not take it kindly. Nakatsukasa was depressed and mortified and was moping listlessly as she leaned against a pillar. Her heart was in turmoil—she thought that she should move to a place where she could no longer see Genji, and yet the prospect of being separated from him was too sad to bear.

Meanwhile, the two young lords were thinking about the koto music they had heard earlier that evening and delightfully pondering the strange, mournful atmosphere of the Hitachi Princess's dwelling. Tō no Chūjō was imagining, in eager anticipation, a sweet lady who had spent many lonely years in that place. He could see himself beginning an affair with her, the pain of their emotions so great as to be intolerable, his own heart so torn that his appearance grew haggard, causing gossip to swirl among the courtiers. But then he remembered how eager and confident Genji had looked setting out on his adventure, and it occurred to him that his friend would never let an opportunity like that one pass him by. He experienced a twinge of jealous resentment and apprehension.

Later on, both of the young lords sent the obligatory letter to the Hitachi Princess, but neither of them received a reply. They were annoyed and confused by this, thinking it was terrible of her to be so negligent. If possible, Tō no Chūjō was even more irritated than Genji. *A woman living in such a place should give some indication she is sensitive to the sorrowful evanescence of the world by composing poems that make intriguing allusions to images of transient trees and grasses or to the appearance of the sky. And each time she ought to entice the man by hinting at the state of her own moods. No matter how dignified she may be, it is positively unattractive—bad form, really—to shut herself away like this.*

It was not his nature to keep his feelings to himself, so he complained to Genji: "Have you had even a single reply from her? I sent her a letter hinting at my feelings, but she's left me hanging."

Just as I figured, Genji thought, smiling, he's already made his move.

"Is that right? I haven't heard anything from her either ... but then again, I haven't really tried very hard."

Tō no Chūjō found Genji's response evasive, and he was quite put out.

Genji hadn't been all that interested in the woman from the start, and in the face of her cruel silence his feelings had cooled. Now that he knew his friend was writing to her frequently, however, he thought the Princess might succumb to the sheer volume of Tō no Chūjō's words. He could just see her smug face,

having rejected the man who had first approached her, and the very thought made him sick at heart. He summoned Taifu and had a serious discussion with her.

“I’m very unhappy that she remains unresponsive and gives no sign of her feelings,” he complained. “She must have doubts about me—that I’m some frivolous man who goes around deceiving women, even though I am not that type at all. But if she’s reluctant to trust me and thinks I’m fickle, then things between us will never go as I intend. Naturally I’ll be unfaithful, and it will end up being all my fault. I must say, I’m more attracted to a woman who is gentle and easygoing—one whose parents and siblings are supportive, not critical.”

“I wonder,” Taifu asked, “if it’s really true that she could never be your ‘shelter in the rain,’ as the love song puts it? She’s such an unusual woman, much more withdrawn than others.”

She went on to describe the appearance of the Princess.

“She doesn’t sound especially refined, and she lacks a sparkling wit. But if what you say is true, she seems childlike and generous of spirit—a woman of the most lovable sort.”

Genji was clearly unable to get the lady of the evening faces out of his heart.

He continued to suffer from bouts of fever, and his mind was constantly preoccupied with his secret, tormented thoughts of Fujitsubo. The spring and summer passed, and there was never a moment of peace for him.

Brooding quietly over the course of the autumn, he lovingly remembered the cacophony of those fulling blocks and rollers, which even now seemed to reverberate in his ears. In this state of reverie he made frequent inquiries after the Hitachi Princess, but he still could not get a clear response from her. He was irritated that she refused to act like a normal court lady, and unwilling to accept even the possibility of defeat, he roused himself and pressed Taifu about the situation, which he was beginning to find irksome.

“What’s the meaning of this?” he demanded. “I’ve never seen anyone like her.”

Taifu felt sorry for him and tried to explain: “I’ve never told her that meeting you is inappropriate, and I haven’t said anything that would turn her against you. She is just absurdly shy and reticent, which is why she cannot bring herself to reply to your messages.”

“That’s not normal,” Genji continued. “If she were a child, then no one would expect her to exercise any judgment. Or if she were still so young that she could not do as she wishes, then her bashfulness would make some sense. But at her age she should at least give some indication that she’s giving the matter serious consideration. For some reason I’m restless and lonely, and if I could just get an

answer from her suggesting that she felt the same way, then I'd know that my prayers had been answered. After all, it's not a sexual liaison I'm after—I just want to stand on that dilapidated veranda outside her screens. She is being most disagreeable and her motives are inscrutable. Find some way for me to meet her, even if you don't have her permission. I promise I won't do anything upsetting or outrageous."

For all his nonchalance, Genji was in the habit of keeping his ears open to any and all information about women at the court, which is why Taifu had mentioned the Hitachi Princess in passing on that tedious evening some months earlier. But now that Genji was talking about her so eagerly, Taifu was troubled at the prospect of having to act as go-between. Her mistress was inexperienced, after all, and did not have much in the way of talent or breeding. Seeing that it might end unhappily, she began to regret that she had been so reckless in guiding Genji to the Princess. And yet Genji did seem sincere, and so she risked looking perverse if she ignored his request. Prince Hitachi had maintained an old-fashioned residence, so hardly anyone ever visited. And, after he died, not a single footprint had parted the overgrown grasses in the garden until Genji showed up. The radiant light from this remarkable man streamed in, bringing smiles to even the lowest-ranking attendants.

"You must reply to him," they had all urged the Princess, but she was so peculiarly reticent and shy that she could not bring herself to even glance at his letters.

Taifu calculated in her frivolous way that given the circumstances she should arrange for Genji to speak to her mistress—with curtains between them, of course—when an appropriate opportunity arose. If they did not hit it off, well ... that would be the end of it. On the other hand, if there were some karmic bond between them and it was meant to be, no one could reproach her for his coming to visit from time to time. She said not a word about any of this to anyone, not even her father.

One evening—sometime after the twentieth day of the eighth month—as the night deepened the Hitachi Princess was waiting impatiently for the moon to rise. Only the light from the stars was clear and bright, and the breeze wafting through the top of the pine trees made a sublimely lonesome sound. She began to speak about the past, weeping as she did so, and Taifu thought this might be the perfect moment. She sent a message to Genji, and he arrived in his usual stealthy manner.

The moon rose at last, creating an eerie atmosphere around the rustic fence. As the Princess gazed out at the scenery, Taifu encouraged her to play the seven-string koto. When she began softly plucking the instrument, Genji thought her

playing was not all that bad. In contrast, Taifu, who was a romantic at heart, was a little frustrated: *If only she would play in a more intimate, modern style!*

With no one around to see him, Genji had no qualms about going straight in unannounced. He called to Taifu, who pretended to be shocked, as if she were learning of his interest for the first time.

“This is frightfully awkward,” she said to the Princess. “Apparently the man we’ve talked about so often has arrived. He says he has been in a state of constant irritation over your refusal to reply to his messages, and when I refused to hear him and told him there was nothing I could do about it, he said he wanted to explain his feelings to you in person. How should I respond to him? This is not some common, frivolous visit, since he is constrained by his exalted status from going out too often. It would be cruel of you not to hear him out. You should listen from behind your curtains to what he has to say.”

The Princess was mortified and retreated to the interior of the residence. Sitting there, she seemed very childish.

“I don’t know what I should say to him!”

“You are so immature. I really worry about you,” Taifu laughed. “It’s perfectly reasonable to act childish when you have parents or a guardian to look after you,” she explained. “But given your current situation, it’s no longer appropriate for you to be so reticent around a gentleman.”

Though she remained reluctant to speak with Genji, the Princess was constitutionally incapable of rejecting anything anyone told her, and so she replied, “I will hear him out, but I will not say a word. So let’s have the lattice shutters locked down.”

“I don’t think it would be proper to keep him outside the shutters on the veranda. Even if you let him into the space beneath the eaves, he is not the type to do anything rash or careless.”

Taifu sounded convincing, though she knew what she had just told the Princess was not true. Still, just to be safe, she secured the sliding door between the Princess’s room and the space between the pillars under the eaves before setting out a padded cushion for Genji.

The Princess still felt shy and unsure, and because she hadn’t the slightest idea how to prepare herself to speak with this man, she naively assumed that what Taifu told her was how she should act. The old woman who had been her nurse and most of her other attendants had retired to their rooms and were fast asleep by this time. Two or three of the younger women were curious and wanted to catch a glimpse of the man whose looks were celebrated at court. They were eagerly preparing for his visit. While they dressed their lady in a presentable robe and touched up her appearance, she herself did not seem excited by all this.

The gentleman had taken care to conceal his magnificent figure, and yet he looked truly fresh and elegant.

I wish I could show him off to someone who has the discriminating taste to appreciate him, thought Taifu. He can't show off his radiant beauty to advantage in a place like this. What a waste!

She was relieved that at least the Princess was behaving passively and not likely to do anything too forward in front of Genji. At the same time, she felt uneasy. Genji would no longer be able to accuse her of failing to arrange the meeting he was always pressing her about, but now that she had arranged it, would it bring misfortune and sorrow to her mistress?

Considering the woman's rank, Genji assumed that in place of overly stylish modern talents and learning she would be exceptionally elegant. Apparently the Princess had moved a little closer to him at the prodding of her attendants, and as she moved quietly forward, the enchanting perfume of her robes wafted toward him. She seemed so reserved and dignified that Genji was sure he had guessed correctly about her. He told her how long he had been yearning for her, but she didn't say anything in response—this was much worse than not receiving a reply to his letters, since she was now so near to him. He sighed, lamenting the fact that he could do nothing about the situation.

*So often has your silence thwarted me
The only hope that I can cling to now
Is that you have not told me not to speak*

"If my plea is in vain, at least tell me that you reject me. Not knowing how you feel hurts me so," Genji said, eloquently alluding to a poem.³

Jijū, the daughter of the Princess's nurse, was a talented and impetuous young woman, and she found her lady's inability to reply unbearably shameful. So she moved over closer to her lady and replied for her:

*I am not at all like a priest who rings a bell
Calling forth the silence to mark his sermon's end
For to rebuff with silence is a paradox*

The girlish voice lacked solemnity, and because Jijū had spoken as though she were actually her mistress instead of a go-between, Genji felt that the Princess was being a little too informal and familiar for a person of her high status.

He replied, "Such a shrewd response has left me at a loss for words."

Though I understand that silence

*May be superior to words
How awkward is your non-response*

All manner of trivial things passed between them, and though he spoke both playfully and seriously, nothing worked for him.

Genji was growing irritable. It occurred to him that maybe her ridiculously prolonged silence was her bizarre way of telling him there was another man to whom she was attached. So in desperation he slid open the panel doors that Taifu had taken care to close and slipped inside the room. Taifu was shocked by his audacity; after all, hadn't he promised her he would behave himself? She couldn't bear to watch—it was so pitiful—and retreated to her own quarters as if she were oblivious to all that was taking place.

The younger attendants had heard rumors from the court that Genji's looks were peerless, and so they were more inclined to forgive his trespass. They did not protest loudly, but because his behavior was so unexpected they were concerned that their mistress had not had enough time to prepare emotionally. The Princess simply withdrew into herself, feeling nothing but shame and mortification.

Genji looked on her with forgiving eyes. *How touching that there are still such artless, innocent ladies. She was brought up to lead such a sheltered existence, she knows nothing of the ways of the world.*

It was hard to make out her appearance in the dark, and she seemed at once mysterious and a little pathetic to him. What was it about her that was so attractive? Genji let out an audible sigh, then left while it was still dark. Taifu was lying awake, listening and wondering how things had gone. She did not want to let on that she knew anything about Genji's departure, and so she did not even cough or clear her throat to signal that someone should see him off. As a result, Genji had to slip away on his own.

Returning to his villa at Nijō, he lay down straightaway but couldn't sleep. He brooded over the fact that his relationships with women never quite satisfied his desires, yet despite his disappointment, it would be difficult to break off the affair now, given the Princess's status. As he struggled to make sense of things, Tō no Chūjō showed up.

"You're sleeping awfully late, aren't you? Let me guess ... you have a good excuse."

Genji got up and said, "I thought I might take it easy and relax by sleeping alone for once. Have you come from the palace?"

"Yes, I just left there. The rehearsals for the procession to the Suzaku Palace are scheduled for today, and they have to decide on the dancers and musicians. I

was summoned to the palace last night, and now I am on my way to inform my father. I will have to return to the palace shortly after.”

He spoke as though he were in a great hurry.

“In that case, let me go with you.” Genji had a meal of boiled and steamed rice and beans, and then the two men got into one of their carriages and had the other drawn along behind them.

“You look sleepy,” Tō no Chūjō admonished his friend. “You’re still keeping a lot of things from me.”

He sounded resentful. Because many tasks had to be tended to, they ended up spending the whole day in service at the palace.

Feeling a little guilty about the Hitachi Princess, Genji finally managed to get a letter off to her that evening. It began to rain, and he felt it was too much trouble to go out that night. He had no desire to make her residence his shelter from the storm. It was well past the time when the Princess would have normally expected a letter to arrive, and Taifu’s heart ached as she looked at her mistress’s pathetic figure. The Princess herself felt deeply embarrassed, and though the expected morning-after letter arrived in the evening, it never crossed her mind that she ought to criticize Genji.

He had written the following:

*Your intentions, which have remained obscure to me
Like evening fog that shows no sign of lifting
Are harder to fathom in this evening rain*

“How restless I feel waiting for breaks in the clouds!”

Realizing that he would not be calling tonight, the attendants were heartbroken. Still, they encouraged their lady, telling her, “You must send him a reply.”

The Princess, however, was growing more and more fretful and was unable to compose even a formulaic response.

Jijū said, “The night is getting late,” and, as she had earlier, instructed her lady what to write:

*Think of me as you wait for the cloud-covered moon ...
Though we both may gaze in reverie at our hearts
The feelings we experience are not the same*

Pressured by her attendants, the Princess wrote out the poem on purple paper that was so old it had faded to gray. Her brushstrokes were robust, not delicate,

and the style was a little dated, with characters written in uniform columns.

Genji put the letter aside, since it was not worth looking at. He anxiously wondered what the lady must be thinking and regretted that it had come to this, though nothing could be done about it now. She was not at all what he had expected, but he would do the right thing by her, and he would never abandon her. She of course could not know his intentions, and so she was in a state of melancholy and despair.

The Minister of the Left had withdrawn from the palace that evening, dragging Genji along with him to his residence on Sanjō. The young lords, absorbed in the details of the imperial procession, gathered and talked about the preparations. They passed the time practicing their own dances, and the sound of musical instruments reverberated more loudly than usual as they vied with each other. This was no ordinary entertainment. Everyone performed in concert, playing various kinds of flutes from the large, nine-hole *hichiriki*, with its sadly dulcet tones, to the five-hole *shakuhachi*. They also rolled out a large *taikō* drum just beneath the railing of the veranda and took turns beating it with their hands.

With all that was going on, Genji had little free time, and so he secretly stole out and called on only those women who were dearest to his heart. As a result, he failed to visit the Hitachi Princess for some time, and as autumn came to a close she was left to wonder anxiously about what had become of their relationship. She continued to put her trust in him, but as time passed it seemed that such trust was to no avail.

The day of the imperial progress was approaching, and around the time that music from the rehearsals was loudly resounding, Taifu paid Genji a visit.

“How is she doing?” Genji asked, a little sheepishly.

Taifu described the Princess’s condition, adding, “It’s heartbreaking for those of us who have to watch her. She feels utterly abandoned.”

The very thought moved her to tears. All her scheming to make her mistress look remote, mysterious and alluring had come to naught. Genji realized that Taifu must resent his cold callousness. He felt sad imagining the Princess sitting there, silently lost in her thoughts.

“I haven’t had a spare moment,” he sighed. “I’m afraid it cannot be helped. She seems to know nothing of this evanescent world of sorrow, and so I thought I should instruct her.”

He smiled, and he looked so young and handsome that Taifu couldn’t help smiling as well: *It’s inevitable, I suppose. Young men his age seldom think of others and are so self-centered they cause their women to resent them.*

Genji promised that once the busy season was finished, he would occasionally visit the Princess.

After discovering Fujitsubo's niece—the girl he now called his little Murasaki

he took her into his care and was so enthralled by her beauty that he began to neglect even the lady at Rokujo. Naturally he was all the more reluctant to visit the dilapidated residence of the Hitachi Princess, though the pity he felt for her was no less strong. As time went on he began to think he no longer wanted to try to understand the reasons behind the woman's absurd shyness.

On the other hand, he told himself, she might have traits I would find attractive. Because I'm groping around in the dark I haven't been able to judge her clearly, and it may well be that I haven't been able to fully ascertain everything about her to my satisfaction. I'd really like to see her with my own eyes.

It would be rude were he to simply adjust the wick on the lamp to fully illuminate her, and so late one night he silently entered her residence when no one was expecting him. Because her attendants were at ease and had relaxed their guard, he was able to peek in through the gaps between the lattice shutters. Unfortunately, he couldn't see anything at all. The curtains, worn and tattered, had evidently been hanging from their frames for many years, and the room had not been refurbished in ages. Since the curtains were not drawn aside, all he could see was four or five ladies-in-waiting. They had withdrawn from their lady's presence to eat, and even though their trays held light green celadon bowls imported for the nobility from China, the scene was lacking in graceful refinement, and the food, what there was of it, was poor and miserable. Some other women were sitting in a corner shivering from the intense cold. They wore dirty-looking aprons over their worn, soiled white robes—altogether inelegant and unsightly. For all that, he found it amusing.

Are there still women who, in spite of their reduced circumstances, continue the old-fashioned custom of putting their hair up with combs? They're like those women in the Bureau of Female Dancers and Musicians or in the Chamber of the Imperial Regalia. And their combs look as if they might fall out any moment.

Never in his wildest dreams did he imagine that the Princess would have such women serving her.

“It is so cold this year,” exclaimed one of the women, and she started to cry. “When you've lived as long as I have, you're bound to run into such hardships as this!”

“Why did I ever think life was so difficult back in the days when the Prince was still alive?” said another, her voice cracking as she shivered so hard she seemed on the verge of flying away. “Even if we didn't have many people to support us, at least we got by!”

Genji couldn't stand listening to these depressing and repulsive things, so he stood up and moved back a little. He then rapped at the door as if he had just arrived. He heard one of the women tell the others to take care of this and that, and soon the wicks on the lamps were trimmed, the shutters removed, and he was shown in.

Jijū had not been there recently—she was one of the young women who traveled back and forth to the Kamo Shrine to serve the Priestess, who was an imperial princess. With her absence the place seemed even more drab and unsophisticated than usual—so much so that Genji felt he hardly recognized it. The snow, which the women had been bemoaning earlier, began to fall even more heavily and pile up. The sky looked menacing, the wind was howling fiercely, and there was no one to relight the lamps when they flickered out. Genji was reminded of that awful moment with his lady of the evening faces when a spirit threatened him, but he took comfort in the fact that as desolate as this residence was, it was much smaller in scale than that abandoned villa, and there were more people around. Even so, he knew that he would have trouble sleeping on such an eerie evening—though he had to admit that he was attracted to the place, since its creepiness was also intriguing, deeply moving, and peculiarly elegant. He was therefore bitterly disappointed that the Princess remained aloof, neither bestowing favors on him nor doing anything that might pique his interest in her.

After spending a rather tedious night, Genji raised the lattice shutters at the approach of dawn and looked out at the snow blanketing the plants in the garden. There were no footprints to show that anyone had been there, and the white desolation stretched into the distance, evoking an intensely lonely atmosphere. To brush her off—as if he were to brush off the snow—and leave right away would make her feel wretched. He spoke to her in a tone of gentle reprobation.

"Come look at this magnificent sky. I really don't understand why you must be so unreasonably cold and distant with me."

It was barely light outside, but the reflection off the snow made him look all the more handsome and youthful, and the older women beamed as they gazed on him.

One of the attendants said to her lady, "You must go out to him at once. It won't do at all for you to remain hidden away!"

"It's vital that you be docile and obedient to him," instructed another.

Shy and reticent by nature, the Princess was incapable of resisting anyone, and so she straightened herself up and sidled out to sit next to him. Although he continued to gaze out at the snowy landscape and pretended not to look at her, he could not help but take furtive, sidelong glances. *How is she? How does she*

look? Because they had been intimate with one another, he thought how happy it would make him if she were just a little more attractive than he hoped. As it turned out, he had been expecting much too much.

First, he could tell by how tall she was as she sat there that her torso was very long. It was just as he had imagined from his groping in the dark. He could feel his chest tightening.

The second thing that immediately caught his eye was her nose. It was so hideous he couldn't keep his eyes off it. It brought to mind the trunk of the white elephant that the Bodhisattva Fugen rode upon: shockingly prominent, and very, very long. The tip extended so far out that it drooped a little—and it was ruddy, weird and unpleasant beyond belief. Then there was her complexion, which was white enough to put the snow to shame—so white, in fact, that it gave off a bluish tinge. Her forehead was broad and bulging, and the lower part of her face and the overall line of her jaw, which was partly concealed by her fan, were frightfully large—a real horse face. She was thin to the point of emaciation, and he could make out her painfully bony shoulder blades beneath her robes.

He now regretted his curiosity. Why had he ever wanted to see her up close? Her figure was so strange, so ... bizarre. He couldn't stop gazing at her. At least the shape of her head and the length of her luxuriant hair, which cascaded almost a foot beyond the hem of her robes, were not at all inferior to those of ladies he considered paragons of beauty.

It may be a little mean-spirited to single out the clothes a person is wearing, but the very first thing the old romances always describe about a character is his or her clothing. The Princess wore a single-layer robe of a light crimson hue—not unacceptable, since it was a color not limited to use by the imperial family. This particular garment, however, was dreadfully faded. Over it she had on an outer robe so darkened in shade that there was no trace of the original color. And over the top of that was a beautifully scented, if hopelessly out-of-date, sable jacket. Such an ensemble may have been perfectly appropriate in ancient times, but now it looked startlingly incongruous as the dress of a young noblewoman. It pained Genji to see her this way, for he could tell that if she did not have the fur jacket she would have been terribly cold.

Genji was speechless, struck as dumb as the Princess. He finally managed to say a few pleasantries in an attempt to draw her out of her usual silence, but she only grew more bashful and brought her sleeve up to her mouth in a rustic manner that called to mind the way certain officials would slowly amble along during a ceremony, holding out their elbows at an awkward angle. Even worse was her irregular smile, which was oddly disconcerting and put him on edge. Genji felt sorry for her, but he nonetheless made unusual haste to leave.

He excused himself, saying, "Since you have no one else to turn to for support, I was hoping, given my good intentions, that you would be more accommodating and less distant to a man who has begun to visit you. I find it painful that you remain so unyielding."

*Even as the morning snows melt
Icicles still cling to the eaves ...
Will they stay forever frozen*

The Princess did not reply, but simply giggled inanely. The difficulty she had in answering him was pathetic, and so he left.

His carriage was brought around to the middle gate. Even in the dark of night he had been able to see that the gate was extremely warped and on the verge of collapsing. Many other things, however, had been entirely hidden from his sight during his nocturnal visits, and so now, this morning, he finally grasped just how heartrending and desolate this villa really was. The only things that seemed to have any warmth at all were the pine trees covered in snow. Like a rustic abode in the mountains, the place was deeply affecting. Thinking back on that rainy-night discussion of women, he conjured up the romantic image of a ruined gate and garden overgrown with weeds that his compatriots had spoken of—an image made real in the scene before him now. It was exactly the kind of place he had been longing for, a place where he could bring some adorable young lady in distressed circumstances and keep her to love and swoon over whenever he was unable to be at her side. Such an arrangement would surely divert him from his forbidden, scandalous affair with Fujitsubo. Alas, the figure presented by the Princess, who had nothing to recommend her, was out of place in such an ideal setting.

Who else would look after her and put up with as much as I have? Perhaps the spirit of Prince Hitachi, her late father, has remained close by to look after her, and has guided me here to conduct our intimate affair.

Seeing a mandarin orange tree covered in snow, he ordered one of his guards to sweep the snow away. A pine tree, perhaps resentful at being overlooked, seemed to shake off its branches by itself, and a wave of snow came crashing down. The scene resembled the image in the old poem about the famed pine mountain of Sue,⁴ except that here white waves of snow were breaking, and it made Genji long for a quiet, easygoing companion, even if she were not exceptionally profound or insightful.

The gate his carriage was to pass through was not open, so he sent someone to find the gatekeeper. Presently, a peculiar old man appeared, accompanied by a

woman who may have been his daughter or granddaughter—it was hard to judge her age. Her robe, which was heavily stained with soot, stood out in stark contrast to the snow. She looked chilled to the bone and was carrying a strange-looking box wrapped up in her sleeves. The box contained a few dying embers. When the old man had trouble unlocking the gate, she went over to try to help, but it stubbornly refused to budge. Genji's escorts also went over to help, and they finally managed to get it open. Genji composed a verse:

*This morning, while watching the snow
Fall on an old man's hoary head
My sleeves grow as damp as his hair*

He remembered the poem by Bai Juyi expressing sympathy for peasants in the winter, and so he recited a line from it: "The young lack clothing, the old cannot stay warm."⁵

The figure of the Princess came back to him—her nose flushed red, looking frozen in her fur jacket—and he smiled. When the time came to tell Tō no Chūjō about that nose, what in the world would he compare it to? His brother-in-law was always checking up on him, and were he to catch sight of him at this moment, Genji knew he would never hear the end of it.

Had the Princess been a woman of ordinary rank, or if there had been nothing special about her, Genji would naturally have put her out of his thoughts, ending their relationship and letting some other man care for her. But now that he had managed to get a clear look at her, he felt sorry for her misfortune and decided that he would always visit her with a sincere attitude, and not treat her frivolously. He provided her with silk, twill and padded cotton robes in place of her sable fur, and he gave her various items that were to be worn by her older ladies-in-waiting. He treated everyone, people of both high and low station, including the old gatekeeper, with great kindness. The Princess gave no indication that she found his solicitude shameful, which was a relief to Genji, who decided that he would look after her. He even took care of private matters that he normally would not have dealt with for fear of giving offense.

Occasionally he would recall the young wife of the Vice Governor of Iyo.

That night I saw her relaxing and playing Go with her stepdaughter, my lady of the molted cicada shell possessed a modesty and grace that more than made up for her ugly profile. She was not at all disappointing, and I had a hard time giving her up. Is the Princess to be considered in any way inferior? Truly, it's just as the Warden asserted that rainy night: a woman's worth is not a matter of rank or even of looks. The Vice Governor's wife was so damnably proper and

reserved, she defeated me in the end.

The year was coming to a close. Taifu called on Genji at his quarters in the palace. He always felt relaxed around her, even when she was combing and fixing his hair, because there was no sexual tension between them. He was used to bantering playfully with her or calling on her for some service or errand, and she would drop in on him when there was something she had to tell him, even if he had not summoned her.

“I have something strange I must tell you about, but I’ve been wracking my brain over how to broach the subject.”

She was smiling, but because she stumbled over her words and couldn’t bring herself to say what was on her mind, Genji had to prod her.

“Well, what is it? You have nothing to conceal from me.”

“How could I ever hide anything from you?” she said. “If this were a personal problem, I would tell your gracious lordship right away. This, however, is a little hard for me to talk about.”

She was so hesitant that Genji began to get testy: “Are you up to your old tricks again, trying to lead me on?”

“It’s a letter from the Princess.”

Taifu pulled it out and presented it to Genji.

“That’s all this is about? Why so reluctant to show it to me?”

The moment he took it from her, she could feel her chest constrict. The letter had been written on rustic Michinoku paper—thick, white and crinkled—heavily perfumed with incense. The characters were all solid and symmetrical.

*These Chinese robes I wear as you wear on me
With the chill touch of your cruel heart
Their hems soaked ...*

He had not the slightest idea what she meant. As he tilted his head in puzzlement, trying to figure out the poem, Taifu placed an old-fashioned, ponderous-looking clothing box on top of the cloth in which it had been wrapped and presented it to him.

“I don’t know how you can look at this without thinking it’s hideous, but she sent it to you with the express purpose that you were to wear it for New Year’s Day. I knew it would hurt her feelings if I said anything, and now it’s too late to take it back. I considered hiding it away, but that would have gone against my mistress’s wishes. So ... would you please look at it?”

“How could I have ever endured your concealing this magnificent treasure from me? To one like myself for whom ‘there is no one to wrap her sleeves with

mine,’ her gracious consideration fills my heart with joy.”⁶

Genji couldn’t bring himself to say anything more.

What a shockingly bad attempt at a poem! It can’t be helped, he thought. *She probably wrote it by herself and put all her effort into it. Jijū should have corrected her verse, but for some reason didn’t this time. And obviously there was no writing instructor to help her with her brushstrokes.*

He imagined how she must have looked, laboring over the composition, and he had to at least grant that it was a gracious thing for her to do. Seeing his smile, Taifu blushed, knowing what he really thought in spite of his words. The box contained a singlet, which, though a fashionable pale scarlet hue, was lackluster and unforgivably old-fashioned in style. There was also a lined winter robe, which, though it should have had different hues for the inner and outer layers, was the same color all over! Everything about it was inferior. This was all too outrageous, and so he spread open her letter and began scribbling on the edge of the paper, as if he were casually practicing his writing skills. Taifu couldn’t resist sneaking a peek at his words from the side, and she saw this poem:

*This color suits me not and now I wonder
Why have I let my sleeves touch the safflower
Plighted my troth to Suetsumuhana*

“It looked like a flower of deep hue, but ...”

Taifu no Myōbu assumed there had to be good reason for his criticism, and the more she thought about it, she suspected that his dissatisfaction must have stemmed from his having occasionally caught a glimpse of the Princess in the moonlight.

*Why else would he compare her to the safflower? He must have seen her nose!*⁷

She felt sorry for the Princess, though she had to admit she admired the wit displayed by his poem. She responded:

*The hue of a robe dyed by a single flower
May seem faint to someone who has touched it but once ...
Do not make light of it nor disparage its name*

“How worrisome this all is!”

She was speaking in a knowing, experienced manner, as if to herself.

Her poem wasn’t especially accomplished, but it made Genji rueful all the

same: *If only my Safflower were capable of producing even something as pedestrian as this.* He suddenly felt anxious for the Princess when he considered her social status, for he was worried that he might damage her reputation.

Just then some guests arrived, so he whispered to Taifu, “Let’s get this out of sight! A woman sending robes to a man? Normal people just don’t do things like this.”

Extremely embarrassed, Taifu no Myōbu withdrew from his chambers, lamenting to herself: *Why did I show this to him? He must think I’m a clueless bumpkin.*

The following day Taifu was in service at the Emperor’s private residence in the Seiryōden. Genji peeked in on her at the attendants’ waiting room on the west side.

“Here,” he said, nonchalantly tossing a letter in to her. “It’s my reply to yesterday’s message. It was a real strain on me to come up with something to say.”

The women there were all burning with curiosity, wondering what was going on. Genji strolled out, playfully singing snatches from some popular songs: “Just like the color of the plum … I abandon the maiden of the mountains of Mikasa …”

Taifu appreciated his wicked references, which managed to link not only red noses and flowers but also Mikasa, where maidens served the deity of the Kasuga Shrine, and Hitachi, the province where the Kasuga deity originated.

The women, who weren’t in on the secret, pressed her for an explanation: “What’s up with him? What’s so amusing?”

“Oh, it’s nothing,” she told them. “Perhaps he happened to catch sight of a nose on a cold, frosty morning that matched the light scarlet of a certain person’s silk robe. It was mean and cheeky of him to sing those lines.”

“We can’t stand your secrecy. There’s not one of us here who has a ruddy nose. Perhaps he was referring to Sakon no Taifu or to Higo no Uneme.”

The women gossiped among themselves without understanding the real situation.

When Genji’s letter was delivered to the Hitachi Princess, her ladies-in-waiting all gathered round and looked at it admiringly.

*The nights we spend apart accumulate
Like layers of robes that come between us ...
Now you send a robe, another layer*

Written in an informal hand on white paper, it was altogether dazzling.

As dusk approached on the eve of the New Year, Taifu presented the Princess with the same clothing box she had sent to Genji. Various robes, which had been presented to Genji by others, were tucked inside—a robe of a red and purple weave and a lined robe with a russet outer layer and an inner layer of mountain rose yellow. It was obvious that Genji did not care for the color combination of the Princess's earlier gift, but the older attendants missed his point.

"The crimson robe you sent was proper and dignified, not at all inferior to these." They added, "Your poem conveyed your feelings clearly and logically. His reply is a mere interesting trifle."

The composition of her poem had been a trying task for the Princess, so she copied it down and put it away.

After observing the first three days of the New Year, the court was bustling as noisy preparations and rehearsals were undertaken for the annual rite of singing, dancing and parading around the palace, which was to be held on the fourteenth day of the month. This festival, which is no longer held in our day, was usually performed by the women at court, but this particular year the celebration was an *otokotōka*, performed by court gentlemen of both high and low ranks.⁸

With all the gaiety around him, Genji couldn't help being sensitive to the feelings of the Princess, who must have been lonely, so on the evening of the seventh day, the day of the Inspection of the Blue Horses,⁹ he took leave of his father and, after pretending to go straight off to his own chambers in the palace, went to call on her late that night. Her residence was showing more signs of life than usual and seemed a bit more normal. Even the Princess appeared to exude a more relaxed and pliant air.

What has happened here? he thought. *How nice it would be if she has changed and made herself over a little.*

The following morning Genji made a point of intentionally resting leisurely with her until the sun rose. At that moment he stood and stepped outside the curtains. He pushed open the hinged double doors in the corner on the east side of the room. The veranda running along the main facade was in disrepair, missing part of its roof, and so when he opened the doors, sunlight streamed directly into the sleeping quarters. Because the sunlight was reflecting off the thin coating of snow on the ground, he could see the interior quite distinctly. The Princess had moved out a little from the back of the room and was watching as Genji put on his winter robe. As she lay lounging on her side, the shape of her head and her thick hair, which was spilling all around her, created an aura of elegant beauty. Hoping that he might see a change for the better in her with the coming of the New Year, he started to raise the shutter.

At that moment he recalled how put off he had been when he had glimpsed

her face that earlier time. Feeling a twinge of pity, he decided he did not want a repeat of that experience, and so he opened the shutter only partially, pushing an armrest over to prop it open. He then began to straighten up his sidelocks. A hopelessly dated Chinese-style grooming box with four legs and ornate combs and mirror stand had been set out for him. For some reason, when Genji saw it he was touched that she would have a man's grooming set, however old-fashioned it might be. There was something chic and amusing about the set, and he noticed as well that the style of her attire today was more or less in keeping with the times, since she was wearing the robes he had sent her. Though he did not inspect her appearance all that closely, he did think that her outer robe, which had a striking design on it, was an odd misstep, out of place with her other garments.

"Perhaps you will let me hear your voice a little this year? As the poet Sosei put it: 'One awaits the first calls of the bush warbler with the coming of spring.'¹⁰ So I wait, longing for a change in you."

Her voice trembling, she at last answered him, reciting a few words from an old poem: "'In spring, when birds are twittering in concert ...'"¹¹

Genji was puzzled, since the poem is a trite complaint about growing old during a season when all things are renewed. Her response didn't seem quite right for the occasion, but Genji smiled all the same.

"That's the spirit," he said. "Now that we've passed another year, you're showing signs of improving with age."

He got up to leave, quietly intoning a poem by Ariwara no Narihira: "In a forgetful moment, it all seems a dream ... never did I imagine I would make my way through the snow to call upon you."¹²

She remained in her reclining posture as she watched him leave. He took a quick, sidelong glance at her. *Suetsumuhana*, his Princess Safflower, was covering her mouth, but her lustrous nose was as red as the dye derived from her namesake. He couldn't help thinking how unfortunate it was that she had to be so ugly.

Arriving at his residence in Nijō, he found Murasaki looking adorable, and he realized that—in her case at least—red wasn't all that bad a color. In fact, because she was young, it suited her perfectly. She wore a plush double-layered long robe of plain white lined with scarlet, and her innocent mannerisms were utterly captivating to him. Her old-fashioned grandmother had apparently been a strong influence, for Murasaki had not yet blackened her teeth. Nonetheless, because Genji had ordered her to be made up a little, her eyebrows, though not yet completely plucked, were more clearly defined, creating a pure, fresh beauty. He asked himself, with a deeply sincere heart, why he should be so preoccupied

with the affairs of this evanescent world and not pay more attention to this young lady, who was so precious to him. They began to play, as they always did, with her court dolls.

Murasaki was drawing pictures and coloring them. She would dash off sketches of anything she found interesting. Genji added a drawing as well. He drew a woman with very long hair and then colored her nose red. As he looked over his own work, he found it rather unpleasant, even though it was just a drawing. He glanced at his own reflection in a mirror stand. He looked dashing, of course, but then he tried daubing his own nose with some powdered rouge and looked again. Even a face as handsome as his was hard to look at when it had a red nose. Murasaki looked at him and laughed merrily.

“And if my nose were permanently red, how would you like it?” he asked her.

“Why, I’d hate it, of course,” she answered nervously, worried that the rouge might leave him with a ruddy nose forever.

Genji pretended to wipe it off, but then exclaimed, “Oh no, it won’t go white again! What have I done to myself? Whatever will my father say?”

He spoke so seriously that Murasaki came over to wipe the red off his nose.

“Don’t put black paint over the red,” he told her, “or I’ll end up like that scoundrel Heichū who used water to make fake tears and impress the ladies with his sensitivity—that is, until his jealous wife caught wind of what he was up to and secretly poured ink into his water. I could at least put up with a red nose!”

And so on they joked, looking every bit like a charming pair of siblings.

The day was clear, warm and bright, and the treetops, obscured in the early spring mist, seemed to be waiting impatiently for the moment when they would blossom forth at last. The plum trees in particular were already filling out and were on the point of bursting into bloom. A red plum growing next to the covered stairs that led down from the main entrance into the garden had bloomed exceptionally early, its flowers already tinged a faint red.

*These spreading branches of plum stir longings ...
Yet for some reason their scarlet blossoms
Are, like red noses, repulsive to me*

“Why should that be?” Genji sighed, feeling disgruntled by the paradox.
I wonder what became of all of his ladies in the end?

¹ The name Prince Hitachi is derived from his titular appointment as Governor of Hitachi. Like many such

appointments, his governorship was a sinecure and he never actually went to reside in the province. Taifu's father, a member of the imperial clan, is probably a relative of Prince Hitachi and uses the villa as his family home.

2 Bai Juyi, *Hakushi monjū* 2565.

3 *Kokinshū* 1037 (Anonymous): "If my plea is in vain, at least tell me you reject me. Why are things so uncertain when it comes to love?"

4 *Gosenshū* 683 (Tosa): "Are my sleeves like the famed pine mountain of Sue ... every day waves from the sky break over it."

5 Bai Juyi, *Hakushi monjū* 76.

6 *Man'yōshū* 2325 (Anonymous): "The snow drifts down today, but there is no one to wrap her sleeves with mine."

7 Genji plays on the homophone *hana*, which when spoken could mean either "flower" or "nose." The word for safflower, *suetsumuhana*, literally means "a flower [*hana*] picked or harvested [*tsumu*] by its tip [*sue*]," which is how the flowers were harvested for use in making red dyes.

8 When women performed this particular celebration, it was called *onnadōka*. The ritual was suspended at the palace in 983 and thus no longer performed during the time Murasaki Shikibu was writing.

9 *Aouma no sechie* was a festival and banquet where twenty-one horses were paraded before the emperor to bring good fortune. Until the mid-tenth century (to the reign of Emperor Murakami, 946–67), the horses were black (or bluish-black) roans, but by Murasaki Shikibu's time white horses were used.

10 *Shūishū* 5.

11 *Kokinshū* 28 (Anonymous): "In spring, when birds are twittering in concert, though all things are renewed, I continue to grow old."

12 *Kokinshū* 970.

VII

Momiji no ga

An Imperial Celebration of Autumn Foliage

THE PROCESSION to the Suzaku Palace was set to take place sometime after the tenth day of the tenth month. Because it promised to be an unusually lavish event, the imperial consorts and ladies, who were not permitted to leave the palace, complained bitterly that they would not be able to see it. His Majesty was also disappointed that Fujitsubo would not be able to view the procession, and so he had the musicians and dancers perform a dress rehearsal in front of his living quarters in the Seiryōden.

Genji, a Captain in the Palace Guard, performed a dance called “Waves of the Blue Sea.” His partner was Tō no Chūjō, who, as son of the Minister of the Left, was unquestionably superior to other men in terms of his looks and training. Performing next to Genji, however, he seemed like some nondescript tree deep in the mountains growing beside a cherry in full bloom. As the bright slanting rays of the setting sun shone down on them, the music swelled and the performance reached its climax. Genji was carefully following the prescribed form of the dance, but his movements and expressiveness were without peer. The music paused and he recited the accompanying verse in Chinese by Ono no Takamura in a voice as sweet and ethereal as the cry of the Buddha’s heavenly Kalavínska bird. The Emperor was so moved by the performance that he brushed away a tear, while all the upper-ranking courtiers and princes were weeping. At the conclusion of Genji’s recitation, the lively music, which had paused for him, started up again. Genji had twirled the sleeves of his robe around his arms at the very end of the verse, and he was now readjusting them, his face flushed, looking even more radiant than usual.

As auspiciously splendid as Genji’s dance had been, the Kokiden Consort found it strangely disturbing and remarked, “His looks are enough to captivate

the gods in the heavens. It seems weirdly unpleasant.”

The younger women deplored her unkind words.

Fujitsubo might have enjoyed viewing the dance more had it not been for the terrible guilt she felt at having received the Emperor’s gracious gift of ordering this rehearsal for her benefit. To make matters worse, she had to watch a dance performed by the very man with whom she had conducted her outrageous affair. The whole thing seemed like a dream to her. That evening she was in service to the Emperor in his chambers.

“Waves of the Blue Sea” had swept everything before it at the rehearsal that day.

“What did you think of it?” His Majesty asked Fujitsubo. She struggled to answer, but managed to stammer out, “It was certainly a special performance.”

“Genji’s partner did not look bad either,” the Emperor continued. “When it comes to form and gesture, good breeding will out. Professional dancers, those who have some reputation, are no doubt skillful, but they cannot display the same natural, unaffected beauty and grace that we saw today. The two men performed so magnificently, I have to admit I’m worried that when they dance under the autumn foliage on the day of the procession, it might be a bit of a letdown. But never mind ... I so wanted you to see the performance that I had them prepare for it.”

The following morning Genji sent a note to Fujitsubo:

“How did I look yesterday? As I danced, my heart was being torn apart by an unrequited love such as the world has never known.”

*I should never have danced in your presence
With thoughts so troubled ... did you understand
When, in wild abandon, I twirled my sleeves*

“I feel uncertain before your grace.”

Unable to shake the captivating sight of his face and elegant dancing figure, Fujitsubo could not very well pretend she had not seen his note, and so she replied:

*Chinese dancers conceived the “Waves of the Blue Sea”
Twirling their sleeves so long ago and far away ...
But your every gesture touched me here and now*

“My heart is overflowing.”

Genji had not expected a reply, and so he was ecstatic. Smiling, he thought

that her words, which displayed knowledge of ancient dance and foreign courts, showed she had already acquired the dignity expected of a future Empress. He unrolled the letter and pored over it as if it were some treasured sutra.

On the day of the procession the princes of the blood and all members of the court participated. Genji's older half brother, the Crown Prince, accompanied the Emperor. As custom demanded, two boats were rowed around the lake at the site of the performance. One boat, adorned with the head of a dragon, held performers playing Chinese court music, while the other boat, adorned with the head of a blue heron, carried performers playing Korean court music.¹ There were many varieties of Chinese and Korean dance, and the sound of musical instruments and drums reverberated in all directions. Genji had looked so spectacular at the rehearsal the previous evening that the Emperor's old fears that his son might be fated to die young were revived, and he had sutras read for Genji at various temples around the capital to ward off evil. Everyone at the court who heard about this was sympathetic and thought it a reasonable precaution—everyone, that is, except the Kokiden Consort, mother of the Crown Prince, who spitefully remarked: "Isn't this really taking things a bit too far?"

The Emperor had gathered and selected the most distinguished players from among courtiers of both high and low rank to serve as the flutists and drummers who would accompany "Waves of the Blue Sea." He had the performers divided into sides—those playing Chinese music on the left, those playing Korean music on the right. He then chose two Consultants from the Council of State, men who also served as the directors of the Left and Right Gate Guards, to conduct the Chinese and Korean music respectively. Prior to this performance each aristocratic house had sought out the most skilled dance instructors and secluded themselves away to practice under their tutelage.

The intermittent soughing of the wind in the pines mingled with the indescribably polished sound of forty musicians playing in the shade of tall trees in autumn foliage. Truly it sounded like a breeze blowing down from the deepest mountains, and amidst the multihued leaves that had fallen all around, the dazzling performance of "Waves of the Blue Sea" was sublime. The autumn leaves that had adorned Genji's headdress at the outset had dropped off as the dance proceeded. Having lost a little of its luster, the headdress was now suffering in comparison with Genji's lambent face. So the Consultant who was conducting the musicians of the Left plucked some of the chrysanthemums that had been placed in front of the Emperor and inserted them into the headdress.

As the day drew to a close, a chill evening drizzle began to fall, as if the scene had moved the very sky itself. The color of the chrysanthemums now adorning Genji's spectacular figure had faded slightly with the frost, and their beauty was

beyond the power of words to describe. Genji himself was putting all his skill into his performance, dancing in a way that would never be equaled again. As he executed the final movements, retracing his steps just before he exited with a flourish, it seemed that an unearthly chill coursed through all of the spectators. Lower-class people were also watching from the shade of craggy rocks, or from beneath the leaves falling from the mountain trees, and though one would hardly have imagined that they had the sensitivity to appreciate the performance, they were able to dimly recognize the sadness of transient beauty and wept accordingly.

The Fourth Prince, the Emperor's son by the Shōkyōden Consort, was still a boy. Nonetheless, his performance of "Dance of the Autumn Wind" proved to be the most spectacular event after Genji's dance. Because those two performances were so dazzling, everything that followed seemed bland by comparison, which put a damper on the whole affair.

That evening, both Genji and Tō no Chūjō were promoted—Genji to the senior third rank, which was rather an extraordinary rise given his previous status, and Tō no Chūjō to the lower division of the senior fourth rank, which was also an unusual rise. Other high-ranking courtiers had reason to rejoice as well, since those who deserved promotions received them. Since they had all benefited from Genji's success—his own rise having helped pull everyone up with him—it makes one curious to know just what virtue from a previous life now endowed him with the qualities that drew everyone's admiring eyes and caused hearts to be joyful.

At around the time of the procession Fujitsubo left the court and withdrew to her own residence. As always, Genji sought out every opportunity to see her, and consequently he was subjected to complaints from the Minister of the Left's household that he never visited his wife. Moreover, he learned that his wife was more distressed than usual because one of her attendants had reported to her that Genji had plucked a certain "wild grass"—meaning his little Murasaki—and that "he was keeping her in his villa at Nijō."

It's natural she would feel upset, Genji thought, since she knows nothing at all about the situation or how young Murasaki is. Even so, why can't she just tell me how she feels and vent her resentments like a normal woman? I could then speak without reserve, tell her all the things I feel in my heart and put her mind at ease. But no, she has to be so damnably suspicious all the time. It's no wonder I find myself conducting these illicit affairs.

Still, he had to admit that there were no flaws in his wife's appearance or manners that made him feel dissatisfied. And even though she did not understand his feelings for her, she was the first woman he had known, and so he

could not help but regard her with special tenderness. He was sure that over time her attitude toward him would change and she would come to understand. After all, he had faith that, given her gentle and serious nature, she would naturally come around to him. The feelings he had for her were special and different from those he had for other women.

Murasaki was now comfortable with Genji. Possessed of both a virtuous character and attractive looks, she would innocently follow after Genji, clinging to him. For the moment, he was inclined not to give the people in his residence too much information about her, and he kept her in a separate wing of the villa, which he had done up in a lavish manner. He would visit her mornings and evenings, instructing her in all manner of things, copying out books for her to emulate in her writing practice. It made him feel as though he had taken in a daughter from some aristocratic household. He gave special care to setting up the household office and choosing the staff to serve her, so that she would never have cause for worry or complaint. Apart from Koremitsu, Genji kept everyone else in the dark about this woman he was treating so solicitously. Her father, Prince Hyōbu, had been unable to discover what had happened to her.

Murasaki would often reflect on the past, and she missed her grandmother terribly. For that reason Genji would try to divert her whenever he was at Nijō, and he even spent the night with her on occasion. Yet he was busy traveling here and there, visiting his many other women and going out during the evening, and so there were times when she would call after him and tell him how she ached to be with him. He found her unbearably sweet at those moments. Whenever he returned from two or three days of service at the palace, or from a visit with his wife at Sanjō, she would always look depressed. He found this distressing, and because he sometimes felt as though he were caring for a motherless child, he was no longer comfortable going out on his nighttime escapades. Upon hearing how well Genji was caring for the girl, the bishop at Kitayama was relieved and happy, even though he still considered the arrangement abnormal. Each time he conducted a memorial service for his sister, the late nun, Genji never failed to provide him with solemn, elaborate offerings.

Genji very much wanted to find out how Fujitsubo was doing. She had withdrawn to her own villa on Sanjō Avenue, and so he called on her there. He was met by several of her ladies-in-waiting—Ōmyōbu, Chūnagon and Nakatsukasa—and it bothered him that they acted so formally, clearly treating him as if he were a stranger. He stayed calm, keeping his feelings to himself as he exchanged pleasantries and court gossip with the women. Just then the Minister of War, Prince Hyōbu, arrived. When he learned that Genji was there as well, he granted him an audience. The Prince's elegant looks and bearing

bespoke his high breeding, and Genji found his softly erotic, seductive manner so appealing that he imagined that the Prince would be a very alluring partner were he a woman. What's more, because the Prince was the older brother of Fujitsubo and the father of Murasaki, Genji felt a surge of intimacy with the man, speaking to him in a relaxed, warmly familiar way. Noticing that Genji was kindly opening up to him more than usual, the Prince found him quite enchanting. Unaware that Genji was now his son-in-law, he had a similar fantasy, imagining what Genji would be like as a woman.

Being Fujitsubo's older brother, he had the right to go in behind her curtains to speak to her when evening came. Genji was jealous of him, recalling the times when, as a little boy, he would be permitted to accompany his father behind Fujitsubo's curtains and address her face-to-face with no intermediaries. When he thought of the pain their separation caused him, he could hardly stand it.

"Though I should visit you more often," Genji said, "I normally don't have any reason to come here, so naturally I have neglected to stay in touch. Still, it would make me happy if you would send word should you ever need me to take care of something."

His manner was serious and he made no pretense of showing the usual charming warmth as he left Fujitsubo's residence. Ōmyōbu had been useless to Genji in arranging a meeting with Fujitsubo, and it was clear that Fujitsubo now regretted more than ever the karmic destiny that had brought them together. In the face of her mistress's coldhearted attitude, Ōmyōbu felt so ashamed, so at a loss, that as the days went by she found she was no longer able to help Genji in any way. Mutually lost in their unending torment, Fujitsubo and Genji realized how evanescent their bond had been.

Murasaki's nurse, Shōnagon, observed the wonderful though completely unexpected rapport that had developed between Genji and her young mistress and was convinced that their relationship was a blessing from the Buddha, to whom the old nun had constantly prayed and made hopeful offerings. Yet Shōnagon continued to be assailed with doubts about Murasaki's future.

Genji's wife is a woman of unquestionably high status and breeding, and he is involved with a number of other women as well. Surely when the girl comes of age someone will cause problems for her, will they not?

It was only because Genji seemed so devoted to Murasaki that Shōnagon felt she could trust him.

Murasaki was told that three months was an appropriately long period to wear robes of mourning for her grandmother, and so she put them away at the end of the twelfth month, just in time for the New Year. Having known no parent other than her grandmother, she was influenced by the old nun's tastes and continued

to wear modest robes of plain crimson, purple or yellow. In spite of these preferences, she was lovely—indeed, it could even be said that she was rather chic.

On the morning of the first day of the New Year, Genji peeked in on Murasaki's quarters on his way to court to attend the ceremony offering congratulations to the Emperor.

"Your change of attire makes you look more grown up than usual," he laughed, exuding a dazzlingly gentle and affectionate appeal.

Before he knew it, Murasaki was absorbed in arranging her Hina court dolls, setting out various accessories on a series of three-foot-long shelves and spreading the little dollhouses that had been made for her all around the room until it was overflowing with her playthings.

"That Inuki!" Murasaki grumbled. "Last night during the demon purification ritual, she was following the exorcist and got so excited by his mask and lance that she broke this. I've been trying to fix it."

Clearly she regarded this as a major crisis.

"She really is inconsiderate, isn't she?" Genji responded. "I'll have it repaired for you. You just remember that there is no crying or pouting today—it would bring bad luck."

His dashing looks, together with the grand size of his retinue, made his departure for court seem so ceremonious that the women attendants at his residence came out onto the veranda to see him off. Murasaki also stepped outside to watch him leave, then went back inside and dressed up her Genji doll to match the attire he was wearing to the palace.

"I hope you'll start acting a little more mature this year," Shōnagon scolded her charge. "Here you are, already past your tenth birthday, and you're still playing with these dolls. It just won't do. You have a husband now, and you really must start behaving more like a proper wife and looking more like a lady for him. You still can't stand for me to fix up your hair."

Shōnagon scolded Murasaki in order to shame the girl for always being so absorbed in her playthings. But the effect of her admonition was to make Murasaki finally understand her circumstances for the first time.

So he's my husband, is he? The attendants here all have husbands, but they're really ugly. Mine, on the other hand, is a dashing, handsome young man.

It may have been true that she was still attached to her playthings, but her newfound awareness of her relationship with Genji signaled that she was now a year older. The people who served at Genji's mansion had found her childish behavior, which could be quite pronounced at times, awkward and inappropriate, and yet they had no idea that she was in fact a wife in name only, for Genji had

not had sex with her even though they slept together.

Following the ceremony at the palace, Genji went to the Minister of the Left's residence on Sanjō. His wife, as always, presented an icy, beautiful perfection that emitted not the slightest hint of demureness or endearing warmth. He felt uncomfortable in her presence.

"How happy it would make me if—this year, at least—you could change your attitude toward me so that we might have a little more normal relationship as husband and wife."

She, however, was in no mood for reconciliation. Having heard that he had set up another woman at his villa—evidently someone of great value worthy of his special attentions—she could not help feeling depressed and awkward around him. She struggled to act nonchalant, to pretend that she knew nothing about what was going on, and she found it hard, whenever he was intimate and unreserved, to remain stubborn and refuse to open up to him. Indeed, the gentle way she always responded had a special quality that set her apart from other women. Four years older than her husband, she was, at the age of twenty-two, now in her prime, and this was a problem for Genji because her flawless beauty and manners made him lose confidence when he was in her presence. There was nothing lacking in her, no flaws that he could detect anyway, and when he reflected on his own behavior he had to admit that her resentment was justified, since it was caused by those inexcusable affairs his fickle heart led him to pursue. After all, she was the only daughter of the Minister of the Left—a man who of all the nobles of similar rank had the weightiest reputation at court—and Princess Ōmiya, who was the younger sister of the Emperor. The greatest care had been lavished on his wife's upbringing, which meant that her sense of pride was exceptionally strong and that she would take even the most trivial slight or indiscretion as a serious and unpleasant injustice. This in turn made Genji resentful, wondering why it was that he was the one who always had to humor her pride. And so their hearts remained distant and unreconciled.

The Minister of the Left was disturbed by his son-in-law's fickleness, and yet whenever he saw Genji he would always forget his resentments, treat him deferentially, and do everything in his power to look after him. The following morning, as Genji was dressing and preparing to leave for court, the Minister dropped by to look in on him. Now that Genji had been promoted to the third rank, his father-in-law had ordered the servants to bring in a famous obi sash made of lacquered leather studded with gemstones that would show at the back of his robe and indicate his new status. He also had his servants straighten up the back of Genji's robes and was so particular about the choice of shoes it was almost as if he were putting them on Genji's feet himself. His solicitous behavior

was somehow both touching and a little pathetic.

"Should I wear this on official occasions?" Genji asked. "The privy banquet will be held soon, on the Day of the Rat ... is it the twenty-first or the twenty-third this year? Either way, I have to practice my Chinese verse for the event."

"I have better obi for events like that," the Minister sniffed. "This one just struck me as rather unusual-looking. That's all."

He pressed Genji to put it on, being almost religiously devoted to looking after him any way he could. Genji's appearances at Sanjō were certainly infrequent, but just to see this remarkable young man coming and going from his residence was a source of great joy and pride for the Minister.

Genji set off to make his New Year's round of visits. He did not have all that many places to call on: he paid his respects to the Emperor, to the Crown Prince, and to the former Emperor.² He also dropped by Fujitsubo's villa on Sanjō.

"He's more remarkable than ever today. It's thrilling to realize that as he grows older, he's becoming even more handsome."

Fujitsubo's women were praising him up and down, and so she could not resist peeking through the gaps between her curtains to steal a glimpse. Immediately she was lost in her own troubled thoughts.

Her pregnancy was a source of considerable anxiety. Would she survive it? She was supposed to have given birth during the twelfth month, but here it was the New Year already. Her attendants were in a state of anticipation, thinking that surely their mistress would give birth sometime this month. Even His Majesty was having preparations made at court. But the first month passed with no indication that the birth was imminent, and rumors were now flying around court society. Was this delay the fault of some malign spirit? Such gossip made Fujitsubo feel even more miserable, for just as she was frightened by the possibility that she might die in childbirth, she was just as deathly afraid that the secret of her affair with Genji would be exposed. Her mental anguish eventually made her physically ill.

It was now increasingly clear to Genji that he was the father, and so to ward off evil spirits he discreetly ordered esoteric rites to be performed at various temples around the capital. He fully understood the evanescent nature of the world, but he could not help torturing himself with the thought that his relationship with Fujitsubo would end too soon and come to naught.

Then, sometime after the tenth of the second month, Fujitsubo gave birth to a Prince. The Emperor and all the people at Fujitsubo's residence in Sanjō were relieved and excited by this auspicious event, even if Genji and Fujitsubo were not. His Majesty had been praying for her to live a long life, yet now the thought of a long life was a burden to Fujitsubo, given all her cares. When rumors

reached her that the Kokiden Consort had tried to curse her by praying for an unlucky birth, she realized that news of her death would have served as a source of amusement to some at the court. She drew strength and determination from that thought, and gradually her health and spirits improved.

The Emperor's desire to see the child as quickly as possible was boundless. Genji, who was keeping his feelings to himself, was also extremely anxious to see the child to confirm whether or not he was the father. Choosing a time when he knew there would be no one else around, he paid a visit to Fujitsubo.

"My father is eagerly waiting to see the child," Genji told her. "I thought I might take a look at the baby and then report to the Emperor."

"That's out of the question ... he was just born and is not presentable in his present condition."

Fujitsubo quite reasonably refused, for there was no denying that the baby bore a shocking, almost otherworldly resemblance to Genji—a living reproduction. Suffering from the demon of guilty conscience, Fujitsubo was convinced that anyone who saw the baby would instantly recognize the sin that she had committed with Genji. Since sanctimonious people were always eager to discover and condemn even the most minor of faults, what would they say about this? What would happen to her reputation? Dwelling on such possibilities, Fujitsubo was deeply distressed, body and soul.

Genji would meet with Ōmyōbu once in a while, doing his utmost through her to plead his case with Fujitsubo. Not surprisingly, his pleas fell on deaf ears.

He continually pestered her about the young Prince until finally Ōmyōbu told him, "Why must you insist on seeing him? You'll have your chance in due time." Even though she tried to reassure him, she seemed as troubled at heart as he.

Constrained by his surroundings, Genji could not speak frankly with Ōmyōbu.

"Will there ever be a time or conditions when I can speak directly to Fujitsubo, without having to rely on an intermediary?"

It was heartbreaking to see him on the verge of tears.

*What karmic bond forged in a former life
Destined us to meet again in this world
Only to find ourselves always apart*

"I cannot understand these things," he lamented.

Having witnessed the torments her lady was experiencing, Ōmyōbu found it impossible, in the face of Genji's sadness, to curtly refuse him. She recalled the poem by Fujiwara no Kanesuke that evoked the "hearts of parents lost in

darkness,”³ and replied:

*The one looking on the child suffers regret
The one who cannot see the child suffers grief ...
Must all parents wander lost in such darkness*

“How sad that the birth of this child should keep your hearts from finding peace,” she murmured.

With no means of communicating with Fujitsubo, Genji returned to his residence. Troubled by the possibility of idle chatter at the court, Fujitsubo told Ōmyōbu that she could no longer tolerate her leading Genji here; that was how she really felt. Wary that Ōmyōbu might bring Genji to her, she was no longer able to trust her lady-in-waiting as she had in the past, and stopped treating her as a confidante. She continued to treat Ōmyōbu kindly, so that no one would suspect anything was amiss, but there were times now when she appeared displeased by Ōmyōbu’s conduct. Aware that she was estranged from Fujitsubo, Ōmyōbu felt sad that things had not turned out as she had expected.

The baby was taken to the palace during the fourth month. Larger than usual for a baby that age, the boy was already able to turn himself over. His face bore a striking resemblance to Genji’s, but it never occurred to the Emperor that Genji might be the child’s true father. Rather, he assumed that people who shared unparalleled good looks would naturally resemble one another. His affection and care for the baby were boundless. His affection for Genji also knew no limits, but the lack of recognition and support for Genji among the high-ranking courtiers had made it impossible for him to install Genji in the line of succession. He constantly regretted his decision, and it was a source of pain for him to now look on his son’s mature bearing and features and have to think what a waste it was to have removed Genji from the imperial line. It was thus a source of consolation for him that Fujitsubo, the fourth daughter of the previous Emperor and a woman of unimpeachable status, had given him a son who possessed the same radiant beauty as Genji. He considered the child a flawless jewel and lavished the greatest care on him—attention that, for Fujitsubo, merely added to the guilt and anxiety filling her heart.

One day, when Genji decided to pass the time performing music in Fujitsubo’s quarters at the palace, as was his wont, His Majesty joined them. He was carrying the infant Prince in his arms.

“I have many, many children,” he remarked to Genji, “but you were the only one I was able to be with all day from the time you were this one’s age. Maybe it’s because this little one brings those days back to me that I think he looks so

much like you. I wonder if all children look the same when they are very young?"

It was obvious that the Emperor found the child adorable.

Genji felt himself blanch. Fear, shame, elation, pity ... all these emotions overwhelmed him to the point that he felt he was going to cry. The baby prattled and smiled, and looked almost preternaturally cute. Was it all that unreasonable or vain of Genji to think—assuming he really did resemble this child during his own infancy—that he himself must indeed have been incredibly precious? Fujitsubo could hardly stand to be there—she was so mortified that she began to perspire. At the same time Genji, who had been so eager to see the child, was unnerved in his presence, and the turmoil in his heart forced him to withdraw from Fujitsubo's quarters.

Genji returned to his Nijō villa, and after resting for a while to calm his nerves, he decided that he should pay a visit to his wife. Pinks were brightly blooming amidst the vibrant green of the plantings that seemed to cover the entire front garden, so he had one of them picked and sent to Ōmyōbu. There were so many things he had to write to Fujitsubo:

*Though I see you in him, the one so like this little pink,
I cannot tell you so, and thus my heart knows no comfort
My tears heavier than the dew on this flower's petals⁴*

"No matter how much I long to see the little one bloom, because our relationship was not meant to last in this vain world ..."⁵

His note must have been delivered at an opportune moment. Ōmyōbu showed it to Fujitsubo and encouraged her lady to write back:

"You really should answer him, even if, as Ōshikōchi no Mitsune put it, your response is no more than a mote of dust on the petal of a pink."⁶

Fujitsubo was deeply moved and sent back a simple poem written in the faintest of hands. Her characters looked as though she had pulled the brush away before finishing each stroke:

*Though I may consider it the source
Of the heavy dew that soaks my sleeves
How could I discard this precious pink*

Ōmyōbu was overjoyed that her lady had responded, and she promptly delivered the poem to Genji. At that moment Genji was lying languidly, absently lost in melancholy thoughts, sure that his poem had been in vain and that no reply

would be coming back to him. But as soon as he saw Ōmyōbu, his heart beat wildly and he was so happy he wept.

Feeling that it was not good for him to just lie around and mope, absorbed in his cares, he decided he should go to the west hall to see the one person who was his solace. His hair was mussed, he had carelessly tossed on a loose robe, and he was playing a sweetly nostalgic air on his flute when he looked in on Murasaki. She was reclining on an armrest, her elegant appearance calling to mind the image of pinks drenched in dew—perfectly lovely and cute. As enchanting as she looked, it turned out that she was nursing a new grudge against Genji. This was unusual for her, but there she was, sitting with her back toward him, annoyed that he had not come to see her sooner even though he had been in his quarters for some time. Genji moved over to the veranda at the edge of the room and knelt there.

“Come over here,” Genji coaxed her, but she ignored him and continued to sulk.

She expressed her resentment toward him by murmuring lines from the *Man'yōshū*: “Is he like seaweed on the shore at high tide, which I long for so much, but see so seldom?”⁷

She covered her mouth with the sleeve of her robe, apparently embarrassed at her own precociousness. Her gesture made her all the more adorable.

“Ahh, that’s unfortunate ... you’ve already learned how to complain just like an adult. Well, then, let me remind you of this poem: ‘Were I to see you morning and night, just as often as the divers at Ise see the seaweed, would I not grow weary of you?’”⁸

He summoned a servant and had her bring in a thirteen-string koto for Murasaki to play.

“This instrument is difficult because the second string closest to you is thin and easily broken,” Genji told her. He then tuned the instrument to a lower key to reduce the tension on the strings. He played a few short songs to test the tuning and then pushed the koto over in front of her. Murasaki found it impossible to continue sulking, and she played beautifully. She was still so small that she had to raise herself up and stretch to reach the strings, but he found the movements of her left hand, as she pressed the strings to make the instrument reverberate, delightfully refined. He instructed her by accompanying her on the flute. She had a quick memory and could pick up even the difficult keys in just one try. Clever, possessed of a sweet disposition, she was everything he had long hoped for in a woman. The court song “Hosoroguseri” may have had a peculiar sounding title, but as Genji focused on playing it in his inimitable style, Murasaki accompanied him, skillfully keeping time to the rhythm even though

she was so young.

Oil lamps were brought in and they passed the time poring over paintings together. He had mentioned earlier to his retinue that he intended to go out, and so a member of his escort began to cough to signal it was time to go.

“It looks like it might rain ...” one of his guards remarked, and Murasaki at once became sullen and depressed, as she always did when Genji was about to leave.

She pushed the paintings away and lay facedown. Genji found her so endearing that he began to stroke her hair, which was spilling abundantly over her shoulders.

“I suppose you miss me when I’m away?” he asked her.

She nodded.

“I hate going even a single day without seeing you,” Genji tried to comfort her, adding, “But since you are still a child, I have to ask you to be patient a little while longer and to not worry so. I have such fond feelings for you, but I must also consider the feelings of others and not offend those who may be jealous and resentful. Those women are troublesome, and that’s why, for the present at least, I have to visit them as I do. When you are grown up I won’t have to go out any more, but for now I want to avoid the harm that might arise as a result of the jealousy of other women so that we might live a long life and be together as much as we desire.”

Murasaki felt embarrassed to hear Genji speak about their relationship in such detail, and so she did not answer him. She drew herself up onto Genji’s lap and went to sleep.

Genji felt terribly sorry for her and told his attendants, “I’ll not be going out this evening.” They all rose and withdrew, and he had his dinner, which he normally ate in his own rooms, brought to her quarters instead.

He woke Murasaki and told her, “I’m not going out after all.”

Her mood at once improved and she got up. They ate together, but Murasaki was still anxious about his plans and merely picked at her food.

“If you’re not going out,” she suggested, “then why not sleep here tonight?”

If it is so difficult for us to part at a moment like this, Genji mused, then how much more difficult will it be when we have to part on the inevitable road of death?

He was spending so much time at his own residence at Nijō that of course it did not take much time for gossip about his behavior to reach the ears of people who would then report it to Genji’s father-in-law, the Minister of the Left. The women at the Minister’s residence gossiped among themselves:

“Who could she be?”

“It’s shocking, really shocking behavior.”

“We’ve never heard anything about her before … who she is, where’s she from?”

“If she’s always with him like that, then she can’t possibly be anyone of high status or elegant breeding.”

“She’s probably just some passing fancy of his, someone who caught his eye at court. And now he’s treating her like she’s some sort of treasure.”

“That may be, but he’s hiding her away, isn’t he? He must be afraid that people will criticize her.”

“I’ve heard she’s no more than a child, immature and spoiled, with no sense of discretion or judgment whatsoever.”

When these rumors reached the court, His Majesty confronted Genji.

“I find it truly unfortunate that you have given the Minister of the Left cause to grieve. And he has good reason to be unhappy. After all, the Minister has graciously looked after your interests from the time you were a little boy and couldn’t look after yourself. You’re not a child any more, and at your age you ought to know better than to treat him so cavalierly. Why are you being so callous?”

Overwhelmed by his father’s criticism, Genji looked stricken and did not answer, which led the Emperor to surmise that his son was not satisfied with his wife—a most regrettable state of affairs.

“Be that as it may,” he continued, “I have neither heard nor seen anything to suggest that you are promiscuous or that you have done anything untoward with other women here or outside the court. It makes me wonder if you aren’t secretly keeping a woman who would cause other people to resent you like this.”

His Majesty was getting on in years, but his own interest in women had hardly faded. Indeed, he especially enjoyed dalliances with attractive, intelligent women, even if they were lower-ranking servants who served him food and drink or who tended to various menial tasks. This may explain why his reign was noted for the large number of lovely attendants on call. Whenever Genji would chat or flirt with one of these women, it was hard for them to keep their distance. Yet for some strange reason he never seemed especially inclined to indulge himself in sexual dalliances with them. Was it because they were so familiar to him? The women would occasionally tease him about his lack of sexual interest, but he would always respond in a most considerate manner, never stepping out of line or acting rashly—behavior that led some people to consider him far too serious, even lacking somehow.

There was an older Assistant Handmaid named Naishi no suke⁹ who at the time was nearing sixty. In most respects she was of upstanding character, gifted,

well-bred and highly regarded, but when it came to affairs with men she tended, in spite of her age, to be outrageously flirtatious and utterly frivolous. Genji was curious as to how a woman so obviously past her prime could be so lustful, but when he casually bantered and teased with her, he was shocked that she did not think his proposition strange or inappropriate. At the same time, he found her odd and intriguing enough to exchange notes and poems, though in the end, worried that people might find out that he was flirting with a woman as old as she, he coldly broke off with her. Naishi took this rather hard.

One day, when Naishi had finished combing and arranging the Emperor's hair, His Majesty called for a wardrobe maid and withdrew to change his clothing. Genji now found himself alone with Naishi, who was more neatly done up than usual. Her own figure and hair were elegant-looking and her style of dress was lively and voluptuous, so much so that Genji found it a little distasteful that a woman so old would dress in such an inappropriately youthful manner. Even so, he could not let the moment pass without trying to discern what she could be thinking. He tugged on the hem of her robe to get her attention, and she turned toward him. Her face was hidden behind a folding fan that was spread open like a bat's wing and adorned in a most unusual manner with writing and sketches all over it. She coquettishly cast sidelong glances at him. Her eyelids were sunken and drooping darkly, and strands of her wild, straggly hair were showing from behind the fan, which was so bright and gaudy he couldn't help but think that it had been made with a much younger woman in mind.

They exchanged their fans, as was the custom, and that gave Genji the chance to examine hers more closely. The red-lacquered ground of the paper was so dark and shiny that it reflected the light and he could see his own face. Over the lacquered ground a forest of tall trees had been rendered in gold-powder ink.

Along the side of the drawing, written in a style of brushwork that, while not unaccomplished, was nevertheless out of date, was a snatch from a *Kokinshū* poem: "Because the grasses beneath the forest of Ōaraki have withered ..." Genji couldn't help smiling as he recalled the rest of the poem: "... no colts come here to graze, no man comes to harvest."¹⁰

What a queer choice of poems, he thought. *She definitely has some bizarre proclivities.*

"It appears the forest is a summer home," Genji remarked.

He was of course alluding to Minamoto no Saneakira's poem: "Hearing the cries of the cuckoos, it appears they have made the forest of Ōaraki their summer home."¹¹

I imagine that quite a few men, just like those cuckoos, have paid a visit to

Naishi's nest, Genji speculated as he chatted with her about this and that.

Try as he might, however, Genji felt uncomfortable with her, since they were so poorly matched, and he was afraid someone would see them. Naishi, on the other hand, did not seem to be concerned in the least.

*Visit and I shall cut grasses
Though they be withered lower leaves
That you may feed your trusted colt*

Her tone of voice was just a bit too seductive. Genji replied:

*Parting the bamboo grass to go to you
Would I not risk the censure of others
Since so many colts know that forest shade*

“This is too complicated,” he added, standing up to leave.

She tried to hold him back, saying, “I have never been treated so badly before! To suffer the shame of abandonment at my age!” She was now crying and unusually overwrought.

Genji pulled himself free, and as he was leaving he said, “I shall call on you at some point. Though I keep you in my heart, it is difficult to visit you when others might see ...”

Genji was no doubt thinking of the anonymous poem from the *Shūishū*: “I keep you in my heart even though you grow old as the pillars of the Nagara Bridge in Tsu no kuni.”¹²

She must have caught his drift, for she tried in vain to detain him, bitterly exclaiming in an excessively forceful voice, “How bitter it is to be an aging pillar!”

Meanwhile the Emperor, who had finished changing his attire, had been observing the whole sordid scene through a gap in the sliding doors. He found the very idea of such an unlikely match so peculiar and amusing that he remarked, “My ladies are always complaining he is too serious, that he has no interest in them. That may be true, but it looks like he couldn’t pass up Dame Granny.”

He laughed, which embarrassed Naishi, but she held her tongue and said nothing. Perhaps she was thinking that Genji was such a stunningly handsome and respectable man that people might gossip about her, noting that at least she was the kind of woman who wanted to have an affair with a man like that, even if nothing actually came of her desire.

As it turned out, women at the court did gossip about her and Genji, remarking what a queer affair it was; and when Tō no Chūjō heard about it, he thought, *I explore every nook and cranny when it comes to romantic liaisons, but it never occurred to me to pursue someone like that old lady.* Now he wanted to see for himself what it would be like to have an affair with a woman who, despite her age, still burned with amorous passions, and so he began calling on her.

Tō no Chūjō was no ordinary man. Since he was far more handsome than most, Naishi thought of him as a consolation for the treatment she had received at the hands of his coldhearted companion—though she continued to lust after Genji. Her desires were incorrigible, but because she and Tō no Chūjō conducted their affair in secret, Genji never found out. Whenever Naishi saw Genji she would immediately give vent to her resentment, and he would feel sorry for her, since she was so old, and tell himself he ought to comfort her. Yet the very idea of an affair with her gave him pause. And so a considerable amount of time passed until one chill, rainy evening, while Genji was loitering around the palace near the Unmeiden, where the sacred mirror was kept,¹³ he heard Naishi strumming her *biwa* lute in a most pleasing manner. She was especially gifted at the instrument and had even performed with male virtuosos in the presence of the Emperor. She was feeling sad and regretful that night, and her playing sounded truly sublime. She was singing the *saibara* “Yamashiro” in a lovely voice, and Genji could make out the line: “A melon farmer in Koma wants me for his bride, but what should I do?”

This displeased Genji a little, since the song told of a woman who gave up on her true love to go to another man. He stopped and listened closely to her song, which made him think of the moving poem by Bai Juyi, “Hearing a Maiden Sing at Night,” that told of a Chinese maiden who lived long ago in the province of Ezhou. She would sing a beautiful lament for her lover, weeping pearl-like tears, but was unable to respond when anyone asked her what was wrong.¹⁴ Just then Naishi stopped singing and playing, apparently sunk in her own sad, turbulent feelings. Genji moved closer to her chambers, singing a different *saibara*, “The Hut in the Eastern Provinces.” Naishi recognized his song, which tells of a man who visits a woman on a stormy night and, soaked by the rain, asks to be let in. She picked up the song at the point of the woman’s response: “Push open the door and come in.” She was obviously not possessed of a normal sensibility.

*Is no rain-drenched visitor waiting for me
Outside this hut in the Eastern Provinces
Soaked through by the storm and my sorrowful tears*

Genji was a little put off by her complaints. He believed that there was no reason why he alone should accept the blame for her sorrows. He replied:

*Your other lovers make it hard to visit
So I hesitate to be more intimate
Waiting beneath the eaves of that eastern hut*

For a moment he considered just walking on past her quarters, but then he felt that such treatment might be too harsh. He took up her invitation to come in, and they chatted cordially for a while. The atmosphere of the place gave him a strange sensation.

Now, Tō no Chūjō was constantly irritated at the fact that he was always being censured for his amorous escapades while Genji maintained his pretense of being such an earnest and sober young man, acting like nothing was going on when in fact all the time he was secretly visiting lots of different women. He had been plotting for some time to find a way to expose Genji's affairs, and so it delighted him to no end when he learned about the old woman. He hoped to catch Genji unawares and give him a little shock. He wanted to throw Genji off balance and tell him, "There, have you learned your lesson?"

A chill wind was blowing, and as the night deepened it seemed that Genji and Naishi might be napping a little. Tō no Chūjō stealthily slipped inside her chambers, and when he did, Genji, who did not feel at ease sleeping there, heard him. He never imagined that it might be Tō no Chūjō. He assumed instead it was the Director of the Office of Palace Repairs, a man of advanced years who evidently was carrying a torch for Naishi. Fearing it would be very awkward to be discovered in this compromising situation by the Director, Genji picked up his cloak and retreated behind a folding screen.

"What a nuisance," he told Naishi. "I'm leaving now. I should have known better. I saw a spider spinning away when I got here, but I never believed that spiders could foretell a lover's visit—until now! You're terrible for tricking me into coming here!"

Tō no Chūjō had to struggle to keep from laughing. He moved next to the folding screen that Genji had spread open and folded it shut again with a series of loud thuds, raising a frightful racket. Naishi may have been elderly, but she was a lustful woman with an elegant air about her that suggested she knew the ways of the world. She had encountered this sort of distressingly awkward situation many times and was used to handling it, even though her heart was fluttering in panic. Not knowing what this man intended to do to Genji, she abruptly seized Tō no Chūjō despite her trembling and feelings of helplessness.

Unaware of who was threatening him, Genji wanted to make his escape, but he hesitated, imagining what his own retreating figure would look like—robes undone, cap propped precariously on his head—and decided to stay where he was. Tō no Chūjō, not wanting to reveal his identity, said nothing. He feigned a fierce countenance and drew his long sword. Naishi turned toward him clasping her hands in supplication and imploring, “Oh no, my dearest, my dearest!”

At this point Tō no Chūjō was on the verge of bursting with laughter, for no matter how youthful and alluring Naishi tried to make herself, she was still an old woman of fifty-seven or fifty-eight, and the way she looked now—with her makeup, her clothes disheveled, her sleepy face distraught as she stood nervously shaking between two strapping, handsome young men—was completely incongruous. Tō no Chūjō’s performance in putting up a fearsome display and posing as another man was so over the top that Genji eventually caught on and realized that it was someone who knew him and was putting him on.

Genji felt like a complete fool. As soon as he had an inkling that it might be his brother-in-law, he began to find the situation absurd. He reached out, grabbed the arm brandishing the sword, and pinched it hard. Tō no Chūjō yelped in pain, but he couldn’t resist any more and broke down laughing.

“You really must be out of your mind, playing such a capricious prank! Enough is enough, already. Let me put on my cloak.” But Tō no Chūjō suddenly snatched it away and wouldn’t give it back.

“Two can play at that game,” said Genji, who immediately began pulling on and undoing Tō no Chūjō’s obi sash. While the two of them were struggling, both trying not to be undressed by the other, they tugged on Genji’s cloak so hard that the seam of one of the sleeves ripped.

*The fickle heart you try so hard to hide
Will now be exposed by this tattered cloak
That we have together ripped asunder*

“Wear this over your robes, and your true character will be known to all!”

Genji retorted:

*You of all people ought to know you cannot hide
A fickle heart beneath a flimsy summer robe ...
A capricious friend indeed who startles me thus*

Their taunting was good-natured, and neither held a grudge as they left in high

spirits. Their disheveled clothing made them a matching pair.

When he stretched out to sleep, Genji couldn't help feeling annoyed at having been caught like that. Naishi was shocked at what had transpired, and the following morning had an obi sash and a pair of trousers returned to Genji, along with a note:

*What good will it do to say how much I resent
The furor the two of you caused, brandishing swords
Then retreating, waves that never return to shore*

"My river of tears has run dry, exposing the riverbed."

She was alluding to an anonymous poem that expresses a woman's complaint about her lover's departure.¹⁵ This really irritated Genji, who considered her poem extremely cheeky. All the same, he did feel sorry for her, and it was natural for her to feel put out by what had transpired the previous evening. He replied:

*It is not the violent wave
But you the welcoming seashore
I blame for my unsettled heart*

The obi, which belonged to Tō no Chūjō, was darker in color than Genji's cloak. He inspected the cloak again and found one of the sleeves missing the long piece of cloth that was supposed to hang beneath it.

An absolute disgrace. Those who give themselves over to reckless affairs are often made to look foolish. He told himself that he would have to be more careful and be on his best behavior.

Tō no Chūjō was at his billet, where he had been waiting to go on duty for the Palace Guard. He wrapped up the piece of cloth from Genji's sleeve and returned it with a note saying "You should have this sewn on right away."

Genji was irritated. *How did he manage to get hold of this? If I hadn't managed to grab his obi, he would have had the upper hand.*

*Worried that you might blame me for having taken
This light blue sash and for ruining your affair
Here it is ... neither gazed upon nor touched by me*

He wrapped it in paper of matching color and sent it on.

Tō no Chūjō immediately shot back:

*If true that my obi and the lady
Have been taken, then reproach you I shall
For having put an end to the affair*

“You shall not escape me.”

They both arrived after midday for service at the court. Genji was quiet and reserved, which Tō no Chūjō found amusing. That particular day they were kept busy with a variety of official matters, but they couldn’t help smiling at the sight of each other going about their business in a solemn and dignified manner.

During a brief interlude when they were alone, Tō no Chūjō came up to Genji and said, “Have you learned your lesson about keeping secrets?” He was glancing at Genji from the corners of his eyes in a most disagreeable way.

“And just what would I have to hide?” Genji replied. “The person I feel most sorry for is the man who was standing outside waiting but went home empty-handed. Truly, ‘gossip is as thick as the seaweed that fishermen gather,’¹⁶ ... How tiresome is the way of the world!”

The two of them swore a secret vow to be as discreet as the Isayagawa—the river whose name tells men to “say nothing”¹⁷—and never speak of the events of the previous night.

After that day, Tō no Chūjō never let pass an opportunity to tease Genji about the incident. This merely reminded Genji that the fault for all this lay with that difficult old woman. Even now Naishi continued to complain to him in that voluptuous manner of hers, which he found a little hard to bear. For his part, Tō no Chūjō never mentioned the affair to his younger sister. He calculated that it would be better to keep it to himself and hold the information until a time when he might need it.

Genji’s half brothers, princes of the blood who had been born to mothers of the highest rank, all treated him with special deference and respect because they knew that their father favored him over everyone else. Tō no Chūjō, however, would not bow before Genji but would challenge him at every turn. In his own mind he believed that he was in no way inferior. He and his sister had been born of the same parents—their father was the Emperor’s most trusted minister and their mother was an imperial princess, the younger sister of His Majesty. Genji’s father, of course, was the Emperor, while Tō no Chūjō held commoner status the same as his father. But he had been raised with the greatest care and possessed all the requisite virtues of character. He was the ideal courtier in all respects, in no way lacking. The romantic escapades of these two competitive young men were thus extraordinary and eccentric, but to speak of those things further would push the bounds of good taste.

In the seventh month Fujitsubo, as mother of a Crown Prince, became Empress. Genji was appointed as one of the Eight Consultants to the Council of State. The time was nearing when the Emperor would begin to make preparations for his own abdication, and for some time he had been considering naming Fujitsubo's son an heir to the throne. However, he was concerned there would be no one at court who would support or sponsor the child. Fujitsubo's brothers, including Prince Hyōbu, were all princes of the blood and ineligible to take over the reins of power and administer the government bureaucracy. Thus, the Emperor had wanted to make sure Fujitsubo's position was secure and unassailable by making her Empress and confirming her son's authority and claim to the throne.

Naturally this decision rankled the Kokiden Consort.

The Emperor tried to calm her, saying, "Your son, the Crown Prince, will soon begin his reign, and so you may rest assured that your position as Imperial Mother will never be in question."

Still, as expected, some of the less temperate people at court remarked that it would be difficult for His Majesty to just abandon the mother of the Crown Prince—a woman who had been with him for more than twenty years—and elevate another woman over her.

The night Fujitsubo formally entered the palace as Empress for the first time, Genji, in his role as Consultant, was in her retinue. Among all the other imperial consorts, Fujitsubo, herself the daughter of an Emperor, shone resplendently like a radiant jewel. She was a woman who had received His Majesty's unparalleled love and devotion, and so the courtiers all treated her with special honor and deference. It goes without saying that Genji was inconsolable, his heart in torment as he watched her being borne to the palace in her palanquin, knowing she was being carried farther and farther away from him to a place he could not go. He felt so restless he couldn't stand it. With sorrow penetrating the very core of his being, he muttered a poem to himself:

*I wander blind in the darkness of my heart
As I watch you now ascend to the palace
To a realm beyond the clouds, beyond my reach*

As the days and months went by and the little Prince grew, it became harder to distinguish him from Genji; the two of them looked so alike. This was unbearable to Fujitsubo, but it seemed that no one else noticed the resemblance. In truth, how could there be someone born into this world with looks equal to Genji's if that person did not share the same ideal features? Thus the

resemblance seemed natural, and the courtiers thought the two were like the sun and the moon traversing the heavens.

¹ The term for these boats is *ryōtōgekisu* (“dragon head,” “blue heron head”). In China it referred to a single boat with a carving of a dragon’s head at the prow and one of a blue heron’s head at the stern, but in Japan it referred to a pair of boats. I have translated *geki* as “blue heron” even though the bird is not really a heron at all, but a mythical high-flying sea bird (also identified as the yih bird or roc) believed to bring good luck and protection to seafarers. Because the design was thought to resemble a blue heron, I have opted to translate it as such.

² This is the first time the former emperor (i.e., the sovereign who ruled just before Genji’s father) has been mentioned directly in the text. It has been speculated that this former emperor is either Genji’s paternal grandfather or his paternal uncle.

³ *Gosenshū* 1102. Kanesuke’s poem is alluded to in the *Kiritsubo* chapter.

⁴ *Shinkokinshū* 1494 (Princess Keishi): “Though I see his resemblance to this precious little pink, what am I to do? For gazing endlessly at it brings no comfort.”

⁵ *Gosenshū* 199 (Anonymous): “O how I long to see it bloom … the pink planted in the hedgerow growing round my abode.”

⁶ *Kokinshū* 167 (Ōshikōchi no Mitsune): “I long to stop even a mote of dust from settling on this bed of pinks that have come into bloom since first you and I lay on our bed.” Mitsune’s poem is alluded to in the *Hahakigi* chapter.

⁷ *Man'yōshū* 1398 (Sakanoue no Iratsume).

⁸ *Kokinshū* 683 (Anonymous).

⁹ The term *Naishi no suke* means “Assistant Handmaid,” but since a woman at this time at the court was often referred to by her position or by the position occupied by her father (or other male member of her family), I have decided to simply use the title for the name of this character as I have done elsewhere in the text.

¹⁰ *Kokinshū* 892 (Anonymous).

¹¹ *Saneakira shū* 28.

¹² *Shūishū* 864.

¹³ The mirror, which is associated with the Sun Goddess, is one of the three imperial regalia, along with the sword and the curved jewel, that symbolize the legitimacy of the imperial house.

¹⁴ Bai Juyi, *Hakushi monjū* 498.

¹⁵ *Shinchokusen* 937 (Anonymous): “After we parted, I felt as though the sad river of my tears had run dry, exposing the riverbed.”

¹⁶ *Kokin rokujō* 2108 (Anonymous): “Gossip is as thick as the seaweed that fishermen gather … how tiresome it is, the way of the world!”

¹⁷ *Kokinshū* 1108 (unnamed Emperor): “The Isayagawa River that flows beneath the sacred Toko mountain tells us ‘say nothing’—*isaya*—do not mention my name.”

VIII

Hana no en

A Banquet Celebrating Cherry Blossoms

JUST AFTER the twentieth day of the second month, the Emperor sponsored a banquet to celebrate the viewing of the cherry blossoms in the courtyard on the south side of the Shishinden. His Majesty had screens set up for his newly installed Empress, Fujitsubo, who sat to his right, and for the Crown Prince, who sat on his left. The Kokiden Consort was always upset whenever the Emperor bestowed such attention on Fujitsubo, but she could not let the opportunity to view the blossoms pass, and so she attended the banquet.

The day was bright and clear, and the appearance of the sky and the chirping of the birds created a delightful atmosphere. Members of the court would appear before the Emperor, beginning in order of rank with imperial princes and high-ranking officials and continuing on down to officials who were trained in composing verse in Chinese. Each man would take from a stand a slip of paper on which a Chinese character had been written, and then before withdrawing from the imperial presence state his family name and official title and announce which Chinese character he had drawn. They would later use that character as a rhyming word at the end of a line of a poem in Chinese.

Genji, who was now a Consultant in the Council of State, announced in his incomparable voice, "I have drawn the character for *Spring*."

Tō no Chūjō was next in line, and though he couldn't help but worry how he looked compared to Genji, he presented a pleasantly calm demeanor, and his manner of speaking was dignified and exceptionally refined. Many of the men who followed these two were nervous and overawed. It was an age when both the Emperor and the Crown Prince were learned and wise. There were also many courtiers of lower rank who excelled at poetry in Chinese, but because they were not normally permitted in the imperial presence, they felt uneasy. It was nerve-

wracking just to stand up and cross the wide courtyard, which was made bright by the clear weather and His Majesty's radiance, and it seemed excruciating for some to perform the simple task of taking a Chinese character and using it as a rhyming word in a poem. The older scholars, with their distinctive garb, looked to be quite at ease with the formalities of the event, and His Majesty was amused and moved as he took in the various types of people in attendance.

Needless to say, the Emperor had carefully arranged for musical accompaniment. As the sun gradually set, the Chinese *bugaku* song "Spring Warbler" proved to be a perfectly intriguing choice for the occasion. The Crown Prince, recalling Genji's performance beneath the autumn foliage, now presented him with a cap decorated with cherry blossoms and urged him to dance again. Genji could not very well refuse, so he rose and calmly danced the section of the song in which he waved his sleeves about. It was incomparably beautiful. The Minister of the Left wept, forgetting his resentment over the wayward behavior of his son-in-law.

"What about you, Tō no Chūjō?" His Majesty prodded. "It's getting late."

Whereupon Tō no Chūjō danced "Garden with Willows and Flowers." His performance was a little more precise and formal than Genji's. Evidently he had calculated beforehand that he would likely be asked to dance, and so he had prepared for the moment. The Emperor was greatly pleased and rewarded him with a robe—a gesture that everyone in attendance thought most unusual. Officials all performed their dances without regard to order or rank, and as the night wore on, it was difficult to distinguish between those who were skilled and those who weren't. When it came time to present the poems, the official lector had a difficult time even getting through Genji's—people constantly interrupted his reading, making a big fuss and lavishly praising every line. Even the scholars were impressed. Since the Emperor considered his favored son to be the radiant center on such occasions, it was hardly a surprise that he too was moved by the verse. Fujitsubo gazed out at Genji, thinking how strange it was that the Kokiden Consort should hate him so ... and reflecting on why her own feelings of attraction to him should cause her such bitter remorse.

*If I could judge him with objective eyes
View his looks the way I view these blossoms
Would I feel at all constrained or fretful*

Since Fujitsubo composed this privately, I wonder how it came to be known to the court?

The banquet finally ended late at night. The high-ranking officials had each

withdrawn one by one, and both Fujitsubo and the Crown Prince had retired. The hall was deserted and quiet in the bright, lovely moonlight. Feeling intoxicated, Genji found it hard to abandon such a glorious scene, but with the ladies-in-waiting to the Emperor all resting now, no one would be expecting anything out of the ordinary to occur, and if his timing was right he might be able to make a secret, albeit outrageous, visit to Fujitsubo's quarters.

When he reached the door to Ōmyōbu's room, however, he was disappointed to find it closed tight. Sighing, he lamented his bad luck. Feeling that he did not want the night to end just yet, he moved down the narrow passageway toward the Kokiden and found the third door open. Because the Consort and her ladies-in-waiting had retired immediately after the banquet to her rooms in the Emperor's quarters in the Seiryōden, the Kokiden was deserted. A hinged door in the interior of the chambers stood open, but there was no sign of anyone. Before quietly slipping inside and peeking through the open door, Genji noted that such carelessness as this often led to improper and reckless affairs. Everyone should have been asleep by now, but just then he heard a lovely, youthful voice; it was not the voice of some ordinary attendant. She was murmuring a line from a poem by Ōe no Chisato: "Nothing compares to this spring evening of a misty moon."¹

She seemed to be moving toward Genji. Delighted, he reached out and took hold of her sleeve. Her reaction told him she was startled.

"What are you doing here? Who are you?"

"Am I really all that terrifying?" Genji murmured.

*That you admire the beauty of a setting moon
Obscured by misty clouds in the depths of the night
Intimates that our bond is not at all obscure*

He gently and quietly swept her up in his arms and carried her back out to the passageway, swinging the door closed behind him. Her shock and dismay at his forward behavior gave her an allure he found irresistibly attractive.

Trembling, she called out, "There's a man here."

Genji, however, was unconcerned. "It won't do you a bit of good to call for someone," he assured her, "since everybody yields to me. So do be quiet."

She recognized Genji by his voice, and that was some comfort to her.

She felt helpless and at a loss, but she didn't want to come off looking cold or stiff either. Genji was quite inebriated—rather unusual for him—and so he could not bear the idea of just letting her go. For her part, the woman was young and compliant, and so of course she did not know how to resist him. As he was

gazing at her, thinking how sweet she was, dawn began to break. He began to feel mildly panicked, and she seemed to be in even greater turmoil, torn by unsettled emotions.

“Tell me your name,” Genji ordered. “Otherwise I will have no way to contact you. You couldn’t possibly want this to be our one and only encounter, could you?”

She replied in verse, her manner of speech both elegant and coquettish:

*Unimportant though I am, if I disappeared
Would you use the pretext that you don't know my name
To keep from crossing grassy plains to visit me*

“You’re right,” Genji said. “My words were ill chosen.”

*Unless I hear your name, how will I know where the dew dwells ...
If I must search for you, winds of gossip will start to blow
Scattering dew on the bamboo grass, separating us*

“Apart from the fact that you might consider me a nuisance, why else would I hold back and not look for you? Unless, of course, you are leading me on?”

Before he could finish speaking with her, they heard the rustle of attendants getting up, and there were signs of people coming and going between the Kokiden and the Emperor’s quarters, preparing for the return of the Consort. There would be real trouble if they were discovered there, so he had no choice but to leave quickly. They hastily exchanged fans as a token of their tryst and as a promise to meet again, even though she had not given him her name.

Because it was the morning after the banquet there were many women in service at the Kirtsubo. Some of them were already awake but, upon seeing Genji return furtively, they pretended to be asleep, all the while whispering among themselves:

“He’s incorrigible ... so eager to pursue these secretive affairs of his.”

Genji entered his room and lay down to rest. He couldn’t sleep, however, with so many thoughts racing through his mind.

What an extraordinary, attractive young woman! Could she be one of the younger sisters of the Kokiden Consort? She certainly doesn't know much about relationships with men yet, so I'd be willing to guess she's the fifth or sixth sister. One of her older sisters is the wife of my younger brother, the Governor General of Kyūshū. And I know that Tō no Chūjō is married, rather unhappily I must say, to the fourth sister. I've heard they're both really good-looking. If only

the woman I met tonight had been one of the older sisters—now that would have been a more intriguing little tryst. I know that the father of these sisters, the Minister of the Right, intends to give his sixth daughter to the Crown Prince. If she's the woman I met tonight, that would be a real pity. How am I going to be able to make inquiries about her? It will be difficult, no doubt, but at least she did indicate she did not want our relationship to end. On the other hand, if she feels that way, then why didn't she tell me how I could get in touch with her?

He was obviously fixated on her, but as these thoughts came to him, he couldn't help compare the Kokiden unfavorably with the incomparable stylishness of Fujitsubo's quarters, which, unfortunately for him, were all the more intriguing because they were off limits.

That day a smaller, less formal banquet was scheduled, so Genji had something to divert him from his concerns. He played the thirteen-string koto for his father, and the event was even more elegant and original than the previous day's celebration. Fujitsubo arrived at His Majesty's side as dawn was breaking. Genji was anxious to learn if his own *Oborozukiyo*—the lady of the misty moon he had met just before dawn yesterday—had left the palace, and so he had his trusted attendants, Yoshikiyo and Koremitsu—men who never let anything slip past their observant eyes— inquire about her. After Genji withdrew from his father's presence, he spoke with the two.

“Some carriages were readied in great secrecy earlier and just left from the north gate of the palace,” they told him. “From what we could see, members of the families of several of His Majesty's ladies-in-waiting were there. We then spotted the brothers of the lady in question—the Lesser Captain of the fourth rank and the Middle Controller of the Right—they were hurrying out, apparently to see her off. She must have been leaving the Kokiden. The other ladies there seemed to be of very high status, for there were three carriages in all.”

Genji was agitated:

How will I ever find out which sister I slept with? What if her father, the Minister of the Right, finds out about the affair? Would he make a big fuss over having me as a son-in-law? After all, I haven't seen enough of the woman yet to be able to make a judgment about her looks and character, and that could be a major problem. At the same time, I would regret not finding out more about her.

Fretting, uncertain, and lost in his thoughts, Genji lay down and stared blankly into space.

His mind wandered to his little Murasaki. It touched him just thinking about how bored she must feel, moping and depressed because he had not visited her for several days. The previous day his “lady of the evening of the misty moon” had presented him with a memento: a tri-fold fan in the cherry-blossom style,

white on one side, dark red with a sketch of a misty moon reflected off the surface of a lake on the other. The sketch was rather undistinguished, but the owner had obviously used the fan frequently, and that made him yearn all the more warmly for her. He couldn't stop thinking about the expression on her face when she spoke the words "crossing grassy plains," and so he wrote a poem on her fan and set it aside:

*Watching the moon fade in the dawn
A feeling I have never known
Seems to obscure my heart as well*

He realized that it had been some time since he had last visited his wife. But he also thought that Murasaki would be having a hard time of it and that he should go and comfort her. In the end he chose to go to his Nijō residence. It seemed that she was growing ever more lovely right before his eyes. She possessed an elegant charm as well as a refined wit and intelligence. He was more determined than ever to make sure that his dream of training her to be flawless, according to his ideals, would come to fruition. At the back of his mind, however, was the nagging concern that because he himself was training her, she would become too accustomed to being around men. He told her about what was going on at court, then practiced the koto with her. She grew despondent, as she always did, when the time came for him to leave. Still, she had grown used to the situation and no longer tried to follow after clinging to him.

When he finally arrived at his father-in-law's residence in Sanjō, his wife, as usual, made no effort to come out to meet him right away. Bored and idle, Genji's thoughts ran to many things, especially the women in his life. He pulled a thirteen-string koto in front of him and began to play and sing the *saibara* "Nuki River": "Pillowed on the ripples of the Nuki River, no nights of blissful sleep have I, for my father keeps my love from me."

The choice of a song about a woman in love was not accidental.

The Minister of the Left dropped in on him, and they chatted about the fascinating events at the recent banquet.

"I'm old enough," the Minister remarked, "to have witnessed the reigns of four emperors, yet the poetry and music and dance of this era are so remarkable that I don't feel I have aged all that much. There are so many masters of the various arts in this age, and you, being so knowledgeable, were able to direct them skillfully. Even an old man like myself felt like he should get up and dance a little."

“Really, I did nothing special to direct them,” Genji replied modestly. “My only responsibility was to find the most skillful masters. Your son’s performance of ‘A Garden of Willows and Flowers’ seemed to me far superior to all the other performances. It will truly be a model for subsequent generations. If only you, my lord, had stepped out in the ever-flourishing spring of your years and performed a dance, it would have brought even greater honor and glory to the age.”

All the Minister’s sons, including the Middle Controller of the Left and Tō no Chūjō, arrived. With their backs to the veranda railings, each one tuned his chosen instrument, and they amused themselves in a most delightful manner.

The lady of the evening of the misty moon, the one Genji thought of as his *Oborozukiyo*, was lost in a sad reverie as she recalled their meeting, which seemed now like a fleeting dream. She was depressed and confused, for her father had decided that she was to be formally presented to the Crown Prince at the palace during the fourth month. Though it was not true that Genji had no plans to see her again, he still did not know which one of the Minister of the Right’s daughters she was. Moreover, it was rather awkward—even distasteful—for him to be involved with someone whose family did not have an especially high opinion of him and wished him ill.

Just after the twentieth day of the third month, the Minister of the Right sponsored an archery tournament attended by many princes and high-ranking officials. He also hosted a banquet, which followed the tournament, to celebrate the wisteria blossoms. The season for viewing the cherry blossoms had already passed its peak, but there were two cherry trees in late, gorgeous flower—perhaps they were imitating the cherry tree of Ise’s poem that “must not bloom until after the blossoms of the other cherries have scattered.”²

The Minister of the Right had had his residence renovated and decorated lavishly for the purpose of holding the rites of initiation into adulthood for his two granddaughters—princesses born to the Kokiden Consort. The ornate, gaudy style of his residence reflected his personal taste, and everything had a modern, up-to-date air. He had invited Genji to the banquet during an audience they had at the palace, but Genji did not show up. The Minister was sorely disappointed, feeling that Genji’s absence robbed the banquet of a little of its luster. He dispatched one of his sons, a Lesser Captain of the fourth rank, with a message:

*If the wisteria blooming here
Were of some more ordinary hue
Why would I bother to send for you*

Genji was at the palace when the message arrived, and so he showed it to his father.

"He seems quite proud of his wisteria," the Emperor remarked, laughing. "Still, he *has* gone to the trouble of sending a messenger for you, so you really should set off at once. After all, his residence is where his granddaughters have been brought up—princesses, I might remind you, who are your half sisters. You can hardly think of his family as having nothing to do with you."

Genji dressed and groomed himself with extra care, so it was late, well after sunset, when he finally arrived at the villa where they were expecting him. He had on an informal, sheer outer cloak of Chinese-style weave in the cherry-blossom pattern, white outer layer with an inner lining of red. Beneath that he wore a formal robe of a lighter shade of reddish-purple. It had a very long train, and this eclectic mix of informal and formal attire, which gave no indication at all of his high rank, suggested a rather cheeky confidence about his status. Moreover, since everyone else was wearing formal robes, his appearance on entering the banquet was so dazzlingly elegant that it truly set him apart. Even the lambent colors of the blossoms were overawed by his radiance, and the interest their beauty held for those in attendance waned accordingly. Genji played the koto masterfully, but as the night deepened he pretended he was not feeling well because he was intoxicated and quietly withdrew from the celebration.

The two granddaughters—the first and third princesses—were in the main hall of the residence. The wisteria was blooming on the east side of the hall, and the lattice shutters had been raised for the viewing. Genji strolled over to the entrance door on that side and sat down right in front of it. The princesses and other ladies were all sitting in the passageway bordering the veranda, and their sleeves were trailing out from beneath their blinds. It was just a bit too showy and theatrical for Genji's taste, reminding him of the New Year poetry recitals held during the middle of the first month. The scene struck him as out of place, given the season and occasion. Once more he was reminded, favorably, of Fujitsubo's quarters, which were more subtle and demure.

"I told them I wasn't feeling well," Genji said, "but they forced me to drink with them anyway, and now I'm in an awful state. Please forgive me, but would you permit me to hide in the shade of the wisteria in the presence of the princesses?"

He thrust aside the blind that blocked the hinged double doors at the southeastern corner of the hall and leaned forward so that just the upper part of his body was inside.

"Well, this is certainly most awkward for us. It's said that those of low status,

such as we, must rely upon their relationships with those who are exalted. However ...”

Judging from what he could see and hear, Genji surmised that the two ladies nearest him were not of the highest rank—but then again, neither of them was ordinary. It was clear they were well-bred and courtly. The flickering haze of incense drifting into the space and the rustling of silk gowns created the impression of a bright and lively welcome, but the setting was lacking in refinement and depth, and it certainly showed a preference for the modern and up-to-date. Because the princesses had been so eager to view the wisteria, the two ladies near him had ceded the spots where the viewing was better and occupied the less desirable corner space near the door. Of course it was utterly improper for him to try to pursue his lady of the evening of the misty moon at such a time and place, but he found the situation delightfully stimulating, and his heart beat faster as he wondered which of the two women near him was his Oborozukiyo.

“I’ve had the misfortune of losing my fan. I wonder if someone might have taken it?” Genji announced, suggestively alluding to the *saibara* “Ishikawa.”

Leaning against a pillar there, he spoke nonchalantly, but with a knowing, intimate voice.

“Might a suspicious-looking man from Korea have taken it?”

The woman who responded had clearly caught Genji’s reference to the song, but she had not fully grasped his true intent. The other lady said nothing; she merely sighed from time to time. Genji moved closer and took her hand through the curtains.

*I wander Mount Irusa unsure where you are
Wondering if I will ever see you again
Not knowing at all where the bow-shaped moon has set*

“Why should I be so lost and confused?” he said, having guessed who she was. This was more than the young woman could bear.

*If your heart is as true as an arrow in flight
If you care for me, then how could you wander lost
Even without a bow-shaped moon to light your way*

It was *her* voice. Genji was overjoyed, but even so ...

¹ This line is from a *kudai waka*, a Japanese poem on topics suggested by quotations from Chinese verse. The poem alluded to here is from a private collection of poems by Ōe no Chisato, but it was included in a *waka* collection (*Shinkokinshū* 55) that postdates *Genji monogatari*. Genji's poem picks up on the language of the original. The word for "evening of a misty moon" is *oborozukiyo*, and it became the traditional name for this young lady, I have chosen to use it for her as well.

² *Kokinshū* 68 (Ise): "The cherry in the mountain village that has no one to gaze upon its flowers must not bloom until after the blossoms of the other cherries have scattered."

IX

Aoi

Leaves of Wild Ginger

THE COURT changed when His Majesty abdicated and the Crown Prince took the throne as Emperor Suzaku. The Kokiden faction, headed by the Minister of the Right, was now in ascendance, and Genji began to feel that everything was more difficult for him. Just before His Majesty stepped down, he had promoted his favored son to Major Captain of the Right—a rise in status that required the Radiant Prince, in keeping with the dignity of his new position, to begin showing more restraint in pursuing his frivolous nightly adventures. The result was that his many lovers began to complain more and more of his heartlessness. Was it in retribution for causing all these lamentations that Genji suffered from what he saw as the unending cruelty of Fujitsubo, who kept her distance from him? Now, more than ever, she served at the side of the Retired Emperor—almost as if she were some low-ranking attendant. This did not sit well with the Kokiden Consort, but she was now Imperial Mother and had to serve exclusively at the palace—an arrangement that was a source of considerable relief to Fujitsubo.

Depending on the occasion, the Retired Emperor would sponsor musical entertainments so lavish and spectacular that they became the talk of court society. He seemed more content now than when he had held power. The only thing lacking for him was Fujitsubo's little son, the new Crown Prince. He yearned to see the boy, who could not be by his side. Having long worried that Fujitsubo's son had no supporters at court, he asked Genji to look after the boy's affairs—a request that was of course awkward for Genji, but one that also made him happy.

At this point I must bring up another, entirely separate matter. At the time Emperor Suzaku ascended the throne, an imperial princess was appointed as the new High Priestess for the Imperial Shrine at Ise. The mother of this princess

was the lady at Rokujō—the woman Genji had long been visiting discreetly—while the father was an imperial prince who had actually been ahead of Suzaku in the line of succession, but who had died before he could take the throne. Because the Princess was appointed High Priestess under these circumstances, the lady at Rokujō, who no longer had any confidence in the reliability of Genji's feelings, was greatly worried about her daughter's future. The girl was, after all, only thirteen and would be alone in Ise. Thus, the lady at Rokujō had for some time been giving serious consideration to leaving the capital herself and accompanying her daughter to the Imperial Shrine. When the Retired Emperor heard about her plans to leave, he was extremely upset and spoke sharply to Genji about the matter.

"Do I need to remind you," he scolded, "that she was the first wife of my late brother and would have been an Imperial Consort? He had special affection for her, but now I hear rumors about how carelessly you treat her, as if she were some ordinary woman. It's pathetic. I look on her daughter, the High Priestess, as one of my own, and so you must put an end to this frivolous behavior—not just for her sake, but for mine as well. If you persist in playing these irresponsible little games, then don't be surprised when your reputation is in ruins."

Genji could not deny that his father was speaking the truth. Thoroughly chastened, he refrained from answering, whereupon the Retired Emperor added, his tone a little softer, "Never do anything to dishonor or shame a woman. Treat them all gently and give them no cause to resent you."

With that admonition ringing in his ears, Genji humbly withdrew from his father's presence, terrified at the thought that a day might come when his father learned the truth about Genji's wildly reckless affair with Fujitsubo.

If his father was lecturing him about it, then obviously gossip about his affair with the lady at Rokujō had spread through the court. His promiscuity had damaged her honor and his own reputation. He could just imagine how terribly she must be suffering, but there was simply no way he could formally acknowledge their relationship. For one thing, the lady herself was embarrassed that at the age of twenty-nine she was having an affair with a man seven years younger. Moreover, she always tried to appear distant and aloof, and so Genji had grown more reserved with her. Now, however, everyone at court, even the Retired Emperor, knew what was going on, and she lamented that Genji's feelings for her were so shallow.

Genji had long been pursuing the daughter of Prince Shikibu—a lady he knew as Asagao, his Princess of the bellflowers. His efforts had so far proven futile, however, and when Princess Asagao heard rumors of his affair, she resolved

never to end up like the lady at Rokujō and refused to give even the most perfunctory of replies to his vain entreaties. Even so, she showed a proper attitude and conducted herself in a way that would give no offense to Genji, and so he continued to consider her a woman of superior qualities.

Needless to say, the household of the Minister of the Left was not amused by Genji's restless disposition, but then again, since he showed no qualms about carrying on so openly, it would have been useless to have complained to him about it. His wife, for one, did not harbor any deep resentment toward him, not least because she was now pregnant and suffering most pitifully not only from morning sickness but also from anxiety over the dangers posed by the coming birth. Genji thought the pregnancy remarkable, and for the first time felt sympathy for his wife. Because everyone was so overjoyed for her, there was a concern that such happiness could invite bad fortune, and so various prayers and rituals of abstinence were commissioned in order to ensure safe delivery for mother and child. With all these things going on, Genji had less and less time to even consider the feelings of his other women. He was especially mindful of the feelings of the lady at Rokujō, but despite his best intentions not to neglect her, his visits practically ceased altogether.

The High Priestess of the Kamo Shrine also stepped down at about that time, and her successor was the third daughter of the Retired Emperor by the Kokiden Consort. This girl was a special favorite of both parents, and it bothered them that unlike her siblings she would have to live isolated from court life. Unfortunately, there were no other princesses appropriate for the position. Although the rituals of investiture were austere, as was customary with Shinto shrines, they would nonetheless be solemn and grand. The Festival of the Kamo Shrine, which was held in the fourth month, was always a major event in the capital; those who accompanied the High Priestess's procession would decorate their carriages and headdresses with heart-shaped leaves of wild ginger.¹ Because this year marked the new Priestess's inaugural procession, many attractions would be added to the public events already scheduled, and the festival, in keeping with the special status of the High Priestess, would be an especially glorious one.

A few days before the start of the Kamo Festival, twelve high-ranking officials were required to attend the Priestess during the procession to her ritual of purification, which took place on the banks of the Kamo River. Given the auspicious nature of the event, only men with honorable prospects and good looks were chosen for this task, and every detail of their appearance was carefully considered—from the color of the trains on their robes and the pattern of their trousers to the choice of horses and saddles. By special order of Emperor

Suzaku, Genji was chosen to participate, and when those who planned to view the procession heard about this decision, they gave extra thought in advance to preparing and positioning their carriages along the route.

The thoroughfare of Ichijō was crammed with carriages and bustling with people. Viewing platforms had been erected at various sites and decorated with great care. Those decorations, together with the sleeves of the court ladies' robes, which trailed out from beneath the blinds set up on the platforms, created their own splendid spectacle.

Genji's wife rarely left her father's residence to go view events like this. Moreover, she had given no thought at all of going to view this particular procession, since she was feeling ill and nervous. Her younger attendants, however, all complained to her.

"What is my lady thinking? How could we ever hope to enjoy the beauty of the procession if we have to sneak off just to take a peak?"

"Ordinary folk, even the lowest woodcutters and hunters who have no connection with anyone in the procession will be there to take in the sights. They'll especially want to catch a glimpse of your husband."

"People from distant provinces will bring their wives and children to take a look. So it's just not fair that we have to miss it!"

Princess Ōmiya, who, as the younger sister of the Retired Emperor, truly understood the importance of such matters, heard these complaints and urged her daughter to go.

"You've been feeling better recently, and your attendants will feel left out and dissatisfied if you don't."

And with that, all the women were suddenly informed, to their joy, that their lady would be going out after all.

Because the sun was already well up, they left without formally preparing the carriages in a manner befitting the status of the Minister's household. By the time they arrived, Ichijō Avenue was already packed with carriages lining both sides of the street, and it was difficult finding a place to park the imposing and dignified vehicles, unhitch the oxen, and set the shafts on their supports. Many noblewomen already had their carriages positioned there, and the male guards escorting Genji's wife decided to clear a space by pushing aside those that had no guardsmen protecting them.

Among the carriages that had been lined up in that space, two of them exuded a special air of refinement—informal in style, with roofs and blinds made of *hinoki* wicker, slightly worn, but adorned with silk curtains. The women inside had obviously intended to remain inconspicuous. The fresh, vibrant colors of the cuffs of their sleeves, the hems of their skirts, and the ends of their singlets all

peeked out coyly from beneath the blinds. The guards escorting Genji's wife were explicitly told not to touch these two carriages and warned, "This is not a carriage you can just push aside as you wish!" Unfortunately, the young men in both parties had been drinking too much, and in the end there was no way to prevent the situation from getting out of control. The older retainers from the Minister's household commanded the young men to desist, but they were unable to stop a fight from breaking out.

The lady at Rokujō, whose daughter would soon go off to serve as the Ise Priestess, had been thinking she might find relief from her tormented feelings about Genji by coming discreetly to view the procession for the Purification Ritual. Her attendants, aware of her desire to remain incognito, did not reveal her identity, but it was obvious to the men accompanying Genji's wife whose carriages they were moving.

"Don't let them talk to us like that," several of the men shouted. "They must think they can still rely on Lord Genji!"

Several of Genji's attendants had been assigned to accompany his wife's party. They all regarded this incident as most regrettable, but it would have been extremely awkward for them to intervene, and so they looked the other way. In the end, the carriages of Genji's wife and her attendants were positioned in the spaces that had been cleared away, and the carriages of the lady at Rokujō had been relegated to a place behind them, where she could neither see nor be seen. She was in an agony of anger and indignation, and now that her identity had been revealed, after having gone to such great lengths to conceal it out of concern that her shameful feelings for Genji might be exposed, there was no limit to the feelings of chagrin and remorse she suffered. Because the stands for her carriage shafts had been broken in the melee, they had to be propped up on the wheel hubs of some unknown carriages next to hers. It must have looked unsightly, and she was mortified, wondering vainly why she had ever decided to come here.

She no longer wanted to view the procession and wished instead to go home, but there was no space to move her carriage. Just then cries rang out from the crowd:

"They're on their way!"

Her resolve weakened, and now she wanted to wait until her cruel lover had passed. She recalled an ancient poem in which the Goddess of Ise asks a man to stop his horse at Sasanokuma to let it drink from the Hinokuma River—all so that she might have the chance to gaze upon him.² Anxious, she wondered if Genji would stop to acknowledge her ... but no, he continued on, coldly passing by without so much as a glance in her direction. The turmoil in her heart was

greater than ever. Genji feigned disinterest in the many carriages that lined the way, even though they were more splendidly decorated than usual, with the hems of robes spilling out from beneath the blinds as though the occupants were in competition with one another. Still, he did occasionally smile and give a sly, sidelong glance at certain carriages, and when he recognized the carriages of his father-in-law, he assumed a solemn expression as he passed. The men in his escort silently bowed to show their deep respect for Genji's wife. The *Rokujō* lady, overwhelmed by this display, which clearly demonstrated the inferiority of her status, could not have felt more wretched.

*How cruel of those chill waters of lustration
To grant but a glimpse of your reflected image
Reminding me all the more of my wretched fate*

She knew it would be disgraceful to weep in front of her women, so she comforted herself with the thought that she would have regretted passing up the opportunity to witness the radiance of his appearance and the beauty of his countenance on such a dazzling occasion.

The high-ranking nobles who accompanied the Kamo Priestess on the procession were superbly decked out in fine robes, each in keeping with his status at court, and attended by magnificent-looking escorts. The appearance of those of the highest rank was especially breathtaking, and yet, as remarkable as they were, they seemed to pale in comparison with Genji's radiance. One of the eight men in his retinue, which had been assembled just for this event, was a man of the sixth rank, a Lesser Captain in the Right Imperial Guard. It was most unusual to assign someone of his status to this kind of duty, but he was so remarkably good-looking that he was chosen anyway. The other men in Genji's escort were also dazzlingly resplendent, and Genji's appearance, which was always esteemed by the court, was so awe-inspiring that the very trees and grasses seemed to bow before him. Normally, it would be considered improper and unsightly for ladies of rank who, for the sake of modesty, wore veils beneath their deep-brimmed hats, or for nuns who had renounced the world to literally fall over one another in an effort to catch a glimpse of him. Today, however, was different, and no one reproved them. Women of the lower classes—their mouths drawn in where they were missing teeth, their hair tucked modestly inside their robes—jostled each other and made fools of themselves, clasping their hands to their foreheads in supplication to Genji. Vulgar men were grinning stupidly from ear to ear, unaware of how ridiculous their faces looked. Daughters of minor provincial officials, who Genji would never so much as glance at, had arrived in

their lavishly decorated carriages, hopelessly preening and posturing because they knew Genji would be passing by. So many amusing things to observe—including the many women who, having been favored by a covert visit from Genji, were now lamenting to themselves that they no longer belonged among the blessed few he favored.

Prince Shikibu, the Minister of Ceremonials, was viewing the procession from one of the platforms, and when he saw Genji, ominous thoughts came to him: *He has matured so, and his appearance is so truly spectacular that I fear he will attract the attention of gods and demons.*

Prince Shikibu's daughter, Princess Asagao, had exchanged many letters with Genji over several years and so she knew his sensibilities were anything but ordinary. Now that she was seeing his beauty for the first time, her heart was deeply moved.

A woman can be touched by a man's sincerity, she told herself, *even if he is rather ordinary-looking. How much more appealing, then, is the sincerity of a man whose looks are as stunning as his?*

Despite these sentiments, she was not inclined to allow her relationship with Genji to become any more familiar or intimate. Her younger attendants were all praising him so much they sounded uncouth, and she found it irritating to listen to them.

When the Kamo Festival proper was held a few days later, no one from the Minister of the Left's residence came out to view it. Genji had been informed of the quarrel between the carriages, and he felt sorry for the lady at Rokujō. He was also offended by his wife's conduct.

"It's a shame," he remarked, "that such a dignified person should show so little sympathy or kindness toward others. She probably never intended for such a thing to happen, and yet her temperament prevents her from even considering the possibility that women who share the kind of relationship she and the lady do should be mutually affectionate and supportive. No wonder her subordinates, who lack judgment and status, acted as outrageously as they did. As for the lady who suffered this insult, she has such a superior upbringing and is so sensitive to any slight that the whole sordid incident must have been terribly unpleasant for her."

Genji felt such pity that he went to Rokujō to visit the lady. She, however, was reluctant to meet him. Her daughter, after all, was still living in the residence while undergoing the rites of purification that would prepare her to serve as the High Priestess at Ise. Branches of the sacred *sakaki* tree³ had been placed at all the corners and gates, and thus the lady did not feel comfortable letting Genji in to see her, since that would run the risk of defilement. Genji thought her

precaution perfectly reasonable, but he still muttered to himself, “Why must things always be like this? Why do women have to flash their horns and quarrel?”

Genji retreated to his own residence at Nijō. On the day of the Kamo Festival he went with Murasaki to view the festivities. After ordering Koremitsu to prepare their carriages, he went over to the west hall.

“Will all your little ladies be going as well?” he teasingly asked, referring to Murasaki’s playmates.

Observing her outfit and makeup, which exuded an exceptionally graceful air, he couldn’t help smiling.

“Very well, then, shall we be going? Let’s go view the festival together.”

He stroked her hair, which looked even more lustrous than usual, and added, “It’s been a while since you’ve had the ends trimmed. Today would be an auspicious time to do it.” He summoned a scholar from the Bureau of Divination and asked him which hours that day would be lucky or unlucky for trimming hair. He then told Murasaki, “Have your little ladies come forth.” He looked them over and found their childish figures delightfully charming. Their hair had been trimmed gorgeously and hung down in sharp relief over the outer trousers of their festive robes ... altogether adorable. “I’ll cut your hair,” Genji said to Murasaki. “It’s really thick, isn’t it? What would become of it if you just let it grow out?” He found trimming her hair a little difficult. “Ladies with very long hair tend to cut the sidelocks that frame their foreheads a little shorter than the rest. I don’t think you would look as attractive without short locks.” When he finished with the trimming, Genji offered the obligatory benediction, expressing the hope that her hair might grow “a thousand fathoms.”

Murasaki’s nurse, Shōnagon, had been watching them, her heart filled with gratitude. Genji composed and recited a verse:

*I shall protect you, watching your hair grow
Like strands of rippling seaweed stretching up
From the thousand-fathomed depths of the sea*

Murasaki chose to write out her reply:

*You swear love as deep as the thousand-fathomed sea
Yet how am I to know that’s true, since you wander
Coming and going like uncertain, restless tides*

Such clever wit, and such youthful beauty. She’s perfect, Genji thought.

So many sightseeing carriages had arrived for the Kamo Festival that there were not enough spaces to park them all this day as well. Because they were having trouble finding a place to stop, they pulled up near the parade grounds and pavilion where the Mounted Guard held their archery competition during the fifth month of each year.

“So many high-ranking officials have brought their carriages here, the area is really bustling,” Genji said, sounding a little confounded and irritable. He had his carriage pause for a moment next to a lady’s carriage that was not at all inelegant. The carriage was filled with occupants, and a fan was thrust out beckoning him over to them.

“Would you like to set your carriage here?” a woman asked. “We could make some space for you.”

Genji was somewhat taken aback, wondering what kind of woman could be so coquettish. This spot, however, was an excellent place from which to view the festival parade, and so he decided to accept the invitation.

“How did you manage to come by this space?” he asked. “It’s good enough to make people resent you, so I’ll take you up on your offer.”

The lady in the carriage then broke off a section of her stylish folding fan and wrote out the following:

*Heart-shaped leaves of wild ginger adorn another
Though their name promises some day we'll meet . . . vainly
I waited for the Kamo gods to bless this day*

“I cannot pass beyond the ropes marking off that sacred space.”

Genji recognized the handwriting. It was the old Assistant Handmaid, Naishi no suke. He found it shocking that someone her age should be flirting like a young woman. He was genuinely displeased and sent back a curt reply:

*The feelings of one adorned with those heart-shaped leaves
Are certainly fickle, since she can “meet this day”
Any man she wants from among the eighty clans*

Naishi was filled with resentment when she received Genji’s cruel response:

*A bitter adornment, this wild ginger
With its empty promise of meeting you ...
Mere leaves signifying vain and false hopes*

Many women, not just Naishi, experienced pangs of jealousy as they tried to guess the identity of the lady riding with Genji. They resented that for her sake he chose to keep his blinds down, because it denied them an opportunity to catch a glimpse of him. The women gossiped among themselves:

“He was so splendid-looking the day of the procession.”

“Yes, but today’s he’s going about rather informally, don’t you think?”

“Who is that riding with him? I wonder. She must be a special woman.”

Genji remained disgruntled, thinking, *What a complete waste of time, exchanging verses that play on a subject like leaves of wild ginger.*

Anyone else would certainly have refrained from sending a note out of respect for the lady riding with him—but not someone as impudent as Naishi.

For her part, the lady at Rokujō had never in all her life experienced the kind of torment brought on recently by her dark, obsessive thoughts. She had, it is true, resigned herself to Genji’s cruel neglect, but the thought of leaving him behind in order to go with her daughter to Ise brought on agonizing loneliness. She was also fully aware that she would be an object of derision at the court. Whenever she thought, wistfully, that perhaps she ought to stay behind in the capital, she would become anxious, for she knew that if she stayed she would expose herself to even more extreme levels of ridicule. Her days and nights were so filled with troubled thoughts that she couldn’t help but recall the *Kokinshū* poem: “Am I a float on the line of the fisherman of Ise that my heart should be adrift like this, bobbing on the waves?”⁴ Finding no relief from her obsessive, insecure state of mind, she fell ill.

Genji wasn’t in the least concerned about her stated desire to accompany her daughter to Ise, and he never once tried to dissuade her by telling her that it was out of the question. Instead he remarked, rather sarcastically, “I understand. It’s perfectly reasonable for you to find repugnant the prospect of continuing a relationship with a man as worthless as I. Yet no matter how unpleasant it may be for you now, if you were to stay with me to the end, your choice would prove that you’re a woman of uncommonly deep sensibility, would it not?”

On hearing such hateful words, the lady withdrew even deeper into her dark thoughts. Distressed and depressed, she had decided to go see the procession only because she wanted some relief from her insecurity and indecisiveness. And then, when she did go, she found herself buffeted about, as if she were adrift on the violent rapids of the river of lustration.

While all of this was taking place, a malignant spirit was causing concern for everyone at the Minister of the Left’s Sanjō residence. Genji’s wife was suffering terribly, and under the circumstances it was not appropriate for him to be going around visiting his other women. Indeed, during this period he only

rarely went to his own residence in Nijō. True, he had never warmed to his wife much, but he did consider her someone of special importance to him. He was wracked with grief that she should now be suffering so much as a consequence of her remarkable pregnancy, and he had prayers and rites performed for her in his own quarters at his father-in-law's residence.

Many souls of the deceased and spirits of living persons were exorcised and forced to reveal their names. One particular spirit, however, resisted all attempts to move it into the body of a medium and persisted in clinging fast to Genji's wife. It did no real harm, but it would not leave her body, even for a few moments. The deeply obsessive nature of this spirit, which would not obey the holiest of exorcists, made it clear that this was no commonplace possession. The attendants considered the various women Genji called on and whispered among themselves:

"Only the ladies at Rokujō and Nijō have a special place in his heart—perhaps their resentment is especially strong."

Diviners were brought in to confirm these suspicions, but they failed to do so. Whenever they questioned the spirits, they learned nothing that would suggest any of them was driven by revenge or hatred. There was the spirit of a former nurse and spirits that had haunted the families of the Minister and Princess Ōmiya for generations, but these had appeared simply because their daughter was in a fragile condition. None of them were really malicious but seemed to have shown up at random. Why, then, was Genji's wife constantly shouting out and weeping? She was always nauseous or had choking sensations, and she would writhe around as if in unbearable agony. Genji and her parents were frightened and upset, wondering how this would all turn out and worrying that she might die.

Because the Retired Emperor repeatedly sent messages of concern and graciously ordered prayers and rituals, her death would be all the more lamentable. Upon hearing that everyone at the court was worried, the lady at Rokujō was afflicted with the troubling thought that she was being diminished as sympathy for her rival grew. She had always had a jealous, competitive streak, but until that absurd quarrel over the carriages had unsettled her heart, it had never been as pronounced as it was now, and she felt a degree of resentment that no one at the Minister's household could have ever imagined.

The lady knew, as a result of her confused emotions, that her condition was not normal, and so she decided to undergo esoteric Buddhist healing rites. However, she had to move out of her residence and have the rites performed elsewhere in order to avoid defiling her daughter, who was still preparing to be the High Priestess of Ise. Genji heard about her plans and, moved to pity as he

wondered how she was feeling, went to call on her. Because she was not at her usual residence in Rokujō, he had to be exceptionally discreet when he visited. He repeatedly asked her to overlook the way he had neglected her recently, pointing out that it was due to circumstances beyond his control. He even tried to elicit her sympathy by describing the terrible suffering of his wife.

"I'm not all that concerned about her myself," he said, "but I do feel sorry for her parents, who are upset and making rather too much of a fuss about it. So while she is in this condition, I really should stay close by her. If you could take all of these things into account, I would be very grateful."

Genji pleaded with her, but he could see from the expression on her face that she was suffering even more than usual, and he felt terribly sorry for her.

The lady had been moody and withdrawn that night, but when—in the welter of her yearnings and resentments—she saw how ravishing he looked as he prepared to leave at the crack of dawn, she was tempted to reconsider her decision to leave the capital with her daughter. At the same time, the lady was realistic enough to know that Genji, who already held that wife of his in high esteem, would feel even greater affection and lavish his attentions solely on *her* once the child was born. And when that happened, *she* would be left waiting, fretting impatiently over whether Genji would ever show up and knowing that whenever he did come to see her, it would be out of some lukewarm sense of duty or pity. Her tangled emotions opened her eyes afresh to the reality of her situation. After waiting all day for his morning-after letter, it finally arrived that evening—a short, curt note with no poem attached:

"Her condition had been improving recently, but now she has suffered a relapse, and I really must stay here."

She read the note and thought it was just another of his typical excuses. Even so, she sent a response:

*Intimate with love's path where dew has soaked my sleeves
I followed too far ... now my sad fate is to end
Like a peasant planting fields, my robes soaked in mud*

"Perhaps it is fitting to remind you of the old poem about the water of the mountain well. The poet, having tried to draw water from a well so shallow, regrets that she too gets nothing but damp sleeves."⁵

Genji pored over her response, marveling at the beauty of her script, which was far superior to everyone else's, and wondered why the world had to be so damnably complicated. He felt painfully torn—on the one hand, he couldn't simply abandon a woman of her sensibility and looks, and, on the other, there

was no way he could settle on just one woman. He sent his reply well after dark:

“What do you mean that only your sleeves are damp? Your feelings for me must not be very deep.”

*How shallow the path of love you follow
That you merely dampen your sleeves with dew
While I drench myself where the mud is deep*

He added, among other things, “Do you imagine that my feelings for you are insincere, that I would not reply to you in person were my wife’s condition not truly serious?”

At the Minister’s residence the obsessive spirit was appearing more persistently and causing Genji’s wife great distress. The lady at Rokujō then heard gossip to the effect that it was either her own living spirit or that of her late father. She gave the rumors careful consideration. Even though she had never wished ill fortune to befall others, she had often lamented her own bad luck, and she was aware that the living spirit of a person who is preoccupied with personal desires and attachments might wander from the body. She had lived for so many years convinced that she had suffered as much grief and anxiety as it was possible for one person to suffer, and now it was as if her soul had been torn asunder. That day when the foolish incident with the carriages occurred, she had been treated disdainfully, and *that woman*, Genji’s wife, had in effect ignored her as though she were beneath contempt. After the procession to the Purification Ritual was over, her heart and mind lost their moorings and drifted, all on account of that one incident, and she found it truly difficult to calm her nerves.

Lately, whenever she dozed off, she began having a recurring dream. She would find herself in the beautifully appointed, luxurious quarters of some woman—Genji’s wife, she assumed—and would then watch in horror as her living spirit, so completely different from her waking self, would move around the woman, pulling and tugging at her, and then, driven by menacingly obsessive emotions, violently striking and shaking her. Because of this recurring dream, the lady had many moments when she believed she was losing her grip on reality.

Ah, how horrible this is! What they say is true after all. A person’s living spirit really can leave the body and wander about.⁶ And even if it isn’t true in my case, people at the court prefer to speak ill of others, and this situation will provide fodder to those who relish spreading malicious gossip.

Fearing that she would be notorious, the lady made a resolution to herself:

They say it's common for people to leave behind their obsessive attachments and resentments when they die. I've always considered such a thing deeply sinful and ominous, even when it has happened to people with whom I have no connections. But now there are rumors that it's my living spirit that's acting in such a grotesque, unearthly way. It must be retribution for the sins of a former life. I must never give another thought to that cruel man.

She resolved over and over to put him out of her mind, but, try as she might, her resolutions were just another way to think about him.

As part of a series of purification rites in preparation for her departure for Ise, the daughter of the lady at Rokujō was to have moved during the previous year into a detached residence at the palace called the Shosai-in, which served as the pavilion of the First Lustration. However, there had been a number of complications, and so it was decided that she would not move into the pavilion until the autumn. Thereafter, in the ninth month, the Ise Priestess would move again, undergoing the Second Lustration at a temporary shrine built for this purpose on the plains of Sagano, famous for its lovely autumn vistas. The attendants in the residence at Rokujō thus had to make preparations for two purification rites, one right after the other. Their mistress, alas, was distracted and depressed and lying prone in her suffering, unable to rouse herself. This was no trivial matter for the ladies-in-waiting to the Priestess, since her mother's illness could be defiling, and so they commissioned prayers and rites. In truth, the lady didn't really seem all that sick, and as the days and months passed no one was sure exactly what was wrong or how serious it was. Genji was constantly inquiring after the lady's health, but because his wife—who was far more important to him—was suffering so much, he was burdened with seemingly endless concerns.

Because they assumed it was not yet time for Genji's wife to give birth, everyone at the Sanjō residence was caught off guard when she went into labor and appeared to be on the verge of delivering the child. More and more malignant spirits were drawn to her as the moment of the birth neared, and the number and intensity of the prayers and rites meant to assure a safe childbirth increased. Still, that one stubborn, obsessive spirit remained, more intransigent than ever. Even the most venerable of the priests found this spirit abnormal, and they were unable to exorcise it. As they tried to make the spirit show itself, their prayers finally forced it to speak to them through Genji's wife.

The spirit, in a weeping voice wracked with pain, pleaded with the priests, "Please stop for a moment. I have something I must say to Lord Genji."

The attendants at once whispered among themselves, "Just as we thought; there's some reason for this after all."

Genji was shown in to where his wife was lying behind her curtains. Because she seemed to be near death, her parents withdrew a short distance away in case their daughter had some last words for her husband. The priests ceased their prayers and lowered their voices as they chanted the Kannon chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*. Their murmuring created an atmosphere at once uncanny and sublime. Genji lifted the curtains and looked in on his wife. There was something alluring about her as she lay there, her belly large and distended. Even someone with whom she had no connection at all would have been distracted gazing at her, so it was natural for Genji to feel overwhelmed with regret and sorrow. Her long, luxuriant black hair, which had been pulled back and tied up, stood out in vivid contrast to the white of her maternity robes. She was always so prim and proper that Genji had never found her special elegance all that attractive. Now, for the first time, as she lay there in her vulnerable, helpless condition, she struck him as not just precious but voluptuous. He took her hand.

“How terrible this is. Must you cause me to grieve so?”

He began to cry and could speak no further. She weakly raised her head and gazed at him with that expression that had hitherto always made him feel uncertain and inadequate in her presence. Tears filled her eyes, and when he gazed back at her—a woman who now seemed so accessible to him—how could he not be deeply touched?

Because she was crying so intensely, Genji assumed she was thinking of her poor, anxious parents and, on seeing him here like this, regretting that they would soon part.

“You mustn’t brood so much about everything,” Genji comforted her. “You don’t feel well now, but you’ll get better. And even if death should separate us, remember that husbands and wives are destined to meet in the next world. You have a deep bond with your father and mother, and no matter how many times you are reborn, that bond is never-ending. I am sure there will be a time when you will see them again.”

“No, no, that’s not why I’m crying. I’m crying because the exorcists’ prayers hurt me so. I asked for you to come here so that I might have a moment of relief from them. I never imagined that I would come here in this form, but now I know the truth. The spirit of a person lost in obsessive longing will actually wander from the body.” The voice that came from his wife’s lips had a gentle, seductive familiarity. “Just as they did in ancient times ...”

*Bind the hems of my robes
To keep my grieving soul*

From wandering the skies

As he was listening to the voice, his wife's appearance changed and she no longer looked like herself. Genji was trying to comprehend this inexplicable, eerie phenomenon when he suddenly realized he was gazing on the countenance of the lady at Rokujō. He was horrified. He had dismissed out of hand the rumors claiming the spirit possessing his wife was the lady's, considering them nothing more than the idle gossip of vulgar, insensitive people. But he was witnessing the possession with his own eyes and understood now that such things did happen in this world. It was uncanny. *How wretched*, he thought. He then answered her, saying, "You sound like someone I know, but I'm not certain. Tell me who you are."

The spirit replied in a way that left no doubt it was *she*. To say that he was shocked would not do justice to the sense of horror he experienced. At the same time, the presence of the attendants made him feel awkward and embarrassed, since they might recognize that the spirit was the lady's.

When the voice grew a little more subdued, Genji's mother-in-law, thinking that her daughter was feeling more comfortable, brought in a hot medicinal infusion. The attendants raised his wife from behind and supported her in a squatting posture. She gave birth to a boy.

The joy everyone felt was boundless. In contrast, the malign spirits that had been forced into the mediums were raising a tremendous fuss, since they resented the safe delivery. There was still the afterbirth to worry about, but thanks to the numerous prayers and supplications to the Buddha, it was a normal birth. The abbot of the Enryakuji Temple on Mount Hiei and the other distinguished priests quickly withdrew, wiping the sweat from their proud, satisfied faces. All the women in the household were finally able to relax a little after so many days of worry and devoted service. They were sure that the worst was over; and even though new prayers and rites for the mother were ordered, for the moment the baby became the center of attention. Everyone let their guard down as they were absorbed in helping out with the remarkable child. The Retired Emperor, princes of the blood, and the highest-ranking officials all attended, without fail, the traditional banquets held on the third, fifth, seventh and ninth nights following the birth. In joyous celebration, they brought with them exquisite and remarkable gifts of food and clothing, and because the child was a boy, the celebrations were all the more lively and auspicious.

When the lady at Rokujō learned about all of this, she grew agitated. She had heard that Genji's wife had been in a precarious state, but now, apparently, everything was fine, and she felt both jealous and disappointed. She continued to

feel weird, as though she were not herself, and her robes reeked of the smell of the poppy seeds that exorcists burn to drive out a lingering spirit. Strangely, the smell would not dissipate, but continued to permeate her body no matter how often she tried washing her hair and changing her robes. She was disgusted with herself and worried what others might say or think. She couldn't very well discuss this with anyone, so she was forced to suffer in isolation, which only made her emotional turmoil worse. Genji was feeling somewhat calmer, but whenever he recalled the unpleasant moment when the lady's spirit had addressed him unbidden in that weird and shocking manner, he was reminded of the pain she was experiencing because he had not called on her in such a long time. He vacillated, thinking that perhaps he should visit her in person. But then every time he considered the idea of a visit, he couldn't help worrying that he might be appalled, wondering how she could have fallen into such a state. After considering all the options, he decided it would be best for her if he just sent a message.

Everyone was worried about the prognosis for Genji's wife, who had suffered so grievously, and kept a vigilant watch over her. Naturally, Genji stopped going out on his nightly amorous excursions, even though his wife was still quite sick and unable to see her husband in the customary manner. The baby boy was exceptionally handsome, and because there were worries that his looks might attract the resentful attention of malignant spirits, every effort was made from the moment of his birth to protect him and bring him up with the greatest care. Genji's father-in-law was tremendously pleased, since things had worked out as he had hoped. Though he continued to show concern over his daughter, who had not yet fully recovered, he assumed that her condition was simply the aftereffect of having been so ill and that there was no reason to be unduly alarmed.

On seeing the beauty of the eyes and features of the baby, who bore a striking resemblance to Fujitsubo's child, Genji thought lovingly of his other, unacknowledged son, the new Crown Prince, and he was seized with an unbearable desire to go to the palace to visit him.

"I've not been to the palace for some time, and that concerns me. Since my confinement ends today, I had better go there." He then added, with some resentment, "I wonder if I might speak to my wife directly, without a curtain between us? Why do we always have to be so formal with one another, especially now?"

"As you wish, my lord," one of the women responded. "Your relationship with my lady need not be so formal and distant. Though she is terribly weakened by her ordeal, there is no need to separate the two of you with screens or curtains."

The attendants brought in a cushion for him and placed it close to where his wife was lying. He went in, sat down, and began speaking to her. She answered from time to time, but she still seemed very weak. He remembered the state she had been in at that moment when he had been certain she was about to die. He now felt as if it had all been a dream. He spoke of the period when she had been in mortal danger, and it made his heart ache to think that she had been on the point of death, and to recall how she had stopped breathing, but then recovered and spoke to him so urgently.

"There is so much I want to tell you, but they say you are too weak and not up to it, so I'll let it go for now," he said. He reminded her to drink her medicine and showed her consideration in other ways as well. Her attendants were deeply impressed by his ministrations, amazed that he had learned such things.

Her appearance as she lay there was heartbreakingly sweet, so weak and pale that he could hardly tell if she were dead or alive. Her abundant hair was properly done up, and the strands that were lying across the pillow were incomparably elegant. He gazed possessively at her, feeling strange that in all their time together he should ever have found her deficient in any way.

"I must go visit my father, but I shall return quickly," Genji told her. "How happy it would make me if I could always gaze on you as I'm doing now. But your mother is constantly nearby, so out of deference to her I have refrained from seeing you directly, lest I be considered rash. You must do all you can to get well, then move back to your own chambers. One reason you are not improving may be that you have become too childishly dependent on others."

With these words he took his leave, put on splendid robes and went out. In the past she rarely saw him off, but this time she lay there watching him in rapt attention.

The Autumn Ceremonial for Court Promotions was scheduled for that evening, and because the Minister of the Left had to preside over the event, he too left his daughter at his Sanjō residence and headed for the palace. Each of his sons was hoping to receive a promotion, and since they didn't want to be separated from their father on this particular day, they all left with him.

As a result, there were very few people at the Minister's residence that evening, and while the villa was deserted a malignant spirit suddenly assaulted Genji's wife. The choking sensation she experienced made breathing difficult, and she was in great distress. She stopped breathing before there was time to inform those who had gone to the ceremony.

On hearing the news, everyone was stunned, and they left the palace not knowing where their feet were taking them. Though it was the evening of the Autumn Ceremonial, in the face of such a tragedy it would not have been

appropriate to continue the event. The crisis had arisen in the middle of the night, and so they were unable to call for the abbot at Mount Hiei, or even for a distinguished priest. They had all relaxed and let their guard down, assuming that the worst was over, and because her death was so unexpected, the attendants at the Minister's residence were in a panic—confused, stumbling about, bumping into things. Messengers bearing condolences from various noble houses crowded into the residence at Sanjō, but there was no one to take their messages, and the whole house was shaking from the uproar. It was frightening to see how upset everyone was.

Because so many malignant spirits had possessed her, they followed prescribed custom and left her body lying there. They didn't disturb her or move the position of her pillow, lest her soul fail to find its way back should it try to return. They kept watch over her for two or three days, but when her appearance began to change, they realized they had reached the end, that she was indeed gone, and were overwhelmed by grief.

With his wife's tragic death coming on the heels of his shocking encounter with the living spirit of the lady at Rokujō, Genji was preoccupied with thoughts of the tiresome nature of this world, and as a result he felt put off by the words of condolences he received from people—even from women with whom he had a special relationship. Genji's father-in-law, the Minister of the Left, was deeply honored to receive condolences directly from the Retired Emperor. It was an honor that brought a moment of relief to his unremitting sorrow, and it left him crying tears of both joy and grief. On the advice of others, the Minister spared no expense or effort in commissioning mystery rites intended to revive his daughter, and though it was evident for all to see that her body was decaying away, in his distracted state he vainly persisted until there was nothing more to be done. When at last they took his daughter's body to be cremated on the plains of Toribeno, there were many heart-rending moments along the way.

The wide plain was crowded with mourners from all over and with priests from various temples chanting invocations to the Buddha. There was hardly any room to move. Messengers from the Retired Emperor, from Fujitsubo and her son, the Crown Prince, and from all the noble houses conveyed feelings of sorrow and sympathy for which no words could really do justice. The Minister found it difficult to stand, and he lamented, "To be bereft so late in my life ... to lose a child in the prime of her youth ... this has truly laid me low."

The crowd of onlookers who watched him crying in grief and shame over having outlived his daughter experienced a profound sorrow. All through the night the clamorous rituals continued, but when dawn arrived they had to return home with nothing more than a few evanescent ashes by which to remember her.

Death is a reality that all must face, but up to this point in his life Genji had lost only one person, his grandmother, who had been close to him, and so he didn't have much experience dealing with bereavement of this sort. He felt a yearning desire unlike anything he had ever known. When the waning moon rose at dawn in the final days of the eighth month, it imbued the morning sky with an atmosphere of no little pathos. It had been terrible to have to see the Minister so distraught, lost in the darkness of parental grief,⁷ and as Genji gazed up into that dawn sky he was moved to compose the following:

*The smoke that rose from your funeral pyre
Is now a cloud ... but which one I know not
For the sky is veiled with feelings of loss*

After arriving back at his quarters at the Minister's residence in Sanjō, Genji found it utterly impossible to sleep. Recalling the figure of his wife during their years together, one thought followed another until his mind was filled with vain regrets.

Why was I so serenely confident that she would eventually change her view of me? How could I have been so capricious to allow myself to pursue all those dalliances, knowing that they would only cause her pain? She spent her whole life thinking of me as cold and distant, and now she's dead ...

Donning his gray mourning robes, he felt as though he were in a dream, and it made him sad to think that had he died first, she would have had to wear robes of an even darker shade.

*By custom I must wear these light gray robes
And yet my grief is of a blacker shade
My sleeves darkened by a deep pool of tears*

Rhythmically chanting the name of the Buddha, he looked more graceful and handsome than ever. He continued to recite sutras in private, intoning the line "Hail holy Fugen, in whom resides the virtues of all creation" in a manner more impressive than even the most skillful priest. Whenever he gazed upon his infant son, he recalled a line from the *Gosenshū* poem in which the poet likened the infant Kanetada, whose mother had just died, to "young grasses of remembrance."⁸ And even though the thought that his own son was now a memento of the dead lady called forth fresh tears from Genji, the image of "young grasses" was also a source of comfort to him.

Genji's mother-in-law, Princess Ōmiya, was so depressed she was unable to

rouse herself from her chambers. The Minister was concerned and, agitated about her condition, since it looked as if she too might fall ill and die, had prayers and rites performed for her benefit.

The death of his daughter had been so sudden and unexpected—and time was slipping away so quickly—that the Minister had to act immediately to prepare for his daughter's lavish memorial services, which, as custom dictated, were to be held every seven days for the forty-nine days following her death. All of this intensified the pain he was experiencing. Parents will grieve even for children who possess no special merits, so how much greater was his sorrow, having lost a daughter who was so favored? What made matters worse was that the Minister and his wife were left with the lonely realization that they had no other daughters, and they felt bereft, as if a precious jewel on their sleeves had been shattered.

Genji did not return to his residence at Nijō, not even for a brief visit. Grieving deeply in his heart over the loss of his wife, he passed his days from morning to late evening dutifully carrying out his prayers and devotions. All he could do for his various lovers was send them an occasional letter. The new High Priestess of Ise had moved to the quarters of the Left Gate Guard and taken up residence in the Shosai-in to begin the First Lustration. Worried about the possibility of defilement, her mother, the lady at Rokujō, took the move to the Shosai-in as an excuse for not replying to Genji's letter. Genji was experiencing a deep melancholy at the evanescence of the world—an unpleasant realm he dearly wanted to escape—but the birth of his son brought with it obligations that bound him to this world as securely as the ropes used to fetter the legs of horses. He considered renouncing the world—he had been longing to take religious vows for some time—until he was suddenly reminded of yet another pressing obligation, his little Murasaki, the young lady residing in the west hall at Nijō who was likely feeling lonely and pining for his return.

He would lie by himself behind his curtains in the evening, and though there were attendants serving close by, the absence of his wife made him feel as if he were alone. He had difficulty sleeping. He recalled the line “Why, of all seasons”⁹ from the poem by Tadamine expressing the special poignancy of losing a loved one in autumn, and he found that greeting the dawn with the sound of priests specially chosen for the beauty of their sonorous voices chanting the invocation to Amida Buddha was unbearably sublime.

Unaccustomed to sleeping alone, he felt that the soughing of the wind intensified the sadness of the season, which seemed to permeate the very core of his being. He waited restlessly for the dawn, lamenting the long nights that came with late autumn. Just as the first light was breaking and the surroundings were

shrouded in fog, an attendant brought him a letter written on dark, bluish-gray paper, the color of mourning robes. It was a tastefully appropriate choice. The letter was attached to stems of chrysanthemums that were just beginning to open. Seeing the arrangement, Genji couldn't help but admire how stylishly modern it looked. The handwriting told him it was from the lady at Rokujō.

"Do you understand" she had written, "why you have heard nothing from me all this time?"

*Hearing of the sorrowful transiency of life
I am moved to tears and can only imagine
How damp must be the sleeves of the one left behind*

"Seeing the pattern of the autumn skies just now, I could no longer keep my feelings to myself."

How extraordinarily elegant her calligraphy is, he thought. But then, as he continued to gaze at the letter, unable to put it down, a wave of bitter resentment washed over him. How could she so nonchalantly send him condolences like this, especially in light of the terrible things she had done? He was buffeted by contradictory feelings, confusing thoughts. If he didn't reply, but just cut her off and ended their relationship, she would be utterly wretched and he would be responsible for ruining her reputation. At the same time he couldn't ignore his wounded feelings. Maybe his wife had been fated to die as she did, but why had he been forced to witness the possession so clearly and vividly? It seemed he might never be able to change his attitude toward her now. Since he had been defiled by his proximity to death, he knew she might not accept his letter. After all, her daughter, the Ise Priestess, was undergoing purification rituals. So he hesitated for a long time until he finally concluded that not responding to the lady—she had, after all, gone to the trouble of writing him—would suggest a lack of compassion on his part. He composed his reply on purple paper tinged with gray:

"I have not corresponded for the longest time, but please understand that while you are always in my heart, I must observe the period of mourning."

*Those who pass away, those who remain behind
All belong to a realm as fleeting as dew
How vain it is to brood and cling to this world*

"Attachments may be understandable, but you should let go of your obsessions. I will end my note here, since you probably won't be able to read this anyway."

Back in her residence at Rokujō, the lady read Genji's missive in private. Because of the workings of her guilty conscience, she clearly recognized the subtle implications of his words. She was terribly upset, almost beside herself: *So it's just as I thought. He knows it was my living spirit that possessed his wife.*

Her misery and misfortune knew no bounds. What would the Retired Emperor think if he ever found out about this? Her late husband, the former Crown Prince, had been born of the same mother as the Retired Emperor, and the two brothers had been very close to one another. The Retired Emperor had kindly agreed to his brother's request to take care of the affairs of the lady's daughter, graciously proclaiming, "I shall take the place of her late father and always look after her." He had even extended his grace to the lady herself, insisting that she should continue to live at the palace.

The lady was reluctant to stay on, however, since she thought it would be improper for her to become just another imperial concubine. And so she had withdrawn from the palace, only to find herself entangled in this rash, childish affair with Genji. The thought that she would leave behind a scandalous reputation bothered her so much that she was unable to fully recover a healthy, stable frame of mind. Despite all her misgivings, she continued to be known in court society as a woman of refined taste and discrimination who possessed an alluring charm and elegance. Indeed, because her reputation was so high, even after she moved with her daughter to the temporary shrine on the plains of Sagano, which had been constructed for the Second Lustration, she was able to contrive many delightful, stylishly modern diversions there. Thus, Genji was not at all surprised when he learned that during this period certain gentlemen of the court—men possessed of an especially refined sensibility—would take it on themselves, mornings and evenings, to part the dew-drenched path to her quarters at the temporary shrine.

It's quite natural for them to do so, he mused, since the lady has an innate sense of courtly refinement. Should she weary of society and accompany her daughter to Ise, the world will seem a lonely place without her.

The series of seventh-day memorial services was complete. Genji had remained secluded in his quarters at Sanjō until the final service on the forty-ninth day. Tō no Chūjō, who had recently been promoted to the third rank, was feeling sorry for Genji, concerned that for the first time in his life he might be suffering from boredom. He took to dropping in and diverting his friend with news about the court—serious matters as well as outrageous gossip about ongoing love affairs. Evidently that old flirtatious lady, Naishi, was a frequent object of their mirthful laughter.

"I feel sorry for her, somehow. You shouldn't make fun of Dame Granny,"

Genji scolded ... though in truth he always found such stories amusing.

The two friends, brothers-in-law, talked freely to one another, sharing stories about their romantic adventures—that summer, for example, when Genji surprised Tō no Chūjō on the night of the sixteenth-day moon as they were both calling on the Hitachi Princess, his Princess of the safflowers—and of that nose—or that autumn night when Genji had visited the lady; but inevitably their conversation would turn back to the melancholy subject of the transience of the world, and their laughter would turn to tears.

One evening, just after dusk, when a cold, late autumn shower was falling and inspiring poignant feelings of grief, Tō no Chūjō showed up. Though he was still dressed in mourning, he had changed to a light gray winter cloak to match the season¹⁰ and billowy trousers cinched at the ankles. He cut a gallant, dashing figure that put others to shame. Genji was on the west veranda just outside the corner door, leaning on the balustrade and gazing at the front garden, which was now withered by frost. The wind was gusting and rain fell heavily. Genji felt that his own tears were vying with the rain. Resting his chin in his hands, he recalled a line from the Chinese poet Liu Yuxi, whispering it to himself: “I know not if she is become the rain or the clouds ... ”¹¹

Being a man of an amorous nature, Tō no Chūjō gazed at Genji's alluring figure.

If I were a woman who died and left a man such as this behind, he thought, my spirit would surely choose to stay with him instead of moving on to the next world.

Keeping his eyes fixed on Genji, he sat down nearby. Genji, who was relaxing, merely retied the cords on his disheveled summer cloak, which was a slightly darker gray than Tō no Chūjō's. Under the cloak he wore a lustrous crimson singlet, and the effect created by his appearance was one that people would never find tiresome.

Tō no Chūjō stared sadly at the garden.

*She is the rain ... I gaze in vain at clouds
Drifting through a sky drenched in stormy tears
But cannot ascertain which one she is*

"Where has she gone?" he asked, as if talking to himself.

Genji replied:

*The one I used to gaze upon is now the rain ...
As distant cities darken with evening showers.*

*As autumn skies darken with evening showers
My eyes, blurred by misty tears, grow yet dimmer still*

It was obvious from Genji's expression that his emotions were anything but shallow.

How strange, Tō no Chūjō thought. During all those years his feelings for my sister never seemed very deep. Even his father, the Retired Emperor, warned him to treat her better, and only my father's solicitous behavior and the fact that my mother happened to be the sister of the Retired Emperor kept him from abandoning her altogether. Genji always looked miserable whenever they were together, but he managed to stay with her throughout her life. I felt bad for him many times, but now it looks as though he actually considered her worthy of respect all along.

Having come to this realization, the loss of his sister now made him feel more bitter than ever. The sparkle seemed to drain away from everything, and he felt depressed.

Genji had his servants cut some flowers—rich blue gentians and pinks—that were blooming out of sight, nestled among the sere autumn grasses, and after Tō no Chūjō departed, he had his little son's nurse, Saishō, take the flowers to his mother-in-law, Princess Ōmiya, with the following poem attached:

*These little pinks left in the withered grass ...
I think of them as I think of my son
Mementos of this autumn of partings*

"I wonder if their luster must seem diminished to you now, compared to the radiance of the child you have lost."

Truly, the little boy's innocent, smiling face was exquisite. Genji's mother-in-law wept, her tears more numerous than the leaves tossed about by the wind.

*Even now when I gaze upon these pinks
That bloom within a desolate hedgerow
My tear-streaked sleeves seem to wither away*

Although it was now dark outside, Genji, who had time on his hands and was feeling bored, sent a note to Princess Asagao. He assumed that because she possessed a refined sensibility, she would appreciate the sublime beauty of this rainy, early winter evening. A considerable amount of time had lapsed between their letters, but their relationship was such that he wrote only infrequently anyway, and so she would read it without any resentment toward him for

neglecting her. He sent his letter on Chinese paper, which was appropriately tinted to match the appearance of the sky.

*Though I have spent many, many autumns
Sunk in pensive thoughts, never have my sleeves
Been as damp as they are this evening*

“Do chill evening rains always fall in early winter?”¹²

He put extra care into his calligraphy, and so his letter was more arresting than usual. The ladies-in-waiting to Princess Asagao said to her, “This is one letter you cannot ignore.”

The Princess in fact was thinking the same thing, and so she wrote: “Though I have imagined how it must be for you in your confinement, I could not very well tell you all that was in my heart.”

*Since you were left behind in autumn mists
I can only wonder with what sorrow
Must you gaze on these rainy skies today*

This was all she wrote to him, but she had purposely drawn her brushstrokes lightly over the paper so that the lines of her calligraphy were faint, giving it a special allure that made him wonder if there weren’t some hidden significance to her words. Was it just his imagination?

In reality, few women become more attractive to a man the more he sees of her, and in any case it was Genji’s disposition to consider women who were difficult or cold toward him especially elegant.

She may keep her distance from me, he thought, but our mutual affection is revealed in these heartfelt letters, which never fail to show deep sensitivity at moments that call for grace and propriety. That is why our bond will surely last to the end of our lives. On the other hand, a woman who comes across as too self-important and overly refined inevitably ends up exposing her flaws to an excessive degree. I don’t want Murasaki to end up like that.

Although Genji was always thinking about Murasaki, wondering if she was bored and longing for him, he felt confident about their relationship. She was, after all, a motherless child he had taken into his residence, and so he was not all that worried that she might grow fretful or resentful the longer he stayed away from her.

When night fell Genji had oil lamps brought in close to him, and he called in the most accomplished of his late wife’s attendants to speak to them. One of

these women, Chūnagon, had been a secret object of Genji's affections for a number of years, but he refrained from pursuing their relationship during the period of confinement. Chūnagon viewed his discretion as a sign of his deep sensitivity. Genji began by addressing all the women equally, without distinction, in a tone of gentle familiarity: "Spending these past few days and weeks in mourning with you has given me the opportunity to meet with you directly and get to know you even better than I did before your mistress died. Soon we will no longer be able to live together like this, and one day we will all look back at this time with yearning and nostalgia, will we not? We can do nothing about our recent loss, but, thinking about what the future will bring, we know we will have to endure many difficulties."

While he was speaking, the women, who were already tearful to begin with, began to weep openly. One among them replied, "What with the death of our mistress, it already feels as if all is darkness. Now we have to face the fact that our lord will no longer be near us ... and that is hard to bear." She couldn't finish her words.

Genji looked around at the women. He felt great pity, and tried to comfort them.

"How could I stay away from this place? Is it possible you think my feelings for you are so shallow? Please be patient, and in the end you will certainly understand the depths of my devotion. Ah ... life is truly an ephemeral thing ..."

Staring at the light of the oil lamps, his eyes filled with tears at the thought of the evanescence of all things in the world, an expression that made him look all the more magnificent. Among the attendants was a young girl named Atekimi, an orphan who had been beloved by Genji's late wife. Because she was so beloved, it was natural that she looked especially forlorn and bereft. Genji spoke to her, saying, "Little Ateki, you must now think of me as your lord and trust in my support." On hearing his words, the girl broke down and wept piteously. With her little under robe, which was dyed a darker shade of gray than the adults' robes, her black outer cloak, and her pale orange-brown trousers, she looked utterly adorable.

"Those of you who cannot forget the old days when you served my wife," Genji told them, "please stay and attend to our little son, even though you may have to endure a tiresome, tedious life. For if nothing remains of the world I knew here, if all of you go away, then my reasons for visiting this residence will leave with you."

He tried to reassure them that he would remain steadfast, but they couldn't help thinking that no matter what he said, his visits would become even less frequent than they were before the death of their mistress. Such thoughts made

them feel increasingly miserable. Genji's father-in-law, the Minister of the Left, presented mementos to each of the attendants in accordance with her rank—either some small trinket that had given his late daughter pleasure in life or, in certain cases, some more valuable possession. He did this tastefully, without making an ostentatious show.

Genji had been thinking that he couldn't very well continue passing his days shut away in his quarters at Sanjō, and so he went to visit the Retired Emperor. When his carriage was brought around and his escort assembled, a cold evening rain began to pour, as if the skies understood Genji's sorrow and wanted to match his mood. A restless wind was blowing and scattering leaves, and the scene made the women in Genji's retinue feel forsaken. Tears fell anew, moistening sleeves that had barely dried after forty-nine days of grief. Assuming that Genji would return to his own residence after visiting his father, his attendants began to leave the Minister's villa, one after another, in order to get to Nijō ahead of him and have everything ready for his arrival there. Although they all knew that this would not be the last time Genji would ever visit them at Sanjō, sorrow nonetheless welled up inside them again. Seeing that he was about to depart on that overcast, rainy day, the Minister and his wife were assailed once more with pangs of grief. Genji sent a letter over to his mother-in-law:

The Retired Emperor has been anxiously inquiring after me, and so I must go to serve him today. Though I plan to be gone for just a short time, and will return soon, my troubled state of mind has left me unsettled, wondering how it is that I have managed to survive this long in the face of such suffering. I am sending you this note because I cannot bear the thought of taking leave of you in person. It would be more than I can endure.

On reading his letter, Princess Ōmiya was blinded by tears of grief and could not muster a reply. Presently the Minister came out to see Genji off, but, overwhelmed by grief, he could not take his sleeves from his eyes. The women in Genji's retinue were deeply touched by his appearance.

Genji, who could not stop himself from pondering the mutability of all things, was torn by conflicting thoughts and feelings. The sight of his tears touched all those around him, and because those tears expressed sincere grief, he gave off an aura of beautiful elegance.

It took some time, but the Minister at last regained his composure and said, "The older I get, the harder it is for me to control my tears. Even worse, I can't calm my heart, which is in such constant turmoil that my sleeves are always damp, and I am likely to break down and appear unmanly whenever I meet

anyone. That's why I have avoided calling on the Retired Emperor. If you have the opportunity, please intercede on my behalf and explain to him how things are. How painful it is, at the end of a long life, to be preceded in death by one's own child!"

It was unbearable watching him struggle to control himself.

Genji had to blow his nose from time to time because of his tears. "I know it's the way of the world," he said, "that we can never know who is destined to die first, who is fated to be left behind. But actually losing someone is so disorienting ... there is no experience like it. I shall explain your circumstances to my father, and I am sure he will understand."

"Well, goodbye then," the Minister said, urging Genji to take his leave. "The rain shows no sign of letting up, and it will soon be dark."

Genji glanced around. Some thirty female attendants had gathered inside the open curtains and beyond the sliding doors. They were each wearing mourning robes of varying shades of gray, darker or lighter depending on their relationship with his late wife. He felt so sorry for them—they all looked so devastated, drenched as they were by their own sorrows.

"I know you will never abandon your son," the Minister continued sadly, "and so it comforts me that he will remain here with us. It means there is still a reason for you to visit us once in a while. These women, however, are incapable of understanding such things. They're upset now even more than when their mistress died, convinced that today is the end, that you will abandon your home here, and that once you are gone there will be no traces left of the years during which they occasionally served you. I know that you and my daughter were never close or comfortable with each other, but I was always hoping that eventually you two would be happy together. This is such a desolate evening."

"How shallow is the understanding of those women who lament my departure. It is true that I did not come here as often as I should have during the years we were married. And I admit I was rather nonchalant about things, convinced that no matter how cold and distant we were with each other, we would work things out in the end. But how could anyone think I might neglect my responsibilities, especially now that there is someone here with whom I have a deep bond? You will soon understand my intentions," Genji reassured the Minister, and then left.

The Minister saw him off, and went back inside Genji's quarters. The furnishings were the same as always, nothing had changed, but the place felt as empty to him as a molted cicada shell.

The inkstone and writing implements Genji used to practice calligraphy had been left behind, scattered in front of the curtain that separated his bedding from the rest of the quarters. The Minister picked them up and examined them closely,

shutting his eyes tight and letting teardrops fall. The younger female attendants who were watching him had to smile in spite of their sadness. Genji had practiced writing snatches of lovely old poems in both Chinese and Japanese. He had written some characters cursively in the “grass style” and others in a more precise formal manner; mingled here and there among his practice writings were some unusual styles as well.

A gifted calligrapher, the Minister thought, gazing up at the sky. He bitterly regretted that from now on he would have to treat Genji as someone no longer related to his house. Genji had written a line from Bai Juyi’s *Song of Everlasting Sorrow*: “With whom shall I share our old pillows, our old bedding.” He had used the line as a heading for the following verse:

*How sad must she feel, my departed love ...
Like her spirit, I find it hard to leave
This familiar bedding we used to share*

He had included a second heading, using another line from *Song of Everlasting Sorrow*: “The flowers are white and heavy with frost.” This too was followed by a poem:

*Tears fall on our bedding, now covered with dust
Like the dew settling over a bed of pinks ...
Many lonely nights have I spent without you*

The pinks he mentioned must have referred to the flowers he had sent his mother-in-law the other day, for there were wilted pinks among the papers he had used for writing practice.

The Minister showed the poems to his wife, saying, “I am trying to resign myself to the loss of our daughter, knowing that it does no good to grieve and that many others have suffered similar losses. Even when I have bitter thoughts about our karmic destiny, which preordained the sorrows we have tasted as a result of losing our daughter, whose life in this world was so brief, I still try to take comfort in the truth that mutability is the way of the world. Yet as the days go by, I find my longing for her harder and harder to bear. Just the thought that Genji will become a stranger to us makes me feel even more miserable. Whenever he failed to visit us and we didn’t see him for several days, time seemed to pass unbearably slowly. And now, without his radiance to illuminate our house, how can I go on living?”

The Minister broke down again, and the older attendants, witnesses to his

grief, could not hold back their own emotions. It was a cold, dreary evening indeed.

The younger attendants gathered here and there to discuss the sad events among themselves.

“As our lord said to us, it will be a source of comfort having to look after the little boy, even though he is a frail memento of his mother.”

Some mentioned that they would return to their homes for a short period of time. Many sorrowful moments arose, as those who were departing for good bade farewell to those who were staying on.

When Genji called on his father, the Retired Emperor was pained to see his son’s face looking so thin and drawn. “Did you spend your confinement fasting?” he asked, and had food brought in for him. He lavished so much kind attention on him that Genji was both deeply grateful and, given his father’s august status, a little embarrassed.

When he called on Fujitsubo, her women treated him as though he were some sort of marvel. Fujitsubo had Ōmyōbu bring her tidings to Genji: “My days have been filled with endlessly sorrowful thoughts. How much sadder must those days have been for you?”

“The evanescence of life,” Genji replied, “is well known, but when you experience the death of a loved one, you find many things unpleasant. Although my heart has been in turmoil, your messages, which you sent to me throughout my ordeal, were a source of comfort.”

Genji appeared to be suffering a great deal, compounding the air of sadness he always had when he was around Fujitsubo. He was still dressed in mourning—a gray train over a plain uncrested robe, the cords of his headdress rolled up—but he looked more elegant now than he did when dressed in his most gorgeous robes. Anxious that he had not seen the Crown Prince for some time, Genji asked after the boy. It was late at night when he finally departed.

At the Nijō villa his men and women were preparing for his arrival, cleaning and polishing. The senior attendants all appeared before him, and they vied to outdo one another in the splendor of their clothing and makeup. Genji couldn’t help but be touched by the lively scene before him, which contrasted so starkly with the lonely, melancholy scene he had left behind at the Sanjō residence. He changed out of his mourning robes and went over to Murasaki’s quarters in the west hall. The clothing and furnishings there had been changed with the advent of winter, and the rooms had a bright, fresh look to them. The outfits of the pretty women and girls there were pleasing to his eyes, and Murasaki’s nurse, Shōnagon, had made sure that all the preparations had been carried out to his complete satisfaction. Indeed, everything looked wonderful to him.

Murasaki was sweetly done up ... truly lovely.

"It's been a long time," Genji began. "You've become quite the young lady."

He raised the lower half of the curtains to peek in on her, and when he did so she shyly turned away from him. Even so, he could see that her beauty was perfection itself. Glimpsing her profile in the lamplight, he could tell from her eyes and face that she looked exactly like Fujitsubo, the woman who had so possessed his heart, and he was overjoyed. He moved closer to her and spoke of all the things that had happened, and of how anxious he had been, wondering how she had fared during his period of mourning.

"I want to talk to you at leisure, tell you stories of all that took place while I was away. For the time being, however, I'll sleep in the east hall. Having just come out of mourning, it might be bad luck for me to stay here just now. But soon we will have all the time in the world to be together ... so much so that you may come to regard me as a nuisance."

Shōnagon, who was listening in on them, was delighted by his words, but then she immediately began having anxious thoughts about the precarious position of her young charge. After all, Genji discreetly visited many highborn ladies, and it was also possible that he would be drawn to some new lady who might appear on the scene and take the place of his late wife. Shōnagon's suspicious nature was an unattractive trait, but her doubts were understandable, since her primary responsibility was to look after Murasaki.

Genji returned to his own chambers. One of his female attendants, Chūjō no kimi, massaged his legs, and he was finally able to relax and fall asleep. The next morning he sent a letter to his little son at Sanjō. The melancholy reply, obviously written for him by the boy's grandmother, filled him with inexhaustible grief.

With little to occupy him, Genji would lose himself in reveries of longing. Yet because he was reluctant to wander about on some random nocturnal adventure, he could not rouse himself to go out. His little Murasaki was now grown up and ideal in all respects. She looked spectacular, and he felt that now was the appropriate time to consummate their relationship. From time to time he would casually drop hints about their marriage, but she seemed to have no idea what he was talking about.

They whiled away the hours, relieving their tedium by playing Go or word games like *hentsugi*, writing down radicals or parts of a Chinese character and trying to guess which one it was. Murasaki had a clever and engaging personality, and she would demonstrate endearing talents in even the most trivial of pastimes. For several years he had driven all thoughts of taking her as a wife out of his mind, dismissing her talents as nothing more than the

accomplishments of a precocious child. Now he could no longer control his passion—though he did feel pangs of guilt, since he was painfully aware of how innocent she was.

Her attendants assumed he would consummate their relationship at some point, but because he had always slept with her, there was simply no way for them to know when that moment would come. One morning Genji rose early, but Murasaki refused to get up. Her behavior worried her attendants.

“What’s wrong?” they whispered. “She seems unusually out of sorts today.”

Right before Genji returned to his own quarters, he placed just inside her curtains a box filled with inkstones, brushes and paper, which she was to use for the customary morning-after letter. When there was no one else around, Murasaki finally lifted her head and found his betrothal note folded in a love knot at her pillow. Still in a daze, she opened the letter.

*How strange that we have stayed apart so long
Though we slept together night after night
With only the robes we wore between us*

The poem was written in a playful, spontaneous manner, as if he had allowed his emotions to carry him along. It had never crossed her mind that he might be the kind of man who harbored such thoughts about her, and she burned with shame when she recalled their sordid first night: *How could I have been so naive? How could I have ever trusted a man with such base intentions?*

Genji returned to her quarters at midday, peeking in through her curtains.

“Something seems to be bothering you ... are you not well? It would be quite tedious for me if we weren’t able to play Go today.”

Murasaki was still lying facedown. She pulled the bedding up over her face so that she would not have to look at him. When her attendants withdrew, Genji went over to her.

“Why are you acting so despondent? Are you displeased with me? I never imagined that you could be so cold. Your women must think this is all very queer.”

He tugged her bedding away. She was bathed in perspiration, and tears had soaked the hair framing her forehead.

“Now this won’t do at all!” Genji was put out. “Tears on the first day of your marriage? It’s ominous ... very inauspicious.” He tried all sorts of things to cheer her up, but she thought him utterly horrid and refused to speak.

“All right, then, have it your way,” he told her spitefully. “I won’t come here any more if you insist on putting me to shame!”

He opened the box with the writing implements and checked inside. There was no reply note. *She's still a child after all*, he thought ruefully. He now felt sorry for her and decided to stay with her inside the curtains for the rest of the day. He passed the whole time trying to comfort her, but this proved difficult. Her refusal to warm up to him, however, merely made her look all the more precious to him.

It was the First Day of the Boar in the tenth month, when the moon rose in the north-northwest. The custom was to serve cakes made of pounded rice on this day, so as evening wore on and they reached the Hour of the Boar a little after 9:00 p.m., Genji had rice cakes shaped to look like baby pigs brought in to him and Murasaki. The boar was a symbol of fertility, but the First Day of the Boar was not an auspicious time for marriage. Moreover, Genji was still in mourning, and so he made sure their celebration was subdued, serving the rice cakes in Murasaki's quarters only. Observing the various colors of the rice cakes, which were flavored with beans, or chestnuts, or poppy, among other things, and nestled in cypress boxes, Genji remembered that he had to have white rice cakes prepared for tomorrow evening, the Third Night of their marriage. He stepped out and summoned Koremitsu.

"Have rice cakes brought here tomorrow," he ordered, "though not as many as today. This was not a particularly auspicious day for such things."

Seeing Genji's wry smile, Koremitsu caught on immediately. He did not press his lord on the matter, but simply replied with a perfectly serious expression on his face.

"Of course, my lord. It's most reasonable of you to choose an auspicious day to serve rice cakes." He then added, rather drolly, "Let's see ... tomorrow is the Day of the Rat. Shall I tell them you're having rice cakes in the shape of baby mice to celebrate the event? And just how many will you need?"

"I suppose a third as many as we had today ... that should be enough," Genji answered. And with that Koremitsu, who knew just what to do, withdrew. *He's certainly an experienced hand*, thought Genji. Koremitsu spoke of this to no one else, and had the rice cakes prepared at his own residence, without telling anyone why he needed them. He was so discreet, in fact, it was almost as if he had made them himself.

Genji was finding it so difficult to comfort Murasaki that he was at a loss. At the same time he was delighted when it occurred to him that, for the first time in her life, she must have felt like a stolen bride. With that realization came another.

She has been precious to me for many years, but my feelings for her during all that time were nothing compared to what I feel for her now. The heart is a

peculiar thing. Now I find it impossible to be apart from her, even for a single night.

Koremitsu stealthily brought a box filled with the rice cakes Genji had ordered late the previous night. Deeply considerate and sensitive to the situation, Koremitsu thought it might be embarrassing for Murasaki if he asked her nurse, Shōnagon, to take the box into her chambers. So instead he summoned Shōnagon's daughter, Ben.

"Take this to your young mistress, and don't let anyone see you." He handed her an incense jar, inside of which he had hidden the box of rice cakes. "Now listen to me. This is a gift to celebrate an auspicious event, so you must set it beside her pillow. Be very careful. You must carry out my instructions to the letter." Ben thought that this request was suspicious, but she took the jar anyway.

"I have never," she insisted, "been unfaithful in serving my lady."

He cut her short.

"Don't use the word 'unfaithful.' The very uttering of it on an occasion like this is bad luck."

Ben considered the whole affair very odd, but she was young and really had no idea what Koremitsu was talking about. She placed the jar inside her lady's curtains next to her pillow. Genji, as he always did, explained the significance of the rice cakes to Murasaki.

Murasaki's attendants had known nothing about this. It wasn't until the next morning, when Genji had the box of rice cakes taken away, that they finally realized their lord had formally taken their young mistress as his wife. When could all of the dishes have been brought in? The stands on which the plates rested looked fabulous, their legs intricately carved in the shape of flowers. Various kinds of rice cakes had been specially prepared, and everything used for the Third Night celebration—the silver plates, silver chopsticks, silver chopstick rests—had been exquisitely arranged. Shōnagon wondered, *Has he actually gone so far as to recognize her as his wife?* And when she saw it was true, she was profoundly grateful and wept at this proof of Genji's honorable intentions.

The other women were disappointed that they had not been let in on the secret, and they grumbled among themselves. "Of course it's wonderful that things have turned out like this, but why did our lord have to keep it secret? And that Koremitsu ... whatever could he have been thinking?"

Following his marriage to Murasaki, Genji would feel so anxious about her whenever he went to the palace or called on the Retired Emperor, even for a short visit, that a vision of her would come to him and he would see her face. He found his own attraction to her mysterious. He received resentful letters from his other women enticing him to visit, and their notes did make him feel bad for

them. But the very thought that such visits would be hard on his new bride troubled him. He recalled a line from an old *Man'yōshū* poem: “How can I endure a single night apart from you?”¹³ He simply could not bring himself to go out on his nocturnal forays, but instead pretended he wasn’t feeling well and was indisposed. He passed the time sending replies to his ladies along the lines of “I’ve been preoccupied of late with thoughts of the sad evanescence of this world. Once this mood of mine has passed, we shall, I assure you, meet again.”

Oborozukiyo, the lady Genji associated with that evening of the misty moon, could not get him out of her mind. Her older sister, the Kokiden Consort, who was now the Imperial Mother, was extremely displeased to learn about this infatuation, and was further annoyed when her own father, the Minister of the Right, dismissed her concerns.

“Why should I be bothered about this?” he said. “If she realizes her heart’s desire and becomes one of Genji’s wives, I won’t complain. After all, the woman who was most significant to him has apparently died.”

The Kokiden Consort replied, “And what’s wrong with her entering service in the women’s quarters?” She seemed to have her heart firmly set on sending her younger sister to court to serve her son, Emperor Suzaku.

For his part, Genji did not consider Oborozukiyo just another woman, and he thought it a shame that she should be sent into service at the palace. At the present moment, however, he was not inclined to divide his attention among his women. He wanted to focus on Murasaki alone.

I’d better let it be, he thought. Murasaki is good enough. Life is brief, and so I should just settle down with her. I must never again stir resentment in a woman.

This train of thought brought back the incident with the lady at Rokujō. He had learned a fearful lesson. He was sorry for her, but now he could never feel comfortable recognizing her formally as a wife. *If she could be satisfied with continuing to meet as we have over the years, if she could go on being my companion, a woman who could talk with me on those occasions when it’s natural and proper to do so, if we could just be a comfort to one another ...*

As he mulled over their relationship, he realized that no matter how difficult she might be, she was someone he could not easily abandon.

No one at the court knew anything about Murasaki, and when Genji thought about the situation he realized it made her look like a woman without distinction, with nothing to recommend her. And so he decided to inform Murasaki’s father, Prince Hyōbu, that they were now married. Genji did not invite many people to her coming-of-age ceremony, when she would for the first time put on the pleated back skirt worn by adult women, nor did he mention it openly, but he did make extraordinary preparations to ensure it was a remarkable event. His

solicitude was gratifying to Murasaki, but now she couldn't help considering Genji weirdly depraved and dislikeable. She was consumed with regret, having so long relied on him for everything. Clinging to him had merely exposed her own lack of judgment, and she could no longer look him straight in the eye. Whenever he spoke teasingly or playfully to her, she would turn sullen and morose, as though she found his words irritating. He found the change in her behavior both adorable and regrettable, and as the year came to a close he finally expressed his frustration, saying, "I find your coldness a little hard to take after having cared for you all these years."

On New Year's Day Genji made the customary visits to his father, to the palace, and to his secret son, the Crown Prince. He then left for the Minister of the Left's Sanjō residence. The New Year is usually an auspicious occasion, but the Minister had been reminiscing sadly about the old times with his wife and was in a melancholy frame of mind when Genji arrived. Since Genji was honoring them with his visit, the Minister did his best to control his emotions, but when he set eyes on Genji he found it difficult. Was it his imagination, or had the addition of another year given Genji a more mature and dignified presence and even greater radiance? Taking his leave of the Minister, Genji next paid a call on the chambers of his late wife. Her attendants could not conceal their emotions at receiving this rare visit after such a long absence. When he saw his little son, Genji had an ambivalent reaction—overjoyed at how the child had grown and at how happy and healthy he looked, and grief-stricken that the boy's mother was not here with him. The boy looked just like the Crown Prince, especially his eyes and the area around his mouth. The resemblance was so close, in fact, that Genji experienced a twinge of anxiety, since he worried someone else might take note of it. The appearance of his late wife's quarters had not changed, and his New Year's robes, which she had always prepared for him, had been dutifully hung from the top pole of the kimono rack. Without his wife's robe hanging beside it, however, it looked forsaken and lusterless.

His mother-in-law, Princess Ōmiya, sent a note to him:

I know it is bad luck to cry on New Year's Day, but I find it hard to hold back my tears when you honor us this way with your presence. I had robes prepared for you, just as she did in the old days, but my eyes have been so clouded by tears these past months I'm sure their colors will not look very pleasing to you. Still, if you would deign to wear them just for today ...

In addition to the robes, she had other items, all of exquisite craftsmanship, brought in and presented to him. The color and weave of his robe and train,

which she felt he should definitely wear today, were exceptional, and so he put them on, concerned that if he didn't it would make all her efforts on his behalf seem wasted. His heart ached for her when he realized how sad she would have been had he not visited.

He sent a reply: "Thinking spring has arrived, I came with the hope that I could be the first to show it to you. But now so many thoughts and memories overwhelm me, there is nothing I can say."

*On this day each year she made new colors for me ...
And now, today, I come again to don these robes
On which fall tears called forth by memories of old*

"I cannot calm my heart."

Princess Ōmiya replied:

*A New Year has arrived, or so I'm told
But old sorrows linger, as do my tears ...
An old woman's tears, ones that never cease*

They had good reason for their overpowering grief.

¹ *Aoi* (*Aohi* in the old orthography) is the Japanese name for wild ginger. It is also a homophone for the words *au hi*, which means "the day we will meet." The combination of the heart-shaped leaves of the plant, which is an evergreen, and the romantic implications of its name are played on later in this chapter in an exchange of poems between Genji and the older lady, Naishi, who appeared in the *Momiji no ga* chapter. Because much of this chapter centers on Genji's wife, she has been identified traditionally as Aoi. However, I have opted not to use that name, and instead identify her simply as Genji's wife to emphasize her status. Moreover, unlike other female characters—Fujitsubo, Yūgao, Murasaki—whose names come from plants or places directly associated with them, Genji's wife is not directly connected with *aoi*, wild ginger, in the text. Wild ginger is not true ginger. It is a low-growing woodland plant that gives off a scent similar to culinary ginger. I have translated *aoi* as "wild ginger" because there is a simple, natural beauty in this plain name that is appropriate to the aesthetic of the Kamo Festival.

² *Kokinshū* 1080 (a sacred song for the Sun Goddess).

³ *Sakaki* is a flowering evergreen tree native to Japan. It is sacred in the Shinto religion and branches of *sakaki*, decorated with slips or streamers of paper, are used for ritual offerings and purifications.

⁴ *Kokinshū* 509 (Anonymous).

⁵ *Kokin rokujō* 987 (Anonymous).

⁶ *Kokinshū* 977 (Ōshikōchi Mitsune): "It must have wandered off, abandoning my body ... this heart of mine that goes its own way, doing things I do not intend."

⁷ Yet another allusion to Kanesuke's poem: *Gosenshū* 1102.

⁸ *Gosenshū* 1187 (Nurse to Kanetada's mother): "If there were no children as a memento of the relationship

that bound us together, would I have to pick the young grasses of remembrance?” This poem plays on the word *shinobugusa*, a kind of fern whose name means “grasses of remembrance.” This fern is mentioned above in the *Yūgao* chapter, where the name carries a related meaning of “yearning love.”

⁹ *Kokinshū* 839 (Mibu no Tadamine); “Why, of all seasons, did he have to depart during the autumn, when the sight of everything causes the heart to yearn?” The poem was written on the death of Ki no Tomonori.

¹⁰ Clothing was changed for the winter season on the first day of the tenth month.

¹¹ Liu Yuxi (772–842), from a poem included in *Wen xuan* (文選), an anthology of Chinese verse that exerted tremendous influence on the development of Heian period poetry.

¹² Later commentary has claimed that this line is an allusion to a poem (*Genji monogatari kochūshakusho in'yō waka* 514): “I know that chill evening rains always fall in early winter, but my sleeves have never been as damp as they are now.” The source of the poem for Murasaki Shikibu, however, has not been identified.

¹³ *Man'yōshū* 2542: “Now that we are betrothed, sharing a pillow of new grasses, how can I endure a single night apart from you?”

X

Sakaki

A Branch of Sacred Evergreen

THE DAY of departure for the new High Priestess of Ise was drawing near, and her mother's heart was filled with melancholy and loneliness. Following the death of Genji's wife, whose special status the lady at Rokujō had found such an affront to her dignity, rumors spread around the court to the effect that now, at last, Genji would surely make her his primary wife. Even her own ladies-in-waiting were atwitter with anticipation at the possibility. Contrary to expectations, however, Genji's visits to the lady abruptly ceased altogether, and upon experiencing his shockingly cold behavior, the lady realized that something must have happened to truly upset him. She therefore resolved to abandon her lingering attachments and strengthened her resolve to accompany her daughter to Ise.

There was no precedent for a parent to accompany the High Priestess to Ise, but the lady, who wanted to distance herself from her troubled relationship with Genji, explained that she couldn't be separated from her daughter because the girl was simply too young to be on her own outside the capital. Hearing that the lady had decided to leave, Genji felt a twinge of remorse and exchanged with her a series of elegantly touching letters. The lady, however, was convinced that it was now too late for them and that they should not meet face-to-face. Genji would almost certainly consider her refusal hateful, but she was firmly resolved, heart and mind, for she knew it was inappropriate to do anything that would further disturb her troubled spirit and cause her more pain and suffering.

She would return occasionally to her villa on Rokujō, but she did so infrequently and in such secrecy that Genji was never able to learn when she was in residence there. Since she had moved out to the compound of the temporary shrine on the plains of Sagano—a place difficult for him to visit no matter how

much he longed to go—they remained apart as days and months passed, even though he continued to be deeply concerned about her. On top of everything else, Genji's father was from time to time troubled by various ailments, which was unusual, and these additional worries burdened his heart and gave him no rest. Still, Genji was shamed by the prospect that the lady might think him cold and that people who heard about their relationship might consider him heartless, and so in spite of his travails he decided to go to the temporary shrine in Sagano. It was already the seventh day of the ninth month, and he assumed that their departure for Ise was imminent—perhaps in the next day or two. The lady was feeling restless, pressured by the numerous preparations she had to make for the departure. Now, on top of everything else, Genji was sending note after note begging to meet, if only for a moment. He told her that he would even stand outside her blinds. She struggled, unsure what to do, until she finally concluded that it would be excessively unfriendly not to meet him. She agreed to have him visit her secretly, but with a screen between them.

Once he had set out to cross the broad plains of Sagano, he was moved to sorrowful compassion. The autumn flowers were withering, and the lonely sound of the wind in the pine trees harmonized with the rasping cries of insects coming from the sere thickets of satin-tail grass. Faint notes of music, gentle and tender, were wafting faintly on the wind, though he could not quite make out the song or the kind of koto being played.

An escort of ten or so of Genji's most trusted guards accompanied him. In an effort to avoid attracting attention, his men had eschewed wearing formal robes. Genji, on the contrary, had not bothered to disguise himself, but had taken special care in preparing his attire. Because he looked so resplendent, he made the sophisticated, urbane young men traveling with him appreciate the profound beauty of the setting.

Why did I wait until now to come here? Genji reflected, bitterly regretting the time that had been lost.

A scattering of temporary dwellings roofed with wood-plank shingles stood inside a low, fragile, rustic-looking enclosure of brushwood. The *torii* gate was made of logs that had not been stripped of their bark, creating an atmosphere of solemnity that, given the purpose of his visit, made him hesitate to enter such sacred ground. Here and there several Shinto clerics were coughing or clearing their throats in order to signal that Genji had arrived, and another group of priests stood talking amongst themselves. It was a different world altogether, one that struck Genji as strange and unfamiliar. The building where the ceremonial fire was kept constantly blazing was glowing faintly, and, since there were so few people about, stillness had settled over the compound. Genji felt a stab of

keen sorrow when it occurred to him just how many days and months she had spent in isolation here, lost in her obsessive longings.

He withdrew, moving out of sight to what he assumed was the appropriate building on the north side of the main hall, and sent in a message to the lady announcing his arrival. He could hear intriguing sounds of people bustling about, but received only a reply from an intermediary. It irritated Genji that his lady showed no inclination to meet face-to-face, and so with great sincerity he spoke to her.

“If you could just appreciate how difficult and inappropriate it is for someone of my position to be coming here in secret like this, then you would not keep yourself apart from me, as if you had drawn a sacred straw rope between us. I wish to clear away the dark feelings and resentments that cloud my heart.”

At that point her attendants interceded for him.

“Truly it would be a pity to leave him standing outside, looking so forlorn.”

What should I do? the lady fretted. I risk being shamed if I go out to meet him now, especially with my women watching ... and even he might think it inappropriate for someone of my age.

But as reluctant as she was to see him, she didn’t want to seem cold or willfully aloof. In the end, the impression she made on his heart when she went out and sat behind her blind with much sighing and hesitation was one of magnificent refinement.

“May I be permitted to come up onto the veranda?” he asked, and stepped up.

His handsome figure and graceful movements gave off an incomparable radiance in the evening moonlight, which shone clearly into the space. They had reached the point in their relationship where he felt embarrassed to try to give some plausible excuse for all the months he had ignored her, so instead he presented her with a small branch of *sakaki*, the sacred evergreen, which he had broken off on his way here. “Having made a signpost of my feelings, which, like the color of this sacred branch will never fade, I have entered this holy compound. And yet, how unfeeling you remain.”¹

She responded with a poem:

*With no cedar trees to serve as signpost
To guide you to this sacred enclosure
Have you in error brought sakaki here²*

Genji replied as follows:

*Thinking you might be where the shrine maiden dwells
I have brought this branch along the way...*

*In longing I plucked this branch along the way
Drawn by the fragrance of sacred evergreens*

He felt constrained by the atmosphere of their surroundings, but he entered just inside her blind and leaned against one of the tie beams around the entrance.

During all those years when Genji ought to have followed the dictates of his heart and bestowed visits on her—a period during which the lady also thought longingly of him—his complacency, born of self-conceit, prevented him from feeling any sense of guilt or urgency about their relationship. Then, after he had been convinced in his heart that she was frighteningly flawed, his passion for her cooled to the point that now they were estranged. Yet as memories of their affair came back to him on the occasion of this extraordinary meeting, his heart was roiled by powerful emotions of sorrow and pity. Thinking of all that had happened and of all that was to come, he wept, brokenhearted. Although the lady seemed to be trying to steel herself, since she did not want her true feelings to show, she was unable to hold her emotions in check, and the sight of her struggling became more and more difficult for him to bear. As she looked at him, his appearance seemed to be telling her to reconsider her plans to leave the capital for Ise. Gazing into the sublime beauty of the sky—was it the early setting of the moon that made it seem so lovely?—his complaints spilled forth as he pleaded with her not to spurn his love. His pleas should have been enough to make the numerous hurts and resentments that had accumulated in her heart vanish. Indeed, even though she had finally resolved to make a clean break with him, now that they were meeting again her resolve began to crumble, and she found herself wavering.

Young noblemen accompanied one another on visits to this temporary shrine, and they cut remarkably splendid figures as they wandered about the garden there—a place they found difficult to leave. The scene before Genji and the lady was thus perfect, and there is simply no way to convey in writing all the words and feelings that these two, who had tasted sorrow to the full, shared with each other.

The sky was gradually growing light—its appearance seemed to have been made especially for them. Genji, who was finding it difficult to depart, took her hand and hesitated, overwhelmed by feelings of intimacy.

*Partings at the break of dawn are always
Soaked by the dew ... but never have I known
So sorrowful an autumn sky as this*

A chill wind was blowing, and the raspy, mournful voices of bell crickets seemed to capture the mood of the moment. No one—not even a person untroubled by sad thoughts—could have passed by this scene without having been deeply affected. That being the case, it is hardly surprising, then, that the two of them, who were so distraught, found it hard to find the words for their poems of parting. Finally, she was able to reply:

*Parting in autumn is sorrow enough ...
Let me not hear as well the mournful cries
Of bell crickets in fields of withered grass*

Though he was filled with frustrations and regrets, it was no use obsessing over them; and so, wishing to avoid the gaze of others, Genji departed. His path was drenched in dew and tears.

The lady, unable to maintain a stoic bearing, was lost in melancholy reverie, staring sadly at the place where Genji had been just moments earlier. His visage, which had been faintly visible in the moonlight, and the lingering fragrance of his perfumed robes, made a deep impression on the young women in attendance, and their praise for him perhaps went beyond the bounds of what was proper.

“Is any journey worth abandoning a man like this?” they tearfully whispered among themselves, unaware of all that had taken place between Genji and their mistress.

His letter the next morning provided an unusually detailed account of his feelings, and though she found it difficult to resist his blandishments, she could not reverse herself and be indecisive once again. Thus, his letter came to naught. Genji was a man capable of unparalleled eloquence in expressing romantic emotions—even for affairs that didn’t mean all that much to him—and so for a relationship that he could never have considered ordinary, it must have been all the more painful to have her reject him this way. He had magnificent robes and furnishings and goods of all sorts prepared and sent to her and her attendants for their journey, but she felt neither joy nor resentment at his show of concern. She was leaving behind a reputation as a frivolous and cruel woman, and as the day of departure drew near, she was now constantly regretting her situation, as if she were aware for the first time of the consequences of her actions. Her daughter, the High Priestess, had a youthful outlook on things, and she was happy that the departure date, which had been unsettled, was now firmly fixed. Naturally, gossip about the mother’s unprecedented decision to accompany her daughter swirled about the court—some of it sympathetic, some sharply critical because of her relationship with Genji.

People whose status is such that they are never subjected to the barbed comments of others seem to have an easier time in life. Unfortunately, for those of high status who stand out in society, there are also many constraints on their behavior.

On the sixteenth day the Rite of Purification for the Ise Priestess was conducted at the Katsura River to the west of the capital. The ceremony was grander than most, in part because it was customary to choose men of high status and splendid reputations—a Consultant, for example, or a Middle Counselor—to serve as a member of her imperial escort. All of this of course reflected the interest that the Retired Emperor was taking in the matter.

Just as they were departing, a letter arrived from Genji revealing all the emotions he had not yet been able to fully express. He had addressed it “To the High Priestess, with Humble Reverence” and bound it with a ritual cord made of paper mulberry bark. “They say,” he had written, “that the god of thunder himself has never sundered a relationship between lovers.”³

*O Gods of the land of the Eight Isles
If you feel pity, then judge kindly
Two who taste in full parting's sorrow*

“Thinking about you, I cannot help but feel depressed and dissatisfied.”

Although she was extremely busy with her preparations, the High Priestess replied. Her Head of Household wrote out the response:

*Were the gods of our land to judge you
Would they not first and foremost condemn
The thoughtlessness of your heart and words*

Genji was curious about the Ceremony of Parting and wanted to go to the palace, but he decided against it because he thought it would look pathetic for a man to be seeing off a lover who had rejected him. So, with nothing to occupy him, he was lost in his own thoughts. The High Priestess’s reply poem was so mature that he had to smile as he read it. *She must be alluring beyond her years*, he thought, aroused to abnormal fantasies about her not as a Priestess but as a woman. His disposition always drew him toward relationships that were unusual and problematic.

How unfortunate that I wasn't able to see her when she was a child, he mused, when I might have been able to get a good look at her. Oh well, nothing in this world is fixed forever, and so I should be able to meet her at some point.

On the day of the Ceremony of Parting a large number of carriages lined up to view the procession, since it featured the presence of a lady and a daughter of exceptional beauty and breeding. At the Hour of the Monkey, around four o'clock in the afternoon, the procession arrived at the palace. The lady had last come here borne in a palanquin when she was to have become Empress. Her father had always aimed for her to reach the pinnacle of court society, but then her circumstances, which he had nurtured so carefully, suddenly changed. Upon seeing the palace now, after the collapse of her father's dreams, she was reminded of the mutability of all things in this world—a thought that moved her profoundly. She had come as the bride of the Crown Prince when she was sixteen and left the palace at twenty when he died. Now she was thirty, and upon seeing the ninefold palace again she composed a poem to herself:

*On this day, as much as I try to suppress
Memories of all that happened long ago
Unbearable sorrow lingers in my heart*

The Ise Priestess had turned fourteen. She was exquisite, and her figure, properly attired for this occasion, was so stunningly beautiful that it raised concerns that she might draw the attention of gods or demons. The Emperor Suzaku was smitten by her, and when he placed the Comb of Parting in her hair, he could not hold back his emotions, and tears welled up in his eyes.

The carriages of the ladies accompanying the High Priestess to Ise were lined up along the compound of buildings housing the Eight Ministries under the Council of State. As they awaited departure the variegated hues of the sleeves of those ladies seated inside were spilling out from under the blinds, giving off a fresh appearance and vivacious charm. Many lords were feeling wistful regret, each of them seeing this moment as his own personal farewell to his parting lover.

The party set off after dark, and when they turned at Nijō Avenue onto the boulevard of Tōin, they passed by Genji's villa. Feeling great pity, Genji attached a poem to a branch of *sakaki* and sent it to the lady.

*When you depart today will your sleeves be dampened
By the Eighty Rapids at Suzuka River ...
Or by tears of regret for leaving me behind*

It was already quite dark when his letter arrived, and the lady was feeling rushed and flustered. Her reply, which she sent from the barrier gate at Ōsaka,

did not reach him until the following day.

*I cannot tell if my sleeves were dampened
By the rapids at Suzuka River ...
Do your thoughts escort me to far Ise*

Though terse and hastily written, her calligraphy was interestingly elegant. Even so, he felt she should have written something that showed a little more depth of feeling for him. A thick fog had settled over everything, and as he stared out achingly at the misty early dawn, he whispered a poem to himself:

*I gaze in longing toward the path you travel
Hoping from afar that this year the autumn fog
Will not hide Mount Ōsaka, where lovers meet*

He did not go over to the west hall to see Murasaki, but kept to himself, sunk in lonely, distracted thoughts. Compared to him, however, the lady on the road to Ise must surely have been suffering an even more exquisite agony.

Genji's father was ill, and by the tenth month his condition had become serious. Everyone in court society was concerned and grieving. Emperor Suzaku was so troubled that he personally called on his father. Although weakened by illness, the Retired Emperor asked repeatedly after the Crown Prince. He then spoke about Genji.

"When I'm gone I want you to continue thinking of him as an adviser in all matters of state, both great and small, just as when I was alive. In my opinion, you should not hesitate at all to entrust the government to him just because he is young. As the Korean diviner predicted, he is a man destined to rule the court. For that reason I was afraid that conflict might arise, and so I took him out of the line of succession and made him a commoner, with the idea that he would be of service to the throne. Do not go against my wishes on this matter."

Although there were numerous heartrending last requests, these are not the sort of things a woman should be relating, and I feel awkward having mentioned what little I have here. Emperor Suzaku was moved to sadness and gave repeated assurances that he would carry out his father's final instructions. He was so glorious in appearance and mature in demeanor that the Retired Emperor looked on him with joy and a sense of trust. Because the audience with his father was formal and public, Suzaku felt constrained, and he soon returned to the palace, regretting that many things had been left unsaid.

The Crown Prince had wanted to accompany Suzaku on his visit, but because

it would have been too much excitement for the Retired Emperor, his visit was changed to another day. The boy was graceful and mature-looking beyond his years, and his longing to see his father had been building all throughout the illness. He was, in his innocence of the true circumstances of his birth, overjoyed when he was finally allowed to visit, and the scene of them together was touching. When the Retired Emperor saw Fujitsubo weeping disconsolately, his heart was filled with conflicting emotions. He spoke to the Crown Prince about all the things he should expect as future sovereign, but the boy was at such a tender age that the Retired Emperor couldn't help looking on him with a mix of concern and pity, and he repeatedly admonished Genji to be vigilant in attending to affairs of state and in looking after the interests of the Crown Prince. It was late at night when the boy left, and the tumultuous scene of his procession, which included virtually all of the upper ranking courtiers, was so grandly solemn that it was indistinguishable from that of Emperor Suzaku's. The Retired Emperor was sorry to see the boy go and dissatisfied that they had not had enough time together.

The Kokiden Consort also wanted to pay a visit, but the presence of Fujitsubo made her hesitate ... and while she was vacillating, trying to decide what to do, the Retired Emperor passed away peacefully and with dignity. Many at the court were caught off guard and panicked. Even though the Retired Emperor had abdicated, he had maintained control of political power so the court would continue to function as it had during his reign. Suzaku, however, was still young, and his maternal grandfather, the Minister of the Right, was shallow, impulsive, and spiteful. Senior ministers and high-ranking nobles all fretted over what would become of the court under his control.

Fujitsubo and Genji had cause to be more distraught and uneasy than anyone. Observing that Genji's filial devotion in carrying out the subsequent memorial rites was much greater than that shown by the other princes, courtiers looked on him with pity and awe. Even in the unadorned robes of mourning, the extraordinary purity of his appearance stirred sympathy in onlookers. He had encountered misfortunes in consecutive years, and so he came to consider the world of the court vain and tedious. It occurred to him that the death of his father provided the perfect opportunity for him to withdraw from society and take religious vows, but because he was still bound by many relationships, he was not ready to do so just yet.

The imperial wives and concubines of the late Emperor remained at his villa until the final memorial service on the forty-ninth day following his death. After that they began to drift away one by one, like falling leaves, returning to their family residences. It was the twentieth day of the twelfth month, and the weather

seemed to signal not only the end of the year but also the end of an era. It seemed intensely so for Fujitsubo, who felt she was living in a world where overcast skies would never clear. She knew all too well the temperament of the Kokiden Consort, how intolerably difficult it would be to live at a court subject to her whims. As if that prospect wasn't depressing enough, she could find no respite from her memories of the late Emperor, with whom she had become so intimate over the years, and because nothing remained as it had been—what with the other women leaving to reside elsewhere—her sorrows knew no limits.

Fujitsubo returned to her family residence at Sanjō. Her older brother, Prince Hyōbu, came to accompany her on the move back. Snow was swirling, winds were gusting fiercely, and the interior of the late Emperor's villa had grown hushed and deserted. Genji arrived at Fujitsubo's quarters, and they shared stories about the old times. Prince Hyōbu was gazing at a five-needle pine in the front garden. The tree was bending under the weight of the snow, and the needles on the lower branches had turned brown. He composed a poem:

*We relied on his sheltering grace, which spread broad
As the shade of this pine, now withered at year's end
Its needles scattered and dispersed like his servants*

His verse was nothing special, but it seemed somehow appropriate to the occasion and was thus very moving.

Genji wept into his damp sleeves. The pond in the garden was completely frozen. He replied:

*The icy pond so clear and mirrorlike ...
How sad that it will reflect no longer
That visage once so familiar to us*

His poem directly expressed his feelings at that moment. Apparently he had adopted a juvenile voice for his composition.

Ōmyōbu added a verse of her own:

*At year's end flowing water in the stone spring
Freezes, ceases to move ... slowly the visage
Of one who was once familiar to us fades*

Numerous other poems were exchanged on this occasion, but there is no need to reproduce them all here.

Although the ceremony that attended Fujitsubo's move to her family villa on Sanjō was typical of such events, it seemed somehow sad—perhaps it was the working of her imagination—and her old residence struck her as strange, like lodgings used by a wayfarer. She contemplated all the months and years that had passed since she last lived there.

Although the New Year was now upon them, no lively, up-to-date festivities were held, and the court was quiet. Genji, more depressed than the others, shut himself away. It was the time of year for provincial appointments. It goes without saying that during his father's reign the gates of Genji's residence were always so packed with horses and carriages bringing courtiers seeking favors that there would be no space to move. Even during the period of his father's retirement, New Year's was a busy time. This year, however, few retainers with their satchels of implements or tools showed up. Genji spotted only his most familiar attendants, and they did not seem to be all that busy. It bothered him to think that from now on life would be tedious and unexciting, and he felt empty and alone.

During the second month Genji's lady of the evening of the misty moon, Oborozukiyo, was promoted from Mistress of the Imperial Wardrobe to Principal Handmaid. She replaced a woman who, grief-stricken over the death of the Retired Emperor, had withdrawn from court and taken vows as a nun. Aristocratic in bearing and of sterling character, Oborozukiyo was specially favored by Emperor Suzaku over the other imperial wives and concubines. The Kokiden Consort was spending more and more time at the residence of her father, the Minister of the Right, and whenever she did stay at the palace, she now quartered in the Umetsubo, the chambers of the plum courtyard. As a result, Oborozukiyo, who had previously been hidden away in the Tōkaden,⁴ was moved to the brighter, livelier Kokiden, where many other women were gathered. Though her new quarters were modern and gay, Oborozukiyo secretly found it hard to forget her unexpected tryst with Genji. She continued her highly secretive correspondence with him, just as she had before her move. For Genji's part, though he worried what would happen to them if word of their affair got out, his predilection for reckless romances aroused his passion, especially now that she was even more difficult to visit.

So long as the Retired Emperor was alive the Kokiden Consort had been constrained. Since she was a headstrong woman with a fierce temperament, she was now bent on avenging herself for all the slights she had suffered—resentments that had built up in her heart over the years. Because she tiresomely opposed everything Genji wanted, he had to resign himself to the fact that this was how things were. However, such unpleasantness, which he had never

experienced before, made him feel he should no longer mingle with others at the court.

The Minister of the Left felt completely out of step with the new power arrangements, and so he made no special efforts to attend the palace. The Kokiden Consort remembered his decision to give his late daughter to Genji rather than to her son, and so she did not have a kind opinion of him. His relationship with the Minister of the Right had been awkward and distant from the start, and now that the times had changed and he was unable to exert his will as he had in the previous reign, it was natural that he should find the smug, self-satisfied look on the face of the Minister of the Right insufferable.

Genji continued to visit the Sanjō residence of the Minister of the Left; and because he now felt a deeper, warmer regard for the women who had served his late wife, he showered his young son with extraordinary love and care. Feeling even more grateful for Genji's generosity and sensitive heart, the Minister's high regard for him remained unwavering.

Genji, who was once the recipient of the late Emperor's boundless grace, seemed to have been overburdened with responsibilities that left him no leisure time for himself. He had drifted away from many of the women he used to visit, and he regretted his frivolous sexual escapades, which he now considered deplorable. With the change of reigns, however, things were different for him. His life was calm and sober, and because he was no longer burdened by worldly affairs, he was able—for the moment, at least—to lead what was for him an ideal life.

Courtiers gushed over the good fortune of Murasaki, the young lady residing in the west hall of Genji's villa. Shōnagon was privately convinced that all of this was a sign of the efficacy of the prayers offered by the late nun, Murasaki's grandmother. Even her father, Prince Hyōbu, was able to communicate with his daughter as he wished. The princesses who were Murasaki's half sisters were not as fortunate or successful, despite the high expectations their parents had for them. Murasaki's stepmother, Prince Hyōbu's principal wife, must have felt especially disgruntled and had many reasons to envy Murasaki's good fortune. Indeed, the young lady's story seemed like something out of a romantic tale.

Following the death of the Retired Emperor, his daughter, the Third Princess by the Kokiden Consort, stepped aside as the Kamo Priestess and was replaced by Genji's Princess of the bellflowers, Asagao. Though there was no precedent for the granddaughter of an Emperor to succeed to the position, there were no other suitable princesses available at the time. Much time had passed, but Genji had not forgotten Princess Asagao, and he regarded her rise to this unusual position as an unfortunate turn of events. Relying as he always did on her lady-

in-waiting, Chūjō, to be his intermediary, he never ceased writing. He was not especially concerned about the change in his political fortunes, but was rather more preoccupied and troubled by trivial affairs such as this, which brought him little in the way of comfort.

Emperor Suzaku did not deviate from his father's last wishes and thought of Genji in a sympathetic light. He was, however, young and overly compliant by nature, and so he lacked the strength of will to be able to oppose the actions of his mother and grandfather, the Minister of the Right. As a result, affairs of state were not carried out exactly as he might have wished.

Genji's troubles only increased, but in spite of everything, he and Oborozukiyo were able to convey in secret their private feelings for one another. Their relationship was outrageous, and yet they must have been unconcerned, since they did not break it off. Suzaku had to withdraw for a period of abstinence leading up to the Rites of the Altar to the Five Gods, which was always performed at the outset of a new reign, and during that interval Genji managed to visit Oborozukiyo. His visits, as before, seemed like a dream to her, and one of her women, Chūnagon, managed to arrange a tryst for them in that narrow passageway where they had first met long ago. Because of preparations for the Rites of the Altar to the Five Gods, there were many people going about the palace, and it was nerve-wracking for them to be closer to the veranda than usual. Since his looks never grew tiresome to people who saw him all the time, how exciting and attractive he must have looked to a woman who met him only on rare occasions like this. Oborozukiyo was just as dazzling and alluring, and though she had not yet acquired the dignity of a mature woman, her elegant grace and youthful vitality made Genji want to gaze on her endlessly.

Dawn approached all too soon, and close by they could hear the voice of a guard stating his name as he came on duty at the appointed hour. Genji listened intently, and surmised what was happening. *There must be another officer nearby who is also secretly meeting someone. The guards coming off duty have pulled a mean prank by having this man report to him.* Genji was amused, but he had also been alarmed—after all, as a Commander in the Guards, Genji initially thought the man was reporting to him. He heard voices calling out, "First Hour of the Tiger!" It must have been around 4:00 a.m. His lady composed a poem:

*Voices announce the breaking of dawn ...
I weep, heartbroken, into my sleeves
Knowing that you too must break from me*

Her helplessness was endearing.

*Must I pass through this world of constant sorrows
Must the night pass in this way ... no dawn shall break
That sees me break with you, weary of your love*

He left, feeling tense and disturbed. As the deep night gave way to dawn, an indescribably lovely mist obscured the moonlit scene. Genji had taken care to disguise himself, but his looks were so incomparable that he was easily recognizable. Unfortunately, he realized when he passed by that the older brother of the Shōkyōden Consort, a Fujiwara Lesser Captain who had just come out of the Fujitsubo, the wisteria-courtyard chambers, was standing nearby out of the moonlight, partially hidden by the shadow of a lattice shutter. Genji would now become the target of malicious rumors for sure.

Whenever he was carrying on like this, Genji would often have mixed emotions regarding the attitude of Fujitsubo, who remained aloof and cool toward him. He wavered between thinking her wonderfully admirable and feeling, in more selfish moments, resentful of her cruelty. She no longer went to the palace, since she felt uncomfortable and out of place there, but she worried about not calling on her son, the Crown Prince. Because the child had no supporters at the palace to look after his interests, she had no choice but to trust Genji to look after everything. Still, he had yet to give up his feelings for her—feelings that for her were distressing and unwanted. Her heart was wracked by fear and despair. Just the thought that the late Emperor had died without suspecting anything about her relationship with Genji made her weak with terror. It was even more frightening to consider what might happen should gossip of their affair spread through the court. The consequences would be dire not so much for her, since she didn't matter all that much, but assuredly for the Crown Prince. And so she had prayers offered to try to get Genji to give up his obsession with her. She avoided him, using every excuse she could contrive. In spite of all her precautions, he somehow shockingly managed by some chance to make his way to her. He had carried out his scheme to get near her without any of her women finding out, and when she confronted him, the situation seemed not real but a nightmare.

I cannot relate exactly or in full all that he said to her, nor how he pleaded his case, but Fujitsubo would not be swayed and kept him away. Eventually she began to suffer chest pains. Several ladies-in-waiting, including Myōbu and Ben, who were attending her nearby, were upset and rushed to her side. Genji's resentment at her cruelty knew no bounds, and he felt that both past dreams and future hopes had all been plunged into darkness. Having lost all touch with reality, he made no effort to leave, even though dawn would soon break.

Hearing their lady suffering, several attendants were bustling in and out near Fujitsubo's chamber. Genji was no longer in control of himself and had to be pushed through a hinged door into a small room with a window. Myōbu, Ben and the others were in an uproar as they hurried to hide his robes. Fujitsubo, upset by all that was going on around her, began to suffer worse pain. Her brother, Prince Hyōbu, arrived together with the Master of the Household and issued a number of orders amidst all the chaos, including a call for a priest. Genji, in utter misery, listened to all of this in his hiding place off the chamber. When evening finally arrived, she seemed to revive.

Fujitsubo had no idea that Genji was closeted nearby, and her ladies-in-waiting, concerned that she might have another seizure, could not bring themselves to tell her that he was still there. She emerged from her sleeping quarters and went into the chamber she used during the day. Prince Hyōbu, reassured that his sister was feeling better, decided to withdraw, and so now there were but a handful of people in her presence. It was common for her to keep only a few of her closest attendants nearby while her other women remained out of sight serving in other parts of the villa or otherwise staying in the background.

Myōbu, Ben and the others whispered anxiously among themselves: "How are we going to get him out of here? How terrible if she were to faint again this evening!"

The door to the small room where he was hiding had been left open a crack. Genji softly pushed it all the way open and slipped into the space between that door and a folding screen set in front of it. He was able to gaze directly upon Fujitsubo, a rare thrill he had not enjoyed since his childhood. Watching her there, his eyes filled with tears.

This pain will not stop, she was thinking. Am I near the end of my life?

She was staring outside, and her profile radiated splendor and fragility beyond the power of words to describe. Some fruits and sweets had been brought in to her—the lid to a box used for writing implements was serving as a tray for the fruits, and though they looked tempting, she did not so much as glance at them. She seemed to be tormented by painful thoughts of her relationship with Genji as she gazed out in quiet reverie.

Such extraordinary, delicate beauty! The luxuriant thickness of her hair ... the shape of her head and face ... the cascading tresses flowing down her back ... together her features exuded a lustrous elegance that was peerless. He was a little surprised to see she was the exact image of his young Murasaki, for as the years had passed he had forgotten just how much they looked alike. Gazing on Fujitsubo in this manner, Genji felt his sorrow and longing dissipate a little.

Her appearance, which was always so dignified that it made him feel unsure and hesitant in her presence, was so much like Murasaki's that he could scarcely distinguish them, and yet—was it because he had been madly in love with Fujitsubo for such a long time?—he couldn't help thinking she was in fact peerless, having reached full maturity as a woman. Led astray by his passions, he slipped quietly inside her curtains. The rustling of his robes as he entered and their distinctive fragrance told Fujitsubo at once that he was there. Startled and alarmed at this unexpected turn, she immediately shrank away from him, and lay prostrate.

"At least look at me," he begged, feeling both irritated and miserable, and he tugged at her robes to pull her to him. She tried to wriggle free and escape his grasp, but to her dismay her hair was caught in her clothing. In grief and shame she knew it was her fate to be entangled with him in this sin and was distraught at the realization.

For so many years Genji had suppressed his love for Fujitsubo, but now his mind and heart were in such turmoil that he could no longer feign indifference. He couldn't stop his tears as he gave vent to all his pent-up hurt and resentment, but she was not impressed and would not respond to him.

"I am quite ill," she said. "If an appropriate opportunity presents itself when I am better, I shall answer you then."

In spite of this rejection, Genji persisted in telling her about his boundless yearnings, and some of what he said must have touched her and roused her sympathy. Yet it wasn't as if he hadn't said all this before, and she felt that it would be deplorable for them to make the mistake of renewing their affair. So, even though she had lingering affection for him, she skillfully put him off, parrying his advances until dawn. Ashamed that he might be disrespecting her and hesitant in her august presence, he felt he had to placate her.

"If you would just let me express my sorrows to you from time to time as I have done tonight," he told her, "I might not be tormented by such improper passions."

Even the most common love affair may be accompanied by sorrows. How much worse must it have been for a relationship like theirs—a forbidden love like nothing else the world had ever known?

Dawn was about to break. Ōmyōbu and Ben pressed Genji repeatedly to take his leave, and Fujitsubo appeared to be suffering again, almost on the point of death. Genji said, "I feel deeply ashamed that you know I am still living in this world. That I must die feeling such attachment to you is a sin that surely will be a hindrance in my next life." His theatrical brooding was enough to alarm Fujitsubo.

*The obstacles preventing me from meeting you
Do not exist this day alone ... how many lives
Will I have to pass lamenting my cruel fate*

“My attachment to you will block your salvation too,” he concluded. Fujitsubo sighed.

*Though you blame me for the resentment
You will carry through many lives hence
Admit that the cause is your own heart*

She seemed to him ideal beyond description when she nonchalantly brushed his words aside. He was beside himself when he departed, suffering for his love and fretting about what she would think of him now.

I can no longer show myself to her ... all I can hope for is that she might realize how miserable I am. He did not send her any letters, abruptly stopped calling on the Crown Prince at the palace, and locked himself away. Asleep or awake, he obsessed constantly over Fujitsubo’s cruelty. Caught in the throes of longing and sorrow, he did not want others to see him. Perhaps because he was so listless, he wondered if he was ill and forlornly asked himself why things had turned out this way. It occurred to him that the reason his sorrows had increased so much was that he had been too long in the world, and he considered renouncing the court and taking vows. Whenever that thought came to him, however, he remembered Murasaki, who was so heavily dependent on him that she would be truly miserable if he left her.

Fujitsubo’s illness lingered in the aftermath of her encounter with Genji. Ōmyōbu and the others thought it a pity that Genji had locked himself away and no longer visited or even wrote. Fujitsubo, who was always thinking of her son, was now wracked with anxiety.

I couldn’t bear it if his heart turned against me, or if he grows weary of the world and decides to renounce it. So thinking, she finally made up her mind. *If I don’t put a stop to this once and for all, rumors will fly at the court, which is already troublesome enough as it is. I shall abdicate my title as Empress, which the Kokiden Consort believed should not have been granted in the first place.*

Fujitsubo thought back over all the extraordinary instructions for the succession that the late Retired Emperor had left behind. *Nothing remains as it was ... truly all is mutable. My circumstances are not as dire as Lady Qi’s,⁵ but it seems certain I am fated to become an object of ridicule.*

The world was an insufferable place and, since it was impossible for her to

remain in it, she decided to take religious vows. Even after she made her mind up, however, she knew she would feel sorry for the Crown Prince if she cut her hair and donned the robes of a nun without seeing him first. So she secretly called on him at the palace.

Genji had always looked after Fujitsubo, tending to her with special attention even for matters far less important than a palace visit. But he did not accompany her this time, sending the excuse that he was not feeling well. He did send some of his retainers to escort her, but he was in such a bad mood that the attendants who had knowledge of the situation found it deplorable.

Fujitsubo's son, who was now six years old, was growing up in the most sweetly delightful way. Overjoyed at this rare visit from his mother, he was warm and familiar around her. She looked upon him with a heart filled with sadness and maternal love. It would be hard to carry out her decision to renounce the world, but when she looked around at the court, so many things had changed that the world she had once known was now, unfortunately, a vain and unreliable place. The Kokiden Consort was by temperament a prickly woman, and her mean-spirited nature made it impossible for Fujitsubo to feel comfortable going to and from the palace. The thought that the woman's mere presence posed a danger for her son was troubling and stirred in her all sorts of inauspicious premonitions.

"What would you think," she asked her son, "if I were to go away for a short while and, during my absence from you, change the way I look?"

"You mean like my old servant Shikibu?" The boy laughed. "You'd never end up looking like her ... would you?"

Seeing that the boy was too young to catch her drift, Fujitsubo felt her chest tighten.

"Well, she's ugly-looking because she's old. That's not what I mean. I've decided to cut my hair and put on dark robes like the ones those priests wear when they come to the palace at night to perform services. When I do that, I won't be able to visit you as often as I have." She was crying now, and the little boy had a serious expression on his face.

"But if you don't visit me for a long time, I'll miss you ..."

Ashamed that tears were running down his cheeks, he turned his face away from his mother. When he did so, his soft hair swayed beautifully. His eyes sparkled in the most endearing way, and the older he got, the more it seemed as if he had slipped Genji's face over his own. His teeth were a little stained, making the inside of his mouth look dark, as if he had blackened his teeth like a girl, and when he smiled an innocent beauty seemed to flow out of him so that Fujitsubo longed to see what he might have looked like as a girl. The only flaw

in this precious jewel—a flaw that made her fearful of vicious gossip at the court—was his striking resemblance to Genji.

Even though Genji loved the Crown Prince, he was determined to make Fujitsubo acknowledge, if only occasionally, just how outrageously cruel she had been to him, and so he suppressed his desire to see the boy and did not visit him for some time. When it occurred to him, however, that his idleness during this period might hurt his reputation, he decided to go on an excursion to view autumn fields and to pay a call on the Urin'in⁶ Temple north of the capital. He stayed for two or three days at the residence where his maternal uncle was secluded as a master priest.⁷ Genji spent the time reading sutras, performing religious devotions, and undergoing many profound and moving experiences.

The foliage was gradually changing color, and the autumnal fields presented elegant vistas that made him feel that he should forget his old home in the capital. He summoned all the most learned and talented monks and listened as he had them discuss and debate doctrinal points from Buddhist texts. Given the atmosphere of the setting, he spent the nights meditating intently on the evanescence of the world—though when the dawn broke and he was bathed in moonlight, he could not help thinking about Fujitsubo, who had been so cruel to him. The priests made offerings to the Buddha of water mixed with leaves and flowers; amidst the clinking of the metal offering bowls, the petals and leaves of chrysanthemums and Japanese maples—some light red, some dark red—scattered as they dropped, giving off an air of fragile impermanence. Over and over the same thoughts came to Genji. *The devotions of these priests provide them with comfort for the cares of this life and assurance for fortunate lives to come. Am I not burdened by my tedious and meaningless attachments?*

The priests, with their solemn, sonorous voices, were chanting a line from the *Sutra on the Meditation of the Buddha of Eternal Life*: “By his gracious and merciful light Amida Buddha will gather to him all living beings who meditate on his name and will never cast them aside.”

Genji felt a twinge of envy toward these priests, wondering why it was that he himself found it impossible to renounce this world. Yet when he recalled his concerns for his young lady, Murasaki, he knew the reason why: his heart was trapped by his attachments.

Having never been away from Murasaki for this long a time, Genji felt anxious and sent her one letter after another.

“I have gone into retreat,” he told her in one such missive, “to see if I should renounce this world, but it is hard to find comfort and assuage the tedium of life, so I am more lonely than ever. So much remains for me to learn from the priests

here, and I feel hesitant, uncertain what to do. How are you passing the time?"

The letter was gorgeous—written in an informal style of calligraphy on thick, rustic paper from Michinokuni. He had attached a poem to it as well, revealing his abiding love for her:

*Leaving you in a dwelling fragile and fleeting
As dew on tangled grasses, my heart knows no peace
Worried that autumn blasts buffet you from all sides*

Murasaki wept when she read the poem. She sent her reply, which consisted of a single poem written on white paper:

*The little spider hangs anxiously from the grass
Whose color fades in the chill blast of autumn winds
Buffeted by worries that your devotion fades*

Genji smiled at her precious writing and murmured to himself, "Her calligraphy is becoming more accomplished." He then mulled over their relationship: *We're always corresponding, so her handwriting is starting to resemble mine. Still, she's beginning to add a more elegant, feminine touch. My efforts to train her are showing excellent results.*

The Kamo Shrine was close enough to the Urin'in that a breeze might have been able to carry a message, so Genji sent a letter off to the Priestess there, Princess Asagao. He complained to her attendant, a woman called Chūjō. "Your lady will probably not understand just how my soul wanders from my body as I yearn for her beneath the unfamiliar skies I view on my journey." He then gave her the following poem:

*Though I tremble addressing you before the gods
Sacred cords of mulberry cloth binding your sleeves
Bring back our autumn together so long ago*

"It's useless to think of the past as present,⁸ yet I so want to return to that time ..." He struck a familiar, intimate tone, writing his letter on light green Chinese paper and attaching it with a core of paper mulberry bark to a branch of *sakaki*. The presentation gave off a solemn air.

Chūjō conveyed her mistress's response to him: "I have been passing my days with nothing to divert me, but in my idleness I recall the past. Though I have many pleasant memories of you, it does no good to dwell on them."

Princess Asagao wrote many other heartfelt and thoughtful words, including a poem written on the edge of a strip of cloth made from mulberry bark:

*You speak of days gone by ... did something happen then
That you keep me in your heart, make these cords of mine
A reason to secretly express your desire*

“In more recent days ...”⁹ Her calligraphy lacked polish, but her techniques were well practiced and she had mastered cursive script. Did this rather improper fantasy about his Princess of the bellflowers, who as she matured had surely grown more alluring than even her handwriting suggested, offend the gods of her shrine?

He remembered with a twinge of sorrow that it was about this time last year when he had his emotional meeting with the lady at Rokujō at the temporary shrine at Sagano. It seemed uncanny that both women should have faced rather similar situations, and his impious inclination to resent the gods did not become him. Had he pursued Asagao more forcefully he might have succeeded in winning her, but during the years when they might have had a relationship he had carelessly let the time slip away. So wasn’t it a little peculiar for him to feel such regrets now that she was a priestess and unavailable to him? Asagao herself must have realized that his interest in her was not ordinary, and it seemed from the sporadic responses he received that she too could not entirely break with him. So weren’t her actions also a little inconsistent and impious?

Genji remained at the Urin’in studying the sixty scrolls that were the core of Tendai scripture and doctrine and receiving instruction from the priests on how to interpret difficult passages. Even the lowest-ranking monks rejoiced over Genji’s presence; they thought his beautiful radiance graced their mountain temple and brought honor to the Buddha. Because Genji’s mind was calm and at peace whenever he contemplated the truth of the world’s evanescence, the prospect of returning to court society was depressing. Still, he could not stop thinking about Murasaki and decided he could tarry no longer. After making a solemn offering to the temple for the recitation of the sutra scrolls, he provided appropriate gifts and stipends to all the priests, regardless of rank, and even to the peasants in the mountain village near the temple. Once he had dispensed all the charitable acts he could, he took his leave. Wrinkled old woodcutters of humble status gathered here and there, thinking they would see him off. They wept as they watched him go, for he was still dressed in mourning robes and his carriage was decked out in black trappings. Though they caught only the barest glimpse of him, the peasants thought him unrivaled, a man not of this world.

So much time had passed since he last met Murasaki that as soon as he saw her he was struck by how womanly she had become. Quiet, composed, elegant ... it pained him deeply to think that her mature demeanor masked her anxieties over the future of their relationship. He recalled the phrase in her poem that mentioned the grass “whose color fades” ... did she understand the conflicting emotions caused by his outrageous desires? He found her reaction both adorable and pitiable and spent more time than usual talking intimately with her.

The red maple leaves he brought with him as a memento of his stay in the mountains possessed an especially vivid hue when compared to the maples in his garden. Perhaps they had been darkened by the heavy mountain dews. It was hard for him to look at the leaves and not think how they were like the darker hues of his love for Fujitsubo ... a desire that had been so heavily soaked by his tears. Such thoughts made him realize that his neglect of Fujitsubo must seem callous, and so he had some of the leaves taken to her as a simple courtesy. He also sent a letter to Ōmyōbu:

It seemed strange that your lady should have visited the palace. Her situation, not to mention the Crown Prince’s, have been matters of concern for me, but as uneasy as I was feeling about them, I could not willfully postpone the period I had set aside to undertake my religious retreat. It has now been many days since I last contacted you. I went off by myself to view the maple leaves, but it was like looking at brocade in the dark.¹⁰ When the moment is right, please show them to your mistress.

The branches were truly gorgeous, but when Fujitsubo looked more closely she noticed that a small letter had been attached to them. Her attendants were watching her and she blushed in shame.

Enough already ... this obsession of his is obscene. My women must think it suspicious, wondering why a man so discreet and thoughtful would now and then do such a thing as this!

She was irritated and had the branches put into a vase and taken out of her sight. The vase was set out next to a pillar on the veranda. She then sent him a stiffly proper response that suggested just how much she relied on him for both everyday matters and the affairs of the Crown Prince. Genji read it bitterly, realizing that she was continuing to use all her wiles to block his advances. Yet he remained in all respects a supporter of the Crown Prince, and if he did not help the boy, people might criticize him or think it suspicious. For that reason he decided to pay a visit to the Crown Prince on the same day that Fujitsubo was to withdraw from the palace.

When he arrived, Genji went first to have an audience with Emperor Suzaku. Suzaku had a free moment just then, and so the two of them exchanged stories about the past as well as gossip about the present court. Suzaku's features closely resembled those of the late Emperor, and now that he had acquired something of an air of youthful elegance, he seemed more gentle and approachable. The two young men regarded one another with full hearts. Suzaku had heard rumors to the effect that Genji's relationship with Oborozukiyo had not ended. There had been times when he had witnessed behavior that gave her away, but he convinced himself that they should not be condemned.

I'd be concerned, he thought, if their affair had just begun, but it started long ago. Even if they are sexually attracted to each other, they are both of superior breeding and would never indulge in an improper affair.

As they continued to discuss all sorts of matters, Suzaku asked for Genji's interpretation of several difficult passages from the Chinese classics that he found unclear. The two men also shared love poems they had received and talked about their affairs. Suzaku took this opportunity to mention the day of the Ceremony of Parting, when he sent off the young High Priestess to Ise, and to remark how beautiful her face was on that occasion. Hearing his older brother share these intimate thoughts, Genji also opened up, telling him all the details about his heartrending dawn at that temporary shrine on the plains of Sagano.

It was the twentieth day of the month, and so the moon rose gradually. The moment was so delightful Suzaku remarked, "It's a shame that we're in mourning, for a night like this calls for music." Genji then politely excused himself, saying, "Her Majesty, the Empress, is leaving the palace this evening and I feel I must be at her service. I am concerned about her circumstances and the situation of the Crown Prince ... she has no one to look after her, and because of our father's last request to me, I feel obligated to help."

"Our father advised me, among his last requests, to treat the Crown Prince as if he were my own son," Suzaku replied. "I have given the matter considerable thought, but I'm not certain if I can really bestow special favors on him alone. He is an exceptionally gifted calligrapher, talented far beyond someone his age. He brings honor to someone like me who is not particularly gifted at anything."

"The boy may act like an adult, wise and talented in most ways, but he is still immature and unformed," Genji said, speaking humbly about the Crown Prince. He then took his leave and withdrew from Suzaku's presence.

As Genji's advance escort was discreetly clearing the way for him, he passed by a Controller in the Chamberlain's office. The young man, who was the son of the Fujiwara Major Counselor and thus a nephew of the Kokiden Consort, was on his way to visit his younger sister, a consort residing in the Reikeiden. Now,

this Controller, who was clever by nature and possessed of considerable status and influence as a result of the rise of the Minister of the Right, was not shy about flaunting either his wit or his authority. When Genji passed him, the young man slowly and deliberately quoted a line from the *Records of the Grand Historian*: “The arc of a white rainbow pierced the sun. The Crown Prince was fearful.”

Genji was stunned by the audacity of his words, for the implication was clear. The Crown Prince of the Chinese kingdom of Yen had plotted to overthrow the first Qin Emperor. However, an omen appeared—a white rainbow over the sun—warning the Emperor and predicting the failure of the plot. The young man was suggesting not only that the Crown Prince and Genji were treasonous, but also that they were doomed to lose. How could Genji possibly respond and censure him here? He had heard how frighteningly hateful the Kokiden Consort was, and though it troubled him to think that those close to her would so brazenly make such insinuating remarks, he pretended he had heard nothing and simply went on his way.

“I know it is late, but I have been in service to Emperor Suzaku,” Genji explained to Fujitsubo.

The two of them reminisced about how in the old days, when the late autumn moon shone brightly, the late Emperor would call for music and entertain in a delightfully modern style. The palace itself remained the same, yet it made them sad that so many other things had changed. Fujitsubo had Ōmyōbu take a poem to Genji:

*Rivals surround the court like ninefold mists
That obscure my view ... all that I can do
Is imagine the moon above the clouds*

She was close by, and the indications of her presence stirred powerful yearnings in Genji. Forgetting all the pain he had suffered for her sake, tears fell from his eyes. He replied:

*The moon we look for now is the same moon
We've seen in other autumns ... how cruel
These mists that obscure and hide it from view*

“They say that mists can be as callous as people ... was that true long ago as well?” Genji asked.

Fujitsubo was always reluctant to leave her son behind, and though she

imparted all sorts of wisdom to him, she couldn't help feeling anxious that he was too young to fully comprehend. The boy normally retired quite early, but he thought that he should stay up until his mother departed. It was very touching to see him. He seemed to resent her leaving him, but he had to put on a brave front and could not very well cling to her or express his desire to go as well.

Reflecting on the words the young Controller had murmured to him, Genji was troubled at heart and chastened. Court society was certainly nettlesome, and because he feared for his reputation, he did not communicate with Oborozukiyo for some time. Then, just as the skies began showing signs that the early rains of winter would soon be upon them, he received a poem from her. Upon reading it, he found it hard to fathom her motives:

*As autumn winds rustle through withered trees
I wait impatiently, hoping each blast
Will carry with it some message from you*

Her sensitive nature, which compelled her to write secretly in this melancholy season, was not at all unappealing to him. He had her messenger wait, took out some Chinese paper from the cabinet where he stored his writing implements, selected a few sheets of surpassing quality, and prepared his brushes with extra care. His appearance while he was making these preparations looked so effortlessly graceful that the women who were in service to him at the moment gossiped among themselves, wondering who could it be, this lady who warranted such special attention.

“Having learned it would be fruitless to correspond with you, I have been withdrawn and depressed,” he wrote. “I was sure I alone was suffering,¹¹ but as it turns out you have been left waiting as well.”

*The tears of longing I shed during all those days
We could not be together ... do they seem to you
Nothing more than rain in an early winter sky*

“If our hearts are alike, we should be able to forget even these rainy winter skies.” His letter expressed in full detail his passionate love for her.

Apparently many other ladies sent letters like Oborozukiyo's, and they all aroused his interest. But even though he answered them considerately and at length, he was never all that seriously attached to any of them.

Fujitsubo was busy with all the preparations needed for the Rite of the Eight Lectures, which followed the memorial service on the first anniversary of the

Emperor's death. Over the course of four consecutive days the eight scrolls of the *Lotus Sutra* would be read and explicated, one in the morning and one in the afternoon of each day. Around the beginning of the eleventh month, on the day of the anniversary, heavy snow fell. Genji sent this poem to Fujitsubo:

*The date he passed away has come around ...
As snow falls I long to know when once more
We'll meet the one who was so close to us*

Realizing that this day was an occasion of the keenest sorrow for everyone, Fujitsubo sent him a reply:

*Such misery, to have long outlived him ...
The date he left us has come round again
Bringing back those times when I was near him*

By the look of it, she had not put much effort into her calligraphy, but, given his feelings for her, Genji couldn't help regarding the letter as elegant and cultivated. Her style of writing was not unusual or especially modern, but her splendid hand was still superior to most. Genji suppressed his desire for Fujitsubo for the day and instead performed his devotions, the poignant beauty of snowflakes moistening his robes.

Sometime after the tenth day of the twelfth month, The Rite of the Eight Lectures was performed. The services were magnificent. The eight sutra scrolls presented to the spirit of the deceased over the course of the four days had been so meticulously prepared—from their jade spindles and thin silk mountings to the ornamentation on their covers—they too were magnificent. The arrangements Fujitsubo made for ordinary events were always unprecedented, and so naturally she went to even greater lengths to ensure that this ceremony was especially lavish. The decorations for the altar and statuary and the cloth covering the lecterns, with their legs carved in floral patterns, brought paradise to mind. The readings of the *Lotus Sutra* and the lectures on the first day were dedicated to Fujitsubo's father, who had been Emperor two reigns ago, while the readings and lectures on the second day were dedicated to the late Emperor. When the fifth scroll, which was the most highly revered, was read aloud on the morning of the third day, a great many of the highest-ranking officials and nobles attended the ceremony, no longer hesitating to attend out of fear of offending the Kokiden faction at court. The lector for this day had been chosen with special care, and when he began chanting the passage where the Buddha

gathered wood, fruit and water to gain the *Lotus Sutra* from his master, the effect of the recitation was overwhelmingly sublime, even though the story was well known to everyone. The various princes of the blood circled around the lector to bring their respective offerings to the altar. Genji's offering, which he had taken great pains to prepare, was peerless.

I know that I am always praising him this way—saying he was incomparable, peerless, not of this world—but every time I observed him, he really did look amazingly stylish and charming. So what am I supposed to do?

On the fourth day Fujitsubo had the concluding readings and services performed for herself. When she then suddenly proclaimed to the Buddha that she would renounce the world and take vows as a novitiate, everyone was stunned. Her brother, Prince Hyōbu, and Genji were shocked by her outrageous decision. In the middle of the ceremony Prince Hyōbu left his seat and moved inside Fujitsubo's blind, but she told him directly that her mind was firmly made up. When the service was over she summoned the abbot of the Enryakuji Temple on Mount Hiei and asked him to administer the Vows of Initiation. As part of this ceremony Fujitsubo's uncle, who was then the Bishop of Yokawa, approached her and began to cut her body-length hair to shoulder-length. While he was doing this, the hall shook with the commotion of inauspicious weeping and lamentations. It is always strange and moving to witness anyone taking vows and renouncing the world—even an elderly person of no special merit. So you can understand why Prince Hyōbu wept inconsolably when Fujitsubo took this step, especially since she had given no prior indication of her intentions.

The people in attendance were awed by the solemnity of the ritual, and all returned home with sleeves soaked by tears. The sons of the late Emperor recalled how beloved Fujitsubo was to their father in days gone by, and their sense of pity and sadness grew stronger as a result. They each offered words of support and comfort to her. Genji, however, remained where he had been seated. No words could express what he needed to say. His mind was lost in dark confusion, but, because the people around him might see his reaction and wonder suspiciously why he was behaving that way, he waited until the other princes had left before he went in and appeared before Fujitsubo.

With fewer people in service, the place gradually grew quiet. Fujitsubo's women had gathered in groups here and there, sniveling and wiping their noses as they wept. The moon, nearly full at this time of the month, illuminated everything, and the sight of the snow-covered garden reflecting the moonlight brought back memories of long ago. It was difficult to be reminded of such things, but Genji suppressed his emotions and asked Fujitsubo, "Whatever possessed you to make such a rash decision?" As always, she had Ōmyōbu act as

her intermediary to give Genji her answer.

“I didn’t just conceive of the idea today … but, if I had announced my intentions beforehand, it would have created a stir that certainly would have caused me to waver in my resolve.”

Judging by the rustling of the silk robes of the women attendants inside Fujitsubo’s blinds, it seemed they were being extra careful to move about with reverent stillness. Listening to these sounds, Genji knew they were having a difficult time keeping their overpowering sorrow in check, and he felt great pity for them. The wind was blowing fiercely, the heavy fragrance of the black *kurobō* incense used to perfume winter robes suffused the air within her chambers, and the faint smoke of ritual incense drifted up from the altar. These fragrances mingled with the scent of Genji’s robes, conjuring up auspicious images of Amida’s Pure Land paradise. A messenger arrived from the Crown Prince. Fujitsubo remembered how her son had looked when she told him of her plans, and the image of him in her mind shook her resolve so greatly that she was unable to compose a reply. Genji sent one in her place.

Everyone was distraught, and so Genji had no chance to speak about all the things he felt for her.

*My heart is set on that Pure Land beyond the sky
A land where a clear moon glows ... yet I must wander
Lost like a parent in the darkness of this world*¹²

“I have long wanted to renounce this world, but it is useless for me to feel that way … for reasons only you understand. My envy regarding your decision knows no limit.”

He said nothing more—after all, with so many people nearby, he couldn’t very well say all he wanted, and so his heart remained burdened. Fujitsubo replied with a poem:

*Though I have taken vows and turned my back
On this ephemeral world of sorrow
Will I ever be able to let go*

“I am still defiled by my sins and attachments.” Her messenger no doubt amended her phrasing to soften her words. With no end to his sympathetic sorrow, Genji withdrew, his heart wracked with pain.

Back at his Nijō villa, Genji was lying down alone in his own quarters. He could not close his eyes to sleep, and though he considered the world a foul

place he wanted to renounce, he still had to think about the Crown Prince.

My late father named him Crown Prince assuming that Fujitsubo would be there to protect his position at court. But she could not bear remaining in this world of sorrow, and since she has taken vows, she won't be able to return to her former status as Imperial Mother. What would become of the boy if I were to forsake the world as well ...

He passed the night tormented by these anxieties. It occurred to him that now that Fujitsubo was a nun, she would need furnishings appropriate to her new life, and so he had the necessary items prepared before the end of the year. Since Ōmyōbu had taken vows along with her mistress, Genji called on her out of deep consideration and provided for her needs as well. Because it was too much to continue relating all the details of his visits, portions of the story were omitted when it was told to me—disappointing, really, when you consider the magnificent and stirring poetry that must have been produced.

Whenever Genji called on Fujitsubo after that, he no longer had to display formal deference to her, and there were even times when she spoke directly to him. Although his feelings for her had never waned, had never left his heart, they were forbidden now more than ever.

With the coming of the New Year the palace was bright and lively with festivities such as the imperial banquet in the Jijūden—during which Chinese poetry was composed—or the festivals on the fourteenth and sixteenth days—when male and female courtiers respectively performed songs throughout the palace. After hearing about those bustling activities, Fujitsubo's heart was full, but as she quietly continued her devotions, she focused her mind on the world to come and resolved to put her trust in that future and distance herself from the disagreeable things of the past. She left the old meditation hall that she had always used just as it was and had a new one built on the south side of the west hall of her villa. She moved into the west hall, which was a little more isolated, and attentively carried out her prayers and devotions.

Genji visited her in her new quarters. There was no sign of any New Year celebrations; the villa was quiet and almost deserted. It may have been his imagination, but he had the impression that those who had served her intimately at the palace when she was Empress were going about listlessly with their heads drooping. It was customary on the seventh day of the first month for the twenty-one horses presented at the palace for the Festival of the Blue Roans to be taken around for review by other members of the imperial family. When they arrived at Fujitsubo's villa, her women went out to observe them as they had always done. Senior officials who had once busily crowded into her residence in the old days on an occasion such as this now avoided it, passing by to gather instead at

the villa of the Minister of the Right across the way on Nijō Avenue. Though this behavior was to be expected, her women found it sad all the same. Thus, when they saw Genji arrive to show his deep respect for their mistress, he looked so splendid that his mere presence seemed to them equal to the visits of a thousand men. For reasons they could not explain, tears came to their eyes.

The surroundings made Genji painfully conscious of the sad transience of life, and as he looked around he couldn't bring himself to say anything right away. The appearance of her quarters had changed. The trim on the blinds and curtains was a light gray tinged with blue, and through the gaps he glimpsed the cuffs of sleeves dyed gray and a light yellow tinged with red; he found them plain but somehow elegant and attractive. He gazed out pensively at the scene presented by the pond, with its thin, melting ice, and the willows in the garden—the only signs of the season. He murmured in a hushed voice a line from a poem by Sosei: "Doubtless they too have tender feelings ..." ¹³ Genji looked strikingly handsome.

*Lost in melancholy, sleeves damp with briny spray
I observe the hut of nuns who gather seaweed
Among the pines of Matsu no Urashima*

Her quarters were not very large, and because an altar took up much of the interior space he sensed that she was quite near the curtain.

*Now that nothing of the world of the past remains
Waves rarely approach Matsu no Urashima ...
Rarer still that anyone should draw near this place*

Her voice was subdued, and he could barely make out what she said; but try as he might to control himself and hide his emotions, tears fell anyway. He took his leave with only a few words, embarrassed that the nuns, who had gained enlightenment, were observing him and murmuring among themselves.

"How mature he has grown!"

"What a splendid man ... he has no equal."

Some of the frail old women wept a little as they sang his praises.

"During that time in his life when nothing stood in his way, when he was flourishing at court and his reputation was at its high point, people wondered if a young man who had never experienced suffering could possibly understand anything of life. Now he is so reserved and calm and seems to be so sensitive to even the most trivial things, it's hard not to feel sorry for him." As they spoke,

many memories came back to Fujitsubo.

The New Year ceremony announcing promotions in rank and appointments for provincial posts was always held in the middle of the first month. This year those who had served Fujitsubo did not receive the appointments to which they were entitled. Fujitsubo did not receive her benefices, even though it was normally a routine matter, and none of her retainers were promoted to the appropriate rank. Many complained bitterly. Even in a case where an Empress takes the vows of a novitiate, to strip away her status and emoluments all at once was unprecedented. Yet the new court took her vows as a pretext for its decision, and as a result many things changed for Fujitsubo. Though she had given up everything from her prior life, whenever she looked at her retainers, who were now distressed that they had no one to rely on for their livelihoods, she regretted her decision. Still, even if it meant the loss of her own status, she was determined to stay focused on that time when her son was safely installed on the throne, and to that end she constantly performed prayers and devotions. Privately she had fearful and troubling thoughts about her affair with Genji, so she meditated fervently on the Buddha, asking that he lighten the burden of her sin and grant forgiveness. By doing so she was able to calm her fretful heart. Genji could surmise from her actions just how she felt, and he understood why she was doing all she did. His own retainers were encountering problems with appointments and promotions, and as a result he withdrew from the court, which he now deemed tiresome and unpleasant.

The Minister of the Left was also weary of the situation at court, which in both public and private spheres had undergone a radical change from the previous regime, and so he submitted a petition asking permission to resign. Suzaku, however, had not forgotten his late father's final words commending the Minister as an important, highly valued adviser and vigilant guardian of the throne. Thus, Suzaku found it impossible to accept the resignation, and, even though the petition was resubmitted over and over, the request came to naught. In the end, the Minister had no choice but to forcefully demand leave to resign despite His Majesty's opposition. He subsequently withdrew to his villa, and immediately afterward the power and glory of the family of the Minister of the Right expanded seemingly without limit. The Minister of the Left was a man of dignity who had wielded considerable influence at the court, and when he withdrew he left Suzaku feeling bereft and isolated. Discerning courtiers deplored the situation.

The Minister's sons were all men of outstanding character esteemed by court society and apparently living lives blessed by good fortune. Now, however, their careers were languishing. Tō no Chūjō and his brothers reached the point where

they too began to despair of their prospects. Tō no Chūjō had continued his sporadic, desultory visits to his primary wife—who, it must be remembered, was the fourth daughter of the Minister of the Right and the younger sister of the Kokiden Consort. Now whenever he did call on her he was no longer treated with any kindness or deference, and it was clear that he was no longer counted as a favored son-in-law. Had the omission of his name from the list of promotions that spring been intended as a clear signal to him of his fall from grace? If so, it didn't seem to bother him very much. Observing that even Genji had gone into retreat and was living quietly, he realized that the world was fickle and fleeting. He was all the more convinced regarding his own situation that what was meant to be would be, that things would run their natural course, and so he called on Genji frequently, passing the time with him in study or playing music. Recalling how competitive they had been in their younger days—occasionally to an absurd degree—he now once more began challenging Genji over even the most inconsequential things.

In imitation of the palace, Genji sponsored formal readings of sutras at his villa in the spring and autumn. He even sponsored readings on the spur of the moment, and these various occasions—which were not part of the regular schedule for readings—were carried off in a grandly dignified manner. He would also summon scholars who were not being employed by the current regime, and who thus seemed to have time on their hands, and engage them in various diversions: composing Chinese poetry or playing games such as guessing the rhyme to a line of Chinese verse. Genji was able to relax in this way, and he hardly visited the palace at all. Because he spent his time in amusements like this, giving himself over to the whims of his heart, it was not surprising that many at court openly censured his conduct.

During a tedious interval when summer rains fell gently every day and there was little to do, Tō no Chūjō arrived with an attendant bearing a large and exceptional collection of poems in Chinese. In response to this gesture, Genji had the storehouse holding his library opened and he selected a few venerable-looking items among rare works that had been stored in cabinets that he had never opened until now. He then discreetly summoned masters and connoisseurs of the art. A large crowd of court officials and scholars gathered and was divided into teams of the Right and the Left. Genji then had them engage in a contest to guess the Chinese character that provided the correct rhyme that completed selected verses. The prizes and stipends offered were unprecedented, and so the competition grew intense on both sides. As the contest proceeded, the characters used for rhyming grew increasingly difficult. Occasionally, when even the renowned masters were at a loss, Genji would intercede and provide the answer,

displaying his prodigious knowledge. At such moments everyone would admiringly praise him.

“How is it that our lord is so learned? It must be karmic merit from your previous lives that allows you to be so surpassingly skilled in all endeavors.”

In the end, the Right lost the contest.

Two days later Tō no Chūjō sponsored a banquet at which the losing side fêted the winners. It was a lavish affair—there were boxes made of thin cypress wood filled with attractively arranged delicacies and gifts of all kinds. The same group of people who had attended the contest was invited, and they were all set the task of composing verses in Chinese. A few roses were blooming at the foot of the stairs leading down into the front garden,¹⁴ and because the event was more quietly refined than the celebrations of either the cherry blossoms or the autumn foliage, the participants felt at ease and relaxed as they played music. Tō no Chūjō’s son had gone into service at the court for the first time this year and, being only eight or nine years old, his voice was ethereal, and his accompaniment on the *shō* pipes had an exquisite charm. He was the second child of Tō no Chūjō’s principal wife, and so people at the court had great expectations for this boy, who had been raised with special attention. He was quick, talented, and strikingly good-looking. As the celebration grew more boisterous, the boy sang the *saibara* “Takasago”¹⁵ in a very pretty manner. Genji removed his outer robe and draped it over the lad’s shoulders as a reward. The lambent sheen of Genji’s face, which was brighter than usual since he was flushed from drinking wine, was ineffably attractive. The glow from his skin seemed to radiate through the thin silk gauze of his singlet and cloak. Because he looked even more wondrous than usual, the old scholars seated in the humbler positions and eyeing him from a distance were moved to tears. As the boy sang the final line from “Takasago”—“Would that I meet my love, this mountain lily”—Tō no Chūjō offered a cup to Genji with this poem:

*With people waiting, eager to catch a glimpse
The first blooms of flowers appear this morning ...
I see you in those flowers, no less graceful¹⁶*

Smiling, Genji took the cup.

*A flower blooming out of season
Seems to wilt in the rains of summer
No longer emits its fragrant charm*

“I am in decline, after all,” Genji teased.

He was in high spirits, and it sounded as though his response distorted Tō no Chūjō’s poem to suit his own playful mood. Tō no Chūjō chided Genji repeatedly and pressed more wine on him. Many poems like the two I have included were composed during this celebration, but, as Ki no Tsurayuki warned,¹⁷ people feel uninhibited on occasions such as this and are apt to compose all sorts of peculiar things. For that reason I have chosen to heed the warning and omit those other poems, which are too bothersome to deal with anyway. Everyone composed verses—some in Japanese, some in Chinese—all of which sang Genji’s praises. Swelling with pride and still smarting from the young Controller’s remark, Genji murmured a line from the *Records of the Grand Historian*, attributed to the legendary Duke of Zhou, who declared: “I am son of Emperor Wen, younger brother of Emperor Wu.” By making the auspicious comparison of his late father and his older half brother to the sage rulers of China, Genji identified himself in the grandest terms. But what did he intend by leaving off the third phrase of the Duke of Zhou’s declaration: “uncle of Emperor Cheng”? Did he feel guilty or worried about his illicit relationship, or was it that he dropped the phrase because the Crown Prince had not yet taken the throne?

Genji’s younger half brother, Prince Sochinomiya, visited him often, and since he was a skilled musician, the two of them made a stylish pair of performers.

At around that time Oborozukiyo left the palace for a stay at her family’s residence, the villa of the Minister of the Right. She had been suffering for some time from a recurring fever and thought she could have healing rites performed in a more leisurely manner at her home. After beginning the esoteric rites, she recovered completely, and everyone was overjoyed—including Genji, who, as he always did, considered this one of those rare opportune moments for a tryst. They exchanged messages and somehow or other succeeded in meeting night after night. Oborozukiyo was now in the full bloom of her womanhood. Her looks and manners were vivacious, and, due to her recent illness, she was now a little thinner, which made her all the more seductively alluring. Her older sister, the Kokiden Consort, happened to be staying in the main hall of the villa during this same period, and though her presence was intimidating, it served to heighten Genji’s instinctive urge to pursue dangerous liaisons.

As he called on his lover night after night, more and more of the women in attendance naturally observed what was going on. Even so, they knew it would cause a great deal of trouble if the two were found out, and so none of them reported the affair to the Consort. The Minister of the Right had absolutely no

idea what was happening until one night when a torrential rain suddenly started to pour and, just before dawn, thunder began to rumble in a most terrifying manner. The Minister's sons and the attendants of the Consort went bustling about, which meant there were prying eyes everywhere. The ladies-in-waiting had gathered in a frightful panic near the place where Genji and Oborozukiyo were sleeping, leaving him no way to make an escape. As all this was going on, dawn broke. Now there were so many servants and attendants moving around the outside of Oborozukiyo's curtains that Genji felt as if his pounding heart would burst out of his chest. The two women who had known about these trysts and had never mentioned them to anyone else were driven to distraction by the thought of what would happen should Genji be discovered.

When the thunder stopped and the rain let up a little, the Minister made his rounds, going first to see the Kokiden Consort in the main hall. Then, with the sound of his approach drowned out by the sporadic, drizzling rain, he barged into Oborozukiyo's chambers, catching everyone there by surprise. Exercising his prerogative as her father, he did not hesitate to raise the curtain and lean inside her sleeping chamber.

"So, how are you doing? That was quite a storm last night, wasn't it? I know I didn't drop in to check on you, but I was worrying about you all the same. Has the Captain, your older brother, been here to see about you ... or your sister's deputy Chamberlain?"

The Minister, unable to hide his own nervousness, was speaking in rapid bursts. Remarkably, Genji found himself smiling, despite being in a most precarious situation, as he drew a picture of the Minister in his mind and compared it to the figure of the Minister of the Left. At the very least, he thought, the old man might have waited until he was actually in the room before babbling on like this.

Oborozukiyo was mortified. When she started to slip out from behind the curtains, her face was flushed bright red. Her father noticed and thought she might be ill again.

"Why is your complexion so strange? Is a malignant spirit troubling you? I knew I should have extended those healing rites."

Just then he caught sight of an obi—a man's obi—blue tinged with a reddish hue. It had caught on his daughter's robe and was trailing behind her. Thinking this highly suspicious, he glanced around and spotted several pieces of folding paper used for practicing calligraphy scattered around at the base of the curtain. The Minister was shocked, not quite sure what to make of the situation.

"What is *that*?" he demanded. "Give it to me so I may see who sent it."

Oborozukiyo glanced back and saw the paper. There was no way to divert his

attention, and she was at a loss how to respond. The Minister was no longer in control of himself—and yet, considering how embarrassed his own daughter must have felt, a man of his stature ought to have exhibited more restraint. Unfortunately, because he was quick-tempered and not especially magnanimous, he lost all sense of propriety. Holding the paper up, he peered inside the curtain and saw a man lying there, looking languid and impudent. Only when the Minister looked in did the man even try to cover his face and tidy up his robes. Though he was irritated and disgusted, he couldn't very well expose the man directly to his face. Blinded by rage, he took the paper and returned to the main hall and the Consort's chambers. Oborozukiyo felt faint and was sure she would die of shame.

Genji was thinking, *What a pathetic fool I am. All these reckless escapades have finally caught up with me, and now I'll have to bear the burden of society's condemnation.* But then he saw how distressed Oborozukiyo was, and he moved to comfort her.

The Minister was rash and impulsive by nature, blurting out whatever was on his mind and lacking any sense of discretion; that tendency, coupled with his crankiness, had become more pronounced the older he got. This was apparent as he ranted on and on to the Consort.

He held nothing back, sputtering, "Here ... it's all here ... Genji's handwriting. This affair started a long time ago without my permission at a moment when I was being careless. But I forgave all his transgressions, given his character and position. When that wife of his died, I even considered accepting him as a son-in-law and said as much. And what did he do? He rejected my offer with that arrogant attitude of his! His behavior was outrageous and inconsiderate. I was so anxious for her future, but I told myself what's done is done, that it was fated to be. And so, hoping that Emperor Suzaku might graciously overlook the stain on her honor, I went ahead and offered her to him, just as I originally planned all along. But doubts about her remained, and to my disappointment she was never made an imperial consort. Now they've gone at it again, starting the affair anew, and I'm more put out than ever! They say men are prone to act like this—typical male behavior and all that—but Genji is especially brazen. I've heard rumors that he actually has the nerve to pursue the Kamo Priestess and that they've even secretly exchanged letters. Absolute blasphemy! This kind of behavior can't turn out well; it'll bring ruin not only to the court but to Genji himself. I never imagined that he could act in such a careless way. After all, he's one of the most learned men of our age and influences the affairs of state. No one ever doubted the quality of his character. Certainly I never did."

The Consort had, if anything, an even fierier disposition than her father, and

she looked extremely displeased.

“My son may be Emperor,” she fumed, “but from the beginning no one showed him the proper respect. Take the retired Minister of the Left. Would he give up his only daughter—his precious little princess—to the older son who was Crown Prince? Oh no ... he gave her instead to the younger brother, to Genji, for his coming-of-age ceremony ... and when he was still just a boy! And then there’s my younger sister. Just as we were planning to send her into service at the palace, he made a laughingstock of her. But did anyone condemn his behavior, or think it outrageous? No, no ... everyone—including my very own father—seemed to admire him and want him for a son-in-law. And so after it was all over we went ahead and sent her to wait on His Majesty, even though the position she was given was not at all what we had in mind originally. I felt sorry for her, hoping against hope that somehow, in spite of what had happened, we could secure a place for her that was at least not inferior to that of the other women. And, had we succeeded, we could have flaunted her in the face of that smug, hateful man. But he was always her secret desire, and now she’s allowed herself to be drawn to him again. I don’t doubt the rumors about the Kamo Priestess, and so now we have to take all possible precautions to protect His Majesty ... especially since Genji is clearly counting on the time when the Crown Prince comes to power.”

She spoke so seriously and with such asperity that the Minister now regretted having blurted out everything.

“Well, whatever happens,” he said, “let’s keep the matter quiet for the time being. Whatever you do, don’t tell Suzaku! She has committed a serious mistake for a woman in her position, but we can still hope that His Majesty will overlook it and indulge her. You warn her in private to control her behavior, and if she pays no heed, then I’ll simply have to accept the responsibility myself.”

The Minister was trying to correct his earlier outburst, but his daughter, judging from her expression, was not one to be so easily assuaged. *He brazenly steals in here*, she thought, *coming to see her while I’m residing close by, mocking and disrespecting us*. The more she thought about it, the more shocked and agitated she grew, until it occurred to her that this situation offered her a golden opportunity to begin taking the steps needed to bring Genji down.

¹ *Gosenshū* 457 (Anonymous): “The leaves of *sakaki* on the august mountain of the sacred enclosure do not fade even in the cold winter rains.”

² *Kokinshū* 982 (Anonymous): “If you truly long for me, come to the foot of Mount Miwa, to my hut ... to

the gate where the sacred cedars stand.”

³ *Kokinshū* 701 (Anonymous): “Would even the thunder-spirit who stomps and rages in the high plains of the heavens ever try to rend our love?”

⁴ This was a suite located on the north side of the Kokiden and thus farther away from Suzaku’s residence in the Seiryōden.

⁵ Lady Qi was a concubine of the founder of the Han dynasty, Gaozu. After Gaozu died, his empress, who had long been jealous of her rival, had Lady Qi and her son murdered.

⁶ The name of this temple was also pronounced Ujii.

⁷ The man is a monastic priest who holds the title of *Risshi* 律師, which was the starting rank held by the highest order of the Buddhist priesthood.

⁸ *Tales of Ise*, section 32: “If only there were some way to make the past the present, to make time return like the spinning yarn used for *shizu* cloth in ancient days.”

⁹ This partial line may be an allusion to another poem, but the source is unclear. The implication seems to be that Asagao has no recollection of a relationship with Genji—indeed, up to this point in the narrative their relationship has been distant, with no indication that it has ever been consummated.

¹⁰ *Kokinshū* 297 (Ki no Tsurayuki): “With no one to see them scatter their autumn leaves, maple trees deep in the mountains are like brocade viewed in the dark of night.”

¹¹ *Gosenshū* 1260 (Anonymous): “As so much time went by without word from you, I thought I alone was suffering ... until at last I’ve reached the point where you now longingly wait for me.”

¹² This is an echo of the poem on the feelings of parents in the *Kiritsubo* chapter. Because of a play on the word for child, *ko*, the poem could be translated as “Lost in the darkness of the world where we share a child.” Genji cannot be that direct, however, and so I have not translated it quite so explicitly.

¹³ *Gosenshū* 1093: “Today I see the famed pines on the isle of Matsu no Urashima ... doubtless they too have tender feelings, these fisher folk who live here.” The word for fisher folk (or fisherman) is *ama*, which is a homophone for the word that means “nun.” This play on words is what brings Sosei’s verse to Genji’s mind.

¹⁴ An allusion to Bai Juyi, *Hakushi monjū* 805 and 1055.

¹⁵ This *saibara* is a love song listing flowers—camellia, white camellia, willow, mountain lilies—that bloom in summer. It is thus appropriate for this celebration.

¹⁶ This poem alludes to *Kokinshū* 436 (Ki no Tsurayuki). This is a naming poem that plays on the word for “rose,” *sau*, which is embedded in the words for “this morning” (*keSA*) and “for the first time” (*UI ni*): “This morning I saw the rose for the first time, and had to admit that the color of its flowers was seductive.”

¹⁷ The source has not been identified.

XI

Hanachirusato

The Lady at the Villa of Scattering Orange Blossoms

GENJI'S PRIVATE travails seemed to be weighing constantly on his mind, and because life in general at the palace had become irksome, the turmoil in his heart only grew worse. He felt isolated and alone and considered the court an utterly detestable place. Still, as much as he might have been inclined to turn his back on it all and take religious vows himself, there were just too many things that kept him attached to the world.

One of his late father's imperial consorts, a woman who had resided in the apartments of the Reikeiden, found her circumstances increasingly difficult following the Emperor's death because she had given him no children. Genji was moved to compassion by her dire situation and tried to help by discreetly assisting her financially. Moreover, he had memories of a fleeting affair that he once conducted with the Reikeiden Consort's younger sister, who had visited the palace on occasion. Though his connection to the former Consort was not close, his habitual sensitivity in these matters did not allow him to forget the younger sister. While Genji had never dealt directly with the Consort, now that he was suffering distress brought on by every kind of worldly woe, he remembered that she too seemed to have tasted heartache to the full. Thus, feeling restless, he decided to call on her during the fifth month on one of those rare days when the clouds parted and the sky was clear.

Genji made no special preparations for his excursion—he dressed so as to be inconspicuous and did not bring along any escort to clear the way ahead of him. Just as he was secretly making his way across the Nakagawa River, he heard the lovely strains of a koto tuned to the rustic *Azuma* mode—a lively tune that seemed to be coming from a small dwelling situated within a grove of trees. Listening intently near the gate of that house, he leaned out a little through the

blinds of his carriage to take a peek. A warm summer breeze was blowing through the large katsura trees, their fragrance and heart-shaped leaves bringing back memories of the Kamo Festival. Glancing over at the dwelling, which had a certain charming appeal, he realized that he had once visited the woman who lived there. The memory stirred long dormant feelings.

“So much time has passed since I last called on her,” Genji said, feeling hesitant. “I wonder if she would even recognize me?”

Still, he tarried, finding it hard to just pass by the place, and at that very moment a cuckoo began to call out. It sounded as though the bird was inviting him inside. He had his carriage backed up and, as was his usual practice, gave Koremitsu a poem and sent him in to make inquiries.

*A cuckoo's faint cry from the hedge round this hut
Where once the two of us exchanged vows of love
Wakens unbearable longings from the past*

Some women had gathered on the west side of what appeared to be the main hall. Hearing their voices—which he recognized from that earlier visit—Koremitsu cleared his throat to signal his presence and then presented his lord’s message. The younger women seemed to find this all rather suspicious. The woman who had once been the object of Genji’s affections replied:

*Though it may be the voice of the cuckoo
Promising its love, how can I be sure
In this rainy season of misty skies*

The uncertainty expressed in this poem sounded—at least from Koremitsu’s perspective—a little forced. “If that’s the case,” he said, taking his leave, “then I guess we identified the wrong hedge.”

The lady of the house was chagrined and saddened by this response, though she kept her reaction to herself. As far as Genji was concerned, if the lady had a reason to be cautious, then it was natural for her to express uncertainty, and Koremitsu had no choice but to retreat. Among women of similar station to this lady, the first who came to Genji’s mind was the sweetly alluring daughter of the Assistant Governor General of Kyūshū, a young woman from Tsukushi who had performed as a dancer at the Gosechi Festival. Genji seemed to be always suffering pangs of longing for every woman he knew. No matter how much time elapsed, his passion for them never faded—even for those women he had been with only once, like the lady whose house he had just passed. Of course, it was

this devotion of his that explained why so many women pined for him.

When he at last arrived at the villa that had been his intended destination all along, he was moved to see it looking just the way he had imagined: quiet, nearly deserted, with no sign of any visitors. He first went to the quarters of the former Reikeiden Consort and talked with her about the old days well into the night. Since it was the twentieth day of the fifth month, the moon rose late, making the shadows cast by the tall stand of trees in the garden look even darker. The lovely fragrance of a mandarin orange tree under the nearby eaves wafted in, reminding Genji and the Consort of people from their pasts. From all indications, the former Consort had aged, but she went to great lengths to remain proper in speech and manner. Her elegance touched Genji deeply. She may never have been a special favorite of his father, but the late Emperor had nonetheless regarded her with warm fondness. As various memories came flooding back, they stirred a chain of associations that made him weep.

A cuckoo called out, its voice identical to the one he had heard earlier—was it possibly the same bird that had been singing in the hedgerow around that other dwelling? It was so charming that it made him wonder if it had followed him here. “How did it know I was here?” he whispered to himself.¹

*The cherished scent of mandarin orange blossoms
Brings to mind loved ones of old ... the cuckoo cries out
Searching for this villa where the blossoms scatter²*

“I should have come here sooner to find solace for the past, for things that are hard to forget,” Genji said. “Here I might find relief from sorrow, though I would also experience an even greater longing. It’s the nature of the world that everything must change, and now there are only a few people left with whom I can reminisce about days gone by. It must be even harder for you to relieve the tedium.”

The present court was what it was, and it was no use complaining about it. Her manner of expression was deeply sincere, which suggested that she was constantly dwelling on the innate sadness of the world, and—perhaps because she seemed so stoic—it imbued her with an even greater sense of pathos.

*No one visits this desolate dwelling
Though the orange blossoms beneath the eaves
Have enticed you here to long for the past*

This poem was the entirety of her reply, but even so Genji sensed that she was

no ordinary woman.

He furtively peeked into the living quarters on the western side of the main hall where the Consort's younger sister—the lady with whom he had been intimate—resided. As he went over to see his lover, she was now associated in his mind with this villa where fragrant mandarin orange blossoms were scattering: *Hanachirusato*. This was not the start of a new affair for him, though certainly his visits to her were rare. Still, because he was so magnificent-looking, she would likely forgive him and forget her bitter complaints. As always, he talked so sweetly and lovingly to her about various matters that his affections could not have been shallow.

All the women who were Genji's lovers, even those who were no more than a passing fling, were extraordinary in some way: in character, or talent, or status. Because he never took any of them for granted, or treated them as if they were of no consequence, most chose to continue their relationship with him without recriminations and with abiding mutual understanding. And if a woman concluded that her affair with him was improper or hopeless and turned to another man, he never considered her attitude unreasonable. The woman who dwelled in that other house, the one with the hedge where the cuckoo had sung, was no doubt one of those whose attitude had changed.

¹ *Kokin rokujō* 2804: “As we talked of things that happened long ago, a cuckoo cried out in that same voice of old—how did it know we were here?”

² *Kokinshū* 139 (Anonymous): “The fragrance of the orange blossoms awaiting the fifth month brings to mind the perfumed sleeves of a lover from long ago.”

XII

Suma

Exile to Suma

THE COURT had become an extremely vexing place for Genji and, because his problems were multiplying, he concluded that his situation would only grow worse if he went on acting as though nothing was amiss.

Suma—in ancient times a site where the nobility had built villas and estates. He heard, however, that it was now a desolate, deserted backwater dotted with a scattering of fishermen's huts. He no longer wanted to stay on in a residence where throngs of people bustled in and out, and yet he knew he would certainly be anxious about his household affairs should he go far away from the capital. His predicament left him confused and indecisive.

He obsessed over everything—all that had happened in the past, the future that was to come—and so he truly tasted grief in all its forms. He felt that, having already forsaken the troublesome palace, he should now distance himself further from the capital before he was formally exiled, even though it would be terribly hard to leave behind so much—Murasaki most of all. It was heart-wrenching to observe her as she grieved and fretted every passing day from morning to night. He tried to reassure himself by taking comfort in a line of verse: “I know that we shall circle round and meet again.”¹ But then he would recall how anxious he felt about her whenever he spent time elsewhere—even if it was only for a couple of days—and how lonely and forlorn she was during such times. Those occasions were nothing like what he was facing now. His self-imposed exile had no fixed period of years. Though he would leave resolving, “I shall do all I can to meet you again,”² he knew that the world was an uncertain realm where death might come at any time, and when he left it might be forever. Such musings made him miserable, and so there were moments when he secretly considered taking Murasaki with him. He decided, however, that it would be

inappropriate to bring such a delicate young lady to those desolate shores where there would be no callers except for the wind and the waves. He also concluded that to bring her along would no doubt add to his misery.

"I don't care how difficult the journey is," Murasaki protested, "so long as I am with you." She seemed to resent him for ignoring her pleas.

He had never paid all that many visits to Hanachirusato, his lady at the villa of the scattering orange blossoms. Still, given her sadly straitened circumstances, it was quite natural for her to feel upset at the prospect of his leaving, since she depended on his kind support to get by. She was not alone, for many women—even those with whom Genji had had only a passing, casual relationship—were now secretly suffering in anticipation of his exile.

Fujitsubo was constantly sending messages expressing her concern and asking after him. She did so with the utmost discretion, however, since she was still afraid that gossip about them might arise. *If only she had shown such compassion for me earlier*, Genji reflected bitterly, in anguish over the realization that it was his karmic destiny to fully experience every hardship of the heart.

Genji left the capital some time after the twentieth day of the third month. Fearing formal banishment, he let no one know the date of his departure. Instead, he took off in secret accompanied by an escort of only seven or eight of his closest retainers. He discreetly sent letters to all his women—those to whom it was fitting and proper to write—and no doubt he used all his skill with words to express his sad longing for them. It would have been fascinating had I had the chance to read them, but unfortunately I was so caught up in the emotions of the moment that I was not able to pay full attention to their contents and so cannot record them here.

Two or three days earlier, under the cover of night, Genji had called at the Minister of the Left's residence. Disguising himself by using an informal wickerwork carriage and hiding behind blinds like a woman, his visit had a sad, dreamlike quality. The chambers where his late wife used to reside seemed somehow lonely and abandoned. When his son's nurses and his late wife's former attendants—those who had remained in service—heard about this rare visit, they gathered to see him. Even the younger women, who had not yet developed especially deep sensibilities, were moved to tears upon seeing how quickly Genji's fortunes had changed, for they now realized the true evanescent nature of the world.

His little boy looked especially charming as he ran about. "I'm touched that he still remembers me after such a long absence," Genji remarked, looking as though he might cry at any moment as he held his son on his lap.

The Minister came over to greet him, saying, “I understand that you have been idle, shut away at your villa, and I considered paying you a visit to talk about the old days. But my infirmities keep piling up so that I no longer even attend court. Since I’ve given up my rank and position, I thought that visiting you might give rise to malicious gossip—you know, people saying, ‘He can’t come to court, but he can go around on personal affairs.’ Of course, my status now is such that I shouldn’t worry myself over such matters, but the court has become a harsh, frightening place, and under these circumstances I have come to feel that a long life is actually a burden and wonder if this isn’t a sign of the end of days. The whole world is at sixes and sevens, and seeing you in this unimaginable predicament makes everything seem truly wearisome.” He wept inconsolably.

Genji replied at some length, telling him, “All that happens is the working of karma. We get what we deserve depending on what we did in previous lives, which means that all this bad fortune is retribution for my past transgressions. In other lands it’s considered a serious breach for a person who has been rebuked by his ruler to continue going about at court, conducting affairs as usual and living as though nothing was out of the ordinary. That is true even for a minor offense that does not warrant the stripping of rank, which is the punishment I suffered, though in my case it was determined that my behavior is worthy of banishment to a distant place. So there can be no doubt that what I did is considered an especially grave crime. I am too wary of potential dangers facing me to live as if nothing is wrong, even though I am innocent of any true crime and my heart is pure. That is why I have decided that I must flee the court before I suffer any greater shame.”

The Minister kept his sleeves pressed to his eyes, and wept as he spoke about the old days and about Genji’s father and the expectations he had for Genji to serve Emperor Suzaku. Genji found it hard to maintain his composure, and he felt a surge of pity for his little son innocently running in and out, so familiar and unreserved with everyone.

“I can’t get over the loss of my daughter,” the Minister said, “and not a day goes by when I don’t think of her. Still, I take some comfort knowing that her brief life was for the best, that she was spared this nightmare, for she would have suffered terribly had she been alive to witness your exile. What makes me sadder than anything is the thought of this young boy being brought up by two old, infirm people and spending his youth apart from you, with no chance to get to know you. People in the old days were never subjected to this sort of punishment, even when they committed a genuinely serious offense. As you said, there are many instances of people here and in other lands who have suffered a fate similar to yours, and yet in all those cases some reason for the

charges was given. I've wracked my brains, but I still can't recall anyone making a formal charge against you." The Minister rambled on like this, touching on many topics.

Tō no Chūjō joined them. Because it was getting late, Genji decided to stay over in his late wife's quarters. He summoned her attendants and talked with them about various matters. He sensed that the lady-in-waiting named Chūnagon, a woman he had secretly favored with his affections, was having difficulty expressing the grief in her heart, and he felt sorry for her. After everyone had settled in for the night and the residence had grown quiet, the two of them shared an intimate conversation. Indeed, his decision to stay the night was most likely because she was there.

Dawn was approaching, and Genji prepared to leave while it was still dark. An exquisite moon, several days past full, was hanging low in the sky. Cherry blossoms had gradually passed their peak, and a light fog, mingling indistinctly with the blossoms, covered the garden where fallen petals around the base of the tree shone white in the moonlight—a scene more sublimely moving than any autumn night. Genji leaned against a corner railing on the veranda and gazed out for a long while. Chūnagon pushed upon the hinged double doors at the corner of the hall. Had she come to see him off?

"When I think that I may never see you again, I can't stand it. I never imagined that things would turn out like this, and so I was thoughtless and failed to visit you all those months when I should have." On hearing these words, Chūnagon wept and could not respond.

Saishō, who served as nurse to Genji's son, brought tidings from the Minister's wife, Princess Ōmiya. "I wanted to speak to you directly, but I have been so upset I couldn't decide what to do. Now you are preparing to leave while it is still dark outside, and I realize how much has changed from the time my daughter was alive and you would stay past the dawn. The precious little one who causes you such concern is still slumbering. Won't you wait until he wakes up?"

Her words brought tears to Genji's eyes, and he whispered a poem that was not meant as a reply:

*I go to view the shore where fishermen light fires
To render salt ... how bitter it is that the smoke
Should remind me of her pyre at Toribeno*

"Are 'partings before dawn' always this difficult?³ Is there anyone—you, perhaps—who might know?"

Saishō replied, her voice choked with tears, “People say that the word ‘parting’ is always detestable, but I feel that your departure this morning is especially trying.” Her emotions seemed genuine and profound.

Genji sent his reply to Princess Ōmiya: “Though I thought about all the many things I wanted to tell you, I beg you to consider that my heart, as you might imagine, was too full for me to write to you. Were I to look in on my little boy, slumbering away, I would find it impossible to flee from this vicious world. So I must be strong and hurry away.”

The women peeked out to watch Genji go. In the bright light of the setting moon he looked preternaturally handsome—fresh, pure, elegant—and his melancholy figure would have brought tigers and wolves to tears. Those who had been close to him ever since he first came to the Minister’s residence following his coming-of-age ceremony were moved to even greater pity by his incomparably splendid appearance.

By the way, I almost forgot to say that Princess Ōmiya sent a poem in reply to his note:

*The distance between you and the one who passed on
Only grows greater when you leave behind the skies
Above the capital where smoke from her pyre rose*

His late wife’s attendants had not yet come to terms with their grief over the death of their mistress, and now they were left with the added sorrow of Genji’s departure. Given the nature of the moment, the tears they shed were inauspicious.

Upon returning to his own villa at Nijō, Genji found that the women who served in his private quarters had apparently not slept at all the previous night. Gathered in groups here and there, they looked as though they were in a state of shock over what was happening to their world. Not one of his male retainers was to be found in the household offices—those who had served him most closely had probably gone off reluctantly to say their private farewells to their families, having resigned themselves to the reality that they would have to accompany their lord into exile. It would have been a grave offense for any retainer who was not closely connected to Genji to come and see him off, and so, without the usual crowd of horses and carriages that so often jostled together at the gate, the villa felt deserted this morning. The scene made Genji realize what a fickle place the world is. The banquet table on the dais of the main hall was already gathering dust, and in several of the rooms the mats had been rolled up and stowed away. *If things are already in this state, Genji mused, how much more*

dilapidated will my estate become while I'm away?

Going over to Murasaki's quarters in the west hall, he saw that the lattice shutters had not been closed—evidently she had been awake all night gazing out in despair. The young girls who served as her pages had been lying down here and there on the veranda and were just now scrambling to get up. The sight of those young girls, so adorably done up in the white gowns they wore when serving at night, made Genji's heart ache; he knew that as time passed they would not be able to continue in service until his return but would scatter, each going her separate way. He was noticing things now that normally he would have paid no attention to at all.

"Many things came up at the Minister's villa yesterday," Genji explained to Murasaki, "so I had to stay the night. I imagine you were preoccupied with your usual jealous suspicions that I was doing something untoward, were you not? So long as I remain in the capital, I would much prefer to spend my time with you and never be out of your sight. But, under the circumstances, when I am about to go into exile, I naturally have to attend to many pressing matters. So how could I possibly stay here locked away with you? The world is uncertain, and it would be a pity if people came to consider me someone inconsiderate or lacking in feeling."

"Is there anything *more* untoward than what's happening now?" That was all she said, and it was not unreasonable that she would be so depressed. After all, their relationship was different, special. Her own father, Prince Hyōbu, had always been remote—never a real father—and she had felt close to Genji from the beginning. Moreover, Prince Hyōbu was now even more aloof than ever, and—worried that his association with Genji might give rise to vicious slander—neither wrote nor even visited to express his concerns. Murasaki was embarrassed that her attendants had noticed her father's change in attitude, which was evident in the way he was now avoiding the villa. She felt it might have been best after all never to have informed him of her whereabouts. It was reported to her that her stepmother, Prince Hyōbu's principal wife, had said, "Her sudden good fortune certainly dissipated quickly enough, didn't it? Ah, I guess it's her fate to be separated from everyone who ever cared about her." Those words made her miserable, and she stopped communicating with her father altogether. But with no one other than Genji to turn to for support, she was truly in a precarious state.

"If after a lengthy period I am unable to receive a pardon," Genji advised her, "I shall send for you even if it means we must live amidst some towering crags.⁴ People would consider it inappropriate to take you with me to Suma right now. Anyone who has incurred the censure of the court ought not to go out to view the

sun and moon, and it would be an extremely grave offense for him to behave as though he hadn't a care in the world. Though I have committed no crime, I feel that this situation is the working out of my destiny and no doubt meant to be. Because there is no precedent for a man sent into exile taking a wife with him, were I to bring you with me it might well lead to worse consequences, given the madness for power that has overtaken the court." He remained in her chambers until the sun was high.

Sochinomiya, Tō no Chūjō and others arrived. Genji felt that he should meet them, and decided to change to an informal cloak. "I am, after all, a man without rank," he stated, choosing a plain garment that suited his taste. His humble outfit was very becoming. He then moved over to the mirror stand to arrange his hair and, staring at the reflection of his gaunt face, which seemed exceptionally refined even to his own eyes, remarked, "Look at me ... I'm no longer the man I was. Am I really all that thin? What a miserable state of affairs!" Noticing the tears in Murasaki's eyes, the pity he felt for her was unbearable.

*Though my body must wander in exile
My image will never be far away
Reflected in this mirror by your side*

Murasaki replied:

*Though we are apart, I may find solace
If perhaps by gazing in this mirror
I should glimpse your image lingering there*

She tried to hide her tears from him by sitting behind a pillar. Seeing her like that, Genji realized that none of his other women could compare to her.

Sochinomiya continued his mournful conversation with Genji until dusk, at which time he returned home.

Given the desperate financial situation at the residence of the former Reikeiden Consort, it was hardly unexpected that she would be in constant contact with Genji. He worried that if he did not call on the Consort's younger sister before he left, his lady of the scattering orange blossoms might feel hurt and resentful. And so, his heart heavy at having to leave Murasaki, he set out that evening, arriving late at night. The former Consort was overjoyed. "How honored we are that you should recognize us like this with your visit." She said various other things, but they are too tedious to record here. From the look of things, she seemed to be facing extremely difficult circumstances; the interior of

the villa was so deserted and quiet that Genji realized that, once he was gone, her life, which had been spent in obscurity for many years, would only become increasingly desolate. Gazing out on the eerily lonely atmosphere of the garden—the hazy moonlight, the broad expanse of the pond, the thick growth of the trees on the landscaped hill—he was reminded once again of those “towering crags” where he would soon be living in exile.

Genji’s lover, Hanachirusato, was lost in silent depression in her quarters on the west side of the villa. She was fretting. *Will he not come to see me as well?* Then the familiar fragrance of his extraordinary perfume came secretly stealing into the melancholy scene of her chambers, which were bathed in the light of the moon. Sliding forward on her knees, she moved outside her curtains and, remaining seated, looking up at the sky. They talked until the dawn approached.

“The nights are so short,” Genji said, “and I wonder if we will ever be able to meet like this again? I regret that I let so much time slip by without the two of us plighting our troth. But my status has always made me an object of idle gossip, and so I never seemed to have had a moment’s respite.”

He was talking about the past when a cock began crowing over and over. Mindful of society’s prying eyes, he hurriedly set off while it was still dark outside. In her heart, as she always did when he left, she compared his departure to the moon setting in the west, and the conceit made her sadder still. The moonlight reflected off the dark purple sleeves of her robe, bringing to mind “the tear-stained face of the moon.”⁵

*I never tire of seeing the face of the moon
Resting upon these sleeves, narrow though they may be ...
Could I but stay its course and make it tarry here*

It was distressing to see her in such misery. Despite the turmoil in his own heart, he comforted her with his reply:

*Gaze not in longing at the cloudy sky
For the moon, obscured for but a brief time
Will surely come round to shine here again*

“Still, we all know that nothing is certain in life,” he added, “and sorrowful ‘tears of uncertainty’⁶ darken my vision.” He departed as dawn broke.

Genji put his affairs in order, assigning various responsibilities for looking after his Nijō villa to those retainers, each according to his respective rank, who had served him closely but had not been swept up by the currents of change at

the court. He then selected the men who would accompany him into exile.

He decided to take only the most essential items to his rustic villa in Suma, things simple, unadorned, appropriate for a man without rank: a box containing essential books, including the collected poems of Bai Juyi and, in imitation of Bai Juyi, a seven-string koto. There were no ostentatious furnishings, no lavish garments. He would instead adopt the appearance of a poor mountain peasant. Murasaki was to take charge of his entire household staff, everyone from his own ladies-in-waiting on down. He also turned over to her the deeds for the properties to which she would be entitled, including the manors and pasturelands in his possession. He considered Murasaki's nurse, Shōnagon, an efficient and able woman, and so he assigned some of his trusted staff to her and gave instructions on how to look after his storehouses and treasury.

Genji's favorites among his own ladies-in-waiting—Nakatsukasa and Chūjō among others—had always been able to comfort themselves over his neglect so long as he was there for them to see. Now they wondered how they would ever console themselves.

"It may well be," Genji told them, "that I shall live long enough to return to the court. Those of you who may wish to wait for me: serve the lady in the west hall." He ordered all of them, irrespective of their individual status, to attend to Murasaki.

He sent charming gifts to the nurses looking after his son at the residence of his late wife and to the women at the villa of the scattering orange blossoms—he did not forget to send necessities to the latter as well.

Genji took the extraordinary step of communicating with Oborozukiyo.

"I know there are good reasons why I have had no word from you, but now, as I make ready to leave, the sorrow and pain I feel over leaving the court are like nothing I've ever experienced before."

*Has sinking in my own river of tears
Which has no ford where we could cross to meet
Caused this flood that is sweeping me away*

"Thinking back on all that took place between us, my love for you is the one crime for which I must accept responsibility." He did not dare write anything more detailed, since the letter might be discovered by the Kokiden faction. Oborozukiyo was in utter misery. Try as she might to hide her emotions, her sleeves could not hold back the tears.

*I must disappear as surely as evanescent foam
That drifts upon a river of tears powerless to stop*

*Tearful tears upon a river of tears, powerless to stop
And meet again the one swept away by the tides of fate*

Her calligraphy, produced at a moment of great distress, was exceptionally lovely. The idea that they would part and never meet again was too bitter for him to accept, but he quickly put aside such rash thoughts. So many of her relatives hated him, and she was taking extraordinary measures to stay out of sight. Thus, in the end, he decided not to force the issue and took no steps to contact her.

On the eve of his departure Genji set out at dusk for the hills north of the capital to visit the grave of his father. The moon rose with the coming of dawn at that time of the month, and so he went first to call on Fujitsubo to take leave of her. He was seated right in front of her blinds, and she spoke to him directly, with no intermediary. She was preoccupied, worried about the situation of her son, the Crown Prince.

Their conversation and all that passed between them must have been deeply felt and remarkably moving.

The sound of her robes rustling, the scent of her perfume ... these things aroused a warm nostalgia in Genji, suggesting that her glorious beauty remained unchanged even after she had taken vows. Though he was tempted to remind her subtly of her cold cruelty toward him, he thought better of it. It would surely displease her if he were to bring up such matters now that she was a nun, and it would bring even greater anguish to his own heart. He thus chose his words carefully.

“I can conceive of only one reason why I am suffering the consequences of these trumped-up charges, and I fear the judgment of the heavens for that sin. Even if I am to lose my life—for which I have no regrets—it doesn’t matter so long as the Crown Prince ascends the throne without incident.”

It was a reasonable thing for him to say, and because Fujitsubo understood perfectly what he was referring to, her heart was too full to reply. Remembering all that had happened between them, Genji wept, his looks creating an aura of dashing elegance. After a short time he was able to continue.

“I am going to the mountains to visit my father’s tomb ... do you want me to take a message from you?” She could not answer right away and, from what he could tell, seemed to be struggling mightily to retain her composure.

*The one I lived with is gone, the one who lives
Is met with hardships ... did I renounce this world
Merely to pass my days in tearful sorrow*

Their hearts were in too much agony to continue trying to convey all their

accumulated feelings, so Genji responded with a poem:

*When death took my father away from me
I thought I'd tasted sorrow to the full
Yet this world's sorrows grow even greater*

After waiting until the moon rose, Genji set out. He was on horseback, accompanied by a mere five or six retainers and only the closest of his servants. It goes without saying that this excursion was much different from his romantic escapades of the past. Everyone found it depressing.

His escort included a young Lesser Captain of the Right Palace Guard. This man had served for a brief moment four years earlier as part of the special escort for Genji on the day of the procession to the Purification Ritual for the Kamo Priestess. Due to his association with Genji he had been passed over time and again for promotions above the sixth rank that by rights should have been his until, finally, ashamed that he had lost his official position and that his name was stricken from the roster of those permitted to enter the inner palace, he found himself among the men accompanying his lord into exile. Catching sight of the Lower Kamo Shrine in the distance, the young man suddenly remembered that day four years earlier. He dismounted, took the reins of Genji's mount and composed a

verse:

*When I recall the procession that sacred day
And those leaves of wild ginger that adorned our caps
How cruel the gods of the Kamo Shrine now seem*

Genji grieved to imagine how he must feel, a young man of such promise who had looked more resplendent than his peers. Genji dismounted as well and, facing the Kamo Shrine, prayed for the blessings of the gods:

*Now I take my leave of this world of woe
And pray to you gods of Tadasu Woods⁷
To right a wrong and restore my honor*

The sight of Genji composing his poem stirred a deep sense of beauty and sadness in the sensitive young men of his escort.

When he arrived at the tomb in the hills, the image that appeared in his mind was so vivid that it seemed as if his father were right there in front of his eyes.

The realization that even a man of infinitely lofty status must pass from the world filled Genji with indescribable bitterness. Though he tearfully recounted all that had happened, he knew he would receive no direct response from the silent grave, and that it would do no good to ask what had become of his father's final admonitions to Suzaku to think of Genji as his adviser. The path leading up to the grave was overgrown with grasses, and the dew further soaked Genji's robes, which were already damp with his tears. Clouds obscured the moon, and the dark shadows of the dense forest were oppressive and unsettling. Feeling as though he had lost the way back, Genji offered a prayer. When he did so, a vision of his father's face, looking as if he were alive, appeared clearly in front of him, sending an involuntary chill through his body.

*What must the spirit of my father think
As he gazes on me, his face obscured
Like the cloud-covered moon I see above*

Returning to his Nijō villa just after sunrise, he sent a note to the Crown Prince. Fujitsubo had entrusted the care of her son to Ōmyōbu, and so Genji gave instructions that the letter be delivered to her quarters.

"I shall depart the capital today," he wrote. "It adds to my many sorrows that having been banished from the palace I am unable to visit you again before I leave. You can imagine all the things I am feeling, so please convey those sentiments to the Crown Prince." He composed a poem as well, which he attached to a branch of cherry from which the petals had already dropped:

*The rustic fallen from favor
When will he ever again view
Spring blossoms in the capital*

The Crown Prince was still a child, but he maintained a serious countenance when he read what Genji had written. When Ōmyōbu asked him how she should reply, he answered, "Tell him, 'I miss you when we are apart for even a short time ... and now you are going far away.'"

She gazed at the boy sadly, thinking his reply childishly inadequate. One memory after another came to her—those events in the past when Genji had tortured himself with his terrifying, fruitless desires, and all the circumstances surrounding his clandestine trysts with Fujitsubo.

The two of them should have been destined for lives free of worry and sorrow, she brooded, and yet Lord Genji, of his own will, chose to pursue his painful love

for my lady.

Ōmyōbu was overwhelmed with regret and blamed herself for bringing them together. She added her own reply to the Crown Prince's note: "There is nothing more I can tell you. I have conveyed your message to him, and it is most pitiable to see him looking so forlorn." Her letter was rambling and disjointed, since she too was upset.

*It saddens me that the cherry blossoms
Scatter so quickly ... O departing Spring
Return to see the capital in bloom*

"When the times are more propitious ..."

The women serving in the Crown Prince's quarters shed furtive tears as they sadly conversed in the gloomy aftermath of the exchange of letters. There was no one, not even those who had merely glimpsed Genji's darkly depressed countenance, who did not lament this unfortunate state of affairs. So it is not hard to imagine how much worse it was for those who were in constant service to him. Even the lowest scullery maids and the menials who took care of the chamberpots—the kind of people that Genji certainly would never have even noticed, though they benefited from his gracious nobility—all lamented his exile, wondering anxiously how long it would be before they would be able to see him again.

Did anyone at the court really believe that exile was an appropriate punishment? From the time he was seven Genji was in constant service to his father, the late Emperor, and since he was a favored son, there was nothing he asked for that his father did not grant. Consequently, everyone at the court had, at one time or another, benefitted from Genji's patronage, and there was not a single person there who did not have cause to be grateful for his generosity. He had done favors for many of the most elite nobility, officials and controllers, who were all in his debt, and the number of lower-ranking officials he had aided was too large to calculate. Not one of them had forgotten what he had done for them, but circumstances being what they were, they were intimidated by the spiteful powers at court and were reluctant to call on Genji at his Nijō villa. The whole of court society was in an uproar, expressing regrets and privately venting their resentment and criticism of the Kokiden faction's behavior. Nevertheless, they probably concluded that it would serve no purpose for them to endanger their own ranks and titles by visiting him. The despicable, cowardly behavior he witnessed during this period of his life hurt Genji, causing him bitter indignation and leading him to conclude that the world was truly dreary and insipid.

On the day of his departure he passed the time in quiet conversation with Murasaki. Then, as was his habit, he left late at night. He dressed in hunting robes, keeping his travel apparel simple.

“I see the moon has risen,” he said to Murasaki. “Please come out and see me off. How can I tell you all the things I still have to say to you? I feel so strangely unsettled whenever I’m away from you even for a day or two.”

He rolled up the blind and coaxed her out onto the veranda. When he did so, Murasaki, who had been weeping inconsolably, regained her composure and, still in a sitting posture, slid over toward him on her knees and moved out onto the veranda. Bathed in the moonlight, she looked beautiful beyond words. He felt sad and uneasy as he imagined how hard it would be for her to manage on her own once he had left behind this uncertain world, but she was already so overwhelmed by her grief that he would only make matters worse were he to speak of his own concerns.

*Time after time I vowed to stay with you
Always until death ... little did I know
That people still alive may also part*

“How foolish I was,” he added, trying to lighten the mood.
Murasaki, however, responded as follows:

*My life would I exchange with no regrets
If I could but stay for a brief moment
The departure I must witness today*

Knowing how she truly felt, Genji found it nearly impossible to leave her behind. Dawn was approaching, however, and since it would be awkward if others saw him depart, he hurried away.

Murasaki’s image haunted him all through the journey on horseback, and at the landing at Fushimi he felt his chest tighten when he boarded the boat that would take him to Naniwa. From there he sailed the final thirty miles to Suma. The journey normally took a day, but since the summer days were long and his boat had a following breeze, he managed to arrive at Suma at around four o’clock in the afternoon, during the Hour of the Monkey. Never having experienced travel like this, having only taken short excursions before, Genji felt mixed emotions—loneliness, of course, but also, as if for the first time, a sense of exhilaration. He viewed the site of the Ōe villa on the banks of the Yodo River. Once used as a lodge for the Ise Priestess on her return to the capital, it

was now in utter ruins, with only pine trees remaining as a marker of where the buildings once stood.

*Is it my destiny to have to dwell
In more unknown places than even he⁸
Who left behind lasting fame in China*

Gazing out at the waves that broke on the shore and then rolled back out to sea, Genji whispered a line from *Tales of Ise*: “How enviously I watch those waves return to the capital.”⁹ Old words from a bygone age, perhaps, but they sounded fresh to the men in his escort, who were moved to sorrow by their lord’s appearance. Looking back in the direction from which he had come, he saw the mountains, obscure in the mist, and truly felt as though he were “three thousand leagues from home.”¹⁰ It was hard to hold back the tears, which fell like spray dripping from the oars of a boat.¹¹

*Though blocked from home by misty peaks
Is not the sky I gaze upon
The sky my loved ones see as well*

The villa where he was to reside was near the house where Middle Counselor Ariwara no Yukihira once sadly observed “briny water dripping from the gathered sea tangle.”¹² His new abode was situated on a disturbingly isolated hill a short distance in from the shore. Everything about the place, starting with the fence, seemed a marvel to him. The thatched roofs of the small pavilions and the reed-thatched roofs of what were apparently the passageways connecting the buildings were pleasantly elegant. The layout and character of the rooms that were to be his quarters were so eccentric they brought to mind some of his romantic escapades from the past. Had it been any other occasion but this, he might have found them charming.

Genji summoned the stewards from some nearby manors and had Yoshikiyo, one of his closest retainers, give instructions for the various tasks they had to complete—though it made Genji sad that Yoshikiyo now had to deal directly with people who were so far beneath him, which he never had to do in the capital. Soon all the construction on the villa was completed, and the place looked very splendid indeed. The garden stream had been dredged and additional trees and shrubs planted, so it hardly seemed real to him that he should now feel more at ease living there. The Governor of Settsu Province had once been a close retainer, and out of feelings of loyalty he discreetly performed a variety of

services for Genji. With so many people bustling about, it hardly seemed like a temporary residence on his journey. And yet with no one to open up to honestly and directly, he felt extremely alienated, a stranger in a strange land, and wondered how he would ever be able to pass the months and years in such a place.

Life gradually settled down, and with the coming of the idle time of the rainy season his thoughts turned to happenings in the capital. He missed so many whose images he conjured in his mind ... the pensive Murasaki, the Crown Prince with his duties at court, his little boy playing innocently at the residence of the Minister of the Left.

He dispatched messages to the capital. It was difficult composing the letters to Murasaki and Fujitsubo, because tears would blind him. He wrote the following to Fujitsubo:

*While fisherfolk at Suma gather seaweed drenched in brine
What goes on in the thatched fishing huts at Matsushima ...
While I weep these tears, how fares the nun pining in her hut*¹³

“As I experience endless sorrow, I have come to feel recently that both past and future are bleak and that I could fill a river to overflowing with my tears.”¹⁴

Like his previous messages to Oborozukiyo, Genji enclosed a private missive to her inside a letter addressed to her lady-in-waiting, Chūnagon, since she was the attendant who had acted earlier as their go-between.

“In the tedium of my idle hours,” he wrote, “I am beset by memories of the past.”

*Unrepentant, I yearn to gaze upon your flowing hair
Alluring as the lustrous sea tangle along these shores ...
What emotions touch the maid who burns sea tangle for salt*

One can only imagine how he poured his heart into every word of the various letters he wrote.

He also sent letters to the Minister of the Left and to his son’s nurse, Saishō, reminding her to look after the boy with the greatest care.

All over the capital there were many distraught women, each one in her respective residence poring over the letter Genji sent her. Still clutching her letter, Murasaki was in such misery she could not get up—much to the dismay of her servants, who tried their best to console her. The personal items that he had used—the koto he had once played, the scented robes he had taken off and left

behind—these things seemed to her now mementos of someone who had departed this world. Although it was natural for her to lament his absence, such extremes of grief were so inauspicious that Shōnagon asked Murasaki's great uncle, the bishop at Kitayama, to say prayers. The bishop performed esoteric rites for the couple, moved as he was to pity at their plight. He fervently prayed for Genji to return safely to the capital, for Murasaki to find peace for her grief-stricken heart, and for the two of them to be permitted to live in a world free of anxiety. Murasaki prepared and sent to Genji clothes for his journey. The cloaks and trousers, which could be cinched at the ankles, were made of stiff, plain silk of a kind normally worn by a man of no rank or status, and they looked so unfamiliar that they made her feel unbearably sad.

Even though his image lingered for her in his mirror, just as his poem had said it would, her sorrow was such that the image provided no comfort. Whenever she glanced at the places where he had entered or left, or at the pillars he had leaned against when he sat down, she would feel her chest tighten. A woman of more mature years and true discernment, one who was accustomed to the ways of the world, would have felt just as she did. Thus it was understandable that Murasaki, who had been so close to him all her life, would experience much stronger feelings than others for the man who had raised and cared for her as both father and mother. Had he actually passed from this world, there would have been nothing to say or do about it, and as time passed the grasses of forgetfulness would gradually begin to sprout and take root. As things stood now, however, she had no way of knowing how long they would be apart. Even though she had been told Suma was not all that far away, she could find no release from her obsessive longings.

Fujitsubo, of course, was also deeply distressed, worried as she was about the prospects of the Crown Prince. Since Genji was supposed to have served as her son's guardian, she could hardly dismiss such concerns as inconsequential, especially considering that her own karmic destiny was so tightly entwined with his. For many years she had been extremely sensitive about any rumors that might arise regarding the two of them, fearful that if she displayed even the slightest affection toward him they both would be subjected to the censure of the court. By continually forcing herself, with all her strength, to suppress the feelings she had for him, she was able to maintain an outward show of indifference, even in the face of his frequent protestations of love. And, as things turned out, for all her anxieties about how people in this tiresome world are predisposed to gossip, Genji's powerful passions did not undermine his discipline and strength of character. He kept their secret safely hidden away and made sure that not the slightest rumor about their affair ever circulated. How,

then, could she not have been moved by tender longings for him? Though not long and detailed, her reply to him was suffused with somewhat more emotion than usual:

“Recently more and more ...”

*Waiting and weeping, the grieving of an old nun
Piles up like logs used by the fisherfolk each year
To burn salt from sea tangle at Matsushima*

Tucked inside Chūnagon’s return letter was a brief reply and poem from Oborozukiyo:

*Like fishermen carefully hiding their fires on the strand
I tend my flames of passion, conceal them so that the smoke
Of remorse cannot rise, but smolders and darkens my heart*

“Of course, I cannot write all that I am feeling ...” Chūnagon’s note described how miserable her mistress was. Some of the details touched Genji so deeply that he broke down and wept.

Murasaki sent a long reply to Genji’s heartfelt letter. It contained many affecting passages along with this poem:

*Compare the sleeves of the dweller by the shore
Drawing water from the sea with tear-soaked sleeves
To robes worn by one so distant from the waves*

The colors and quality of the clothes that accompanied the letter were exceptional. Everything she did was so graceful and refined, and it filled him with regret to think that she was not with him now that he was finally living the quiet life he had always desired, with no romantic or other entanglements to trouble him. Her image was always in his mind, day and night. Because he was tormented by unbearable memories, the idea that he should secretly send for her crossed his mind. But he reconsidered, asking himself why he would do such a thing ... after all, he had to atone for the sins he had committed in this world. And so he chose instead to spend his days in ritual purification and fasting.

Although it made him sad whenever he received a letter from the Minister of the Left with news about his son, Genji was not unduly concerned about the boy. He felt certain that he would meet his son again, and in any case the boy was being raised by people he trusted. Still, is there any parent who has not lost their

way over love for a child?

Now that I think of it, I failed to mention something else that happened during all this commotion. Genji had sent a messenger to the Ise Shrine with a letter for his Rokujō lady, and she had in turn gone to the trouble of dispatching her own messenger to inquire after him. She sincerely expressed in writing all the various emotions that she had experienced. Her choice of words and her calligraphy were exceptionally refined, and her extraordinary level of training and erudition were obvious. Included among all the things she told Genji was the following passage:

Having heard that you now dwell in a place I never imagined could really exist, I feel as though my heart wanders lost in a night without end. Even so, I would guess that not many years will pass before you return to the capital. In contrast, my return to the capital depends on my daughter being called back when a new Emperor takes the throne. That is a long way off, and by remaining here among the deities at this Shinto shrine, I am being deeply sinful in the eyes of the Buddha.

*You who are living on Suma's strands drenched in brine
Think kindly upon the fisher at Ise's shores
Gathering sea tangle with melancholy gaze
How will it all turn out, given the situation at the court, which
brings such distress to all?*

She had attached a second poem:

*How useless to grieve over destiny ...
Vain as searching Ise's shores at low tide
For shellfish that are never to be found*

The Rokujō lady had glued together four or five sheets of white Chinese paper to fashion a scroll onto which she had set down all her melancholy thoughts and feelings, which ran on and on in graceful brushstrokes of dark and light tones.

Even now he reacted to her with a mix of pity and shame. As a result of the incident with his late wife he had let his emotions get the better of him, recoiling in disgust from a lady for whom he had once had tender affections and causing her such distress that she chose to leave the capital. He was especially touched that her letter arrived at a time when he was thinking nostalgically about his old relationships, and he felt a close bond even with the lady's messenger. The man

was a young, pleasant attendant of the Ise Priestess, and Genji had him stay on for several days in order to relate all that he knew about the Rokujō lady's circumstances. Because Genji was now living in a humble residence, he naturally did not keep even a messenger of low status at a distance, but received such men directly. For his part, the messenger wept tears of gratitude that he should be so fortunate to be able to glimpse the splendor of Genji's radiant figure.

One can just imagine the words Genji used in composing his reply.

"Considering the turn of events that necessitated my departure from the capital, I cannot help but think that I should have followed you to Ise. In the tedium and isolation of my life here I can never shake the depressing thought that I do not know when I will see you again."

*If only I could sail that little boat
That folk at Ise row across the waves
Instead I harvest seaweed and sorrows*

*Lost in reverie on the strands at Suma
I gaze out tearfully as the fisherman
Piles up his wood to burn sea tangle for salt*

In this way he sent letters of reassurance to all his women.

The Reikeiden Consort at the villa of the scattering orange blossoms and her younger sister, Hanchirusato, each conveyed her feelings to him. They had both been in melancholy spirits when they wrote, and it struck Genji as bizarrely charming to be reading their elegantly refined missives in the rustic setting of Suma. Reading through them brought him consolation, but they were also the source of sad longings. His lover had included a poem:

*Sleeves damp with clinging dew in this rainy season
I gaze sadly at the tangled ferns of longing¹⁵
Growing thick beneath these dilapidated eaves*

It is true, he thought in sympathy. Apart from the weeds in their garden there is nothing else to shelter them.

When he learned that the tile-roofed earthen wall that surrounded the villa had collapsed in places during the rainy season, he sent orders to the steward of his Nijō villa to have workers from his manors near the capital go and make repairs.

Oborozukiyo was in a state of nervous depression, having become a

laughingstock at court. She had always been her father's favorite, and so he petitioned both the Kokiden Consort and Emperor Suzaku to have her reinstated. Suzaku mulled over the situation. After all, she had held an official position at his court and was not formally an imperial consort whose sexual conduct was strictly limited. What's more, he wondered if she hadn't already been punished severely enough for her provocative affair. With those considerations in mind, he pardoned her. Still, even though she was permitted to attend court, she remained deeply smitten and could not get Genji out of her heart.

Oborozukiyo returned to court service in the seventh month. Suzaku had a strong lingering affection for her, and so he kept her near him as he had always done, acting as though he knew nothing of the imprecations directed at her by certain courtiers. He would on occasion reproach her for one reason or another while also offering tender vows of love. In both looks and bearing Suzaku possessed a youthful grace and elegance, and Oborozukiyo was certainly grateful for, and embarrassed by, his show of noblesse oblige. Yet her heart had room only for memories of Genji.

On one occasion, during a musical performance, Suzaku remarked, "It's at times like this that I miss Genji the most. I venture to say that there are many here who miss him even more than I. It seems as if the light has gone out of everything." He then added, "I have acted contrary to my father's wishes. I shall come to regret my sin." Tears welled up in his eyes, and at that moment Oborozukiyo could no longer restrain her own.

"I have learned from experience that the world is a tiresome place," he continued, "and no longer feel that I want to remain in it much longer. If I were no longer here, how would you feel about it? It makes me bitter to think that my death would not affect you nearly as much as the absence of one who still lives nearby. The poet who wrote the line 'while I am in this world'¹⁶ did not express noble sentiments." His manner was so gentle, and his words suffused with such profound emotion, that tears began to stream down Oborozukiyo's cheeks.

"For whom do you weep?" Suzaku asked. "It makes me sad that you have yet to give me a child ... it's as if something were missing in my life. I have considered adopting the Crown Prince as my father instructed me, but, given the enmity between my mother and the Fujitsubo Consort, it would cause too much trouble to do so."

Certain people were conducting affairs of state in a manner contrary to his wishes, but he was too young and weak-willed to resist, even though he was disappointed and bothered by many things, including Genji's exile, that had been carried out in his name.

At Suma the winds of autumn—the "season of anxious grief"¹⁷—were

intensifying. Though his villa was some distance from the shore, each night the waves, which Middle Counselor Yukihira observed were stirred by winds blowing through the barrier pass,¹⁸ sounded as if they were breaking quite close. Genji had never experienced anything as affecting as the autumn in this place.

He had only a few attendants with him. Because they were all asleep, he was lying awake by himself, his head propped up on his pillow, listening to the winds howling from every direction. Feeling as though the waves were crashing near his residence, tears welled up instinctively—so many that it seemed his pillow might float away.¹⁹ He tried playing his seven-string koto a little, but the music just made him feel even more frightened and alone, and so he abruptly stopped and murmured the following poem:

*Does the wind blow from where my loved ones mourn
For I seem to hear in the sound of waves
Voices crying in pain from loneliness*

Hearing his poem, his attendants were startled awake. Seeing how splendid Genji looked, they were overcome by emotion, and as they arose unsteadily they were quietly wiping their noses to disguise their tears.

Genji wondered, *How must my attendants feel? For my sake alone they have come wandering with me to this sorry existence, having left behind their comfortable, familiar homes and parted with parents and siblings from whom even the briefest absence would be hard to bear.*

Such musings made him miserable, but then he realized that it must make his attendants feel forlorn to see him so downhearted like this. And so, during the days that followed, he diverted them with playful banter, and in moments of idle leisure he would make scrolls by gluing together pieces of paper of various hues and practice writing poems. He also drew remarkable-looking sketches and paintings on rare Chinese silk of patterned weave and used them to decorate the front panels of folding screens. Before he came to Suma he had heard about the views of the sea and mountains here, and he had imagined from afar what they looked like. Now that they were right before his eyes, he depicted those rocky shores—their incomparable beauty truly surpassed anything he had imagined—in charcoal sketches of unrivaled skill. A member of his escort remarked with impatient frustration, “If only we could summon the great masters Chieda and Tsunenori²⁰ and have them color in your sketches ...” Genji’s gentle, familiar behavior and splendid bearing helped his attendants forget the cares of the world. Four or five were in constant attendance, and they were overjoyed to be able to serve him in such close proximity.

One pleasant evening, when the garden flowers near the veranda were a riot of colors, Genji stepped out into a passageway that framed a view of the sea. As he stood there motionless for a few moments, he didn't look like an earthly being, given the odd juxtaposition of his beauty and the setting, and so the divine splendor of his appearance was eerily unsettling. His loose purple trousers, cinched at the ankles, were lined with a pale green; his robe was a soft white silk twill. His dark blue cloak was loosely tied, giving him a casual air as he began reciting in hushed tones the opening lines of his ritual devotions: "I, a disciple of Sakyamuni Buddha..."

He slowly chanted a sutra in a voice so sonorous that it too seemed like nothing of this world. From boats in the offing came voices of fishermen singing as they rowed over the waves. Viewed from a distance, the vague outlines of the boats resembled little birds floating on the sea, creating a lonesome effect. Just then a line of migrating geese flew overhead, their cries like the creaking of the oars, and Genji gazed out at the scene in rapt silence, his hands, white and lambent in contrast to the dark beads of his rosary, moving almost imperceptibly to brush away the tears running down his cheeks. His magnificent appearance gave comfort to his retainers, all of whom were yearning for their loved ones back home. Genji composed a verse:

*Is it because these wild geese, the first of autumn
Were with the loved ones I miss in the capital
That their cries echo mournfully across the skies*

Yoshikiyo responded:

*Though not companions of mine from the past
These geese crying out still stir memories
One after another of my old life*

Koremitsu also responded:

*Am I to consider these geese as companions
On my exile when they willingly chose to leave
Familiar homes for distant realms beyond the clouds*

The Lesser Captain of the Right Palace Guard—the young man whose loyalty cost him a promising career—composed yet another poem:

Even wild geese who leave familiar homes

*To migrate through distant skies find comfort
So long as they are with their companions*

“What would become of me if I were to lose sight of my companions?”

Although the Lesser Captain’s father, who had once been Vice Governor of Iyo, had recently been appointed Vice Governor of Hitachi, the young man had decided not to accompany him, but went into exile with Genji instead. The choice must have caused him great distress, but he put on a brave front and pretended that nothing bothered him.

The full moon rose vivid and bright, bringing back memories to Genji. “That’s right ... tonight is the fifteenth.” Staring up at the face of the moon, he lovingly imagined the music that would be playing on a night like this at the palace, with all the ladies gazing out at the night sky. When he murmured a line from Bai Juyi—“Feelings for acquaintances of old, now two thousand leagues distant”²¹—his attendants could not restrain their tears. With indescribable yearning he recalled the poem Fujitsubo sent him complaining about how the “ninefold mists” kept her from the palace. As memories of this and other moments came to him, he wept aloud. He heard a voice saying, “The hour is late.” However, he could not bring himself to retire.

*As I gaze at the moon I am at peace
Even if only briefly, for it shines
On the distant palace I long to see*

He had warm recollections of a certain night when he had talked intimately with Emperor Suzaku about times past. *How closely he resembles our late father!* Genji whispered a line from a poem in Chinese by the exiled Sugawara no Michizane: “The robe bestowed on me by the Emperor is now with me here.” Truly the robe never left his sight but was always near him.

*My sleeves both right and left are wet with tears
Tears of bitter resentment on the one
Tears of longing for you on the other*

Now, at around that time the Assistant Governor General of Kyūshū was making his way back to the capital. The man had many daughters, and because his travel party was already very large, it would have been too great a burden to have them accompany him overland. He therefore decided to have his principal wife accompany his daughters back to the capital by boat. They had floated

along hugging the coastline, taking in all the views as they went, but the shore at Suma was more enchanting than any other place they had seen, and they were enthralled by it. Hearing that Genji was residing in exile there, the impressionable younger women, who were of a romantic inclination, fussed in nervous excitement with their makeup and appearance—though of course all of that was for nothing, since they were still on the boat and had no hope whatsoever of actually meeting him.

One of the daughters was the young woman who had attracted Genji's notice when she performed as a Gosechi dancer,²² and she was especially disappointed that the boat was being towed past Suma without stopping. Just then the dulcet tones of a seven-string koto could be heard from afar, wafted by the breeze—forlorn notes that conveyed the isolation of this place and the fall in Genji's status. The music brought tears to the eyes of all those who were sensitive to sorrow's beauty. The Assistant Governor General sent a note:

I am returning to the capital from a great distance and was planning to call on you as soon as possible after I arrived in hopes of catching up on all that has transpired in the capital during my sojourn in Kyūshū. Thus it is with shock and sorrow that I now unexpectedly find myself passing by your abode in a place such as this. Many acquaintances, relatives and high court officials will be coming to meet me, so I'm afraid I will be unable to visit out of fear of the trouble I might cause you. I promise that I will call on you when I have the opportunity.

His son, who was Governor of Chikuzen Province, served as messenger. This young man owed his first appointment as a chamberlain to Genji's support, and he felt sad and indignant at what had happened. Still, despite his feelings, there were people observing him, and he was mindful that rumors might arise. So he did not tarry long after delivering the letter.

“After leaving the capital,” Genji told the Governor of Chikuzen, “it has been hard for me to meet with those I was close to in the past. It's good of you to have taken the trouble to call on me.”

He expressed similar sentiments in his reply letter, and the Governor, after reading the note, tearfully returned to his father and reported on Genji's situation. The Assistant Governor General and the people who had come out from the capital to meet him were grief-stricken and wept, which was inauspicious behavior on the occasion of his homecoming.

Somehow the daughter who had been the Gosechi dancer contrived to get a note off to Genji that included this verse:

*Do you know, my lord, the way my heart swoons
Slackening like the towrope on this barge
Drawn toward you by the koto you play*

“Please do not reproach my forwardness,”²³ she added.

Genji read this with a wry smile. He looked so handsome that it made anyone who saw him uneasy to be in his presence.

*If your feelings for me truly make your heart droop
Like the rope that tows your barge, is it possible
For you to simply drift past these shoals at Suma*

“I never imagined that I might find myself pulling in trawling lines on a shore like this.”²⁴

Having received such an elegant reply, the Gosechi dancer was thrilled even more than the stationmaster at Akashi had been when he received a poem in Chinese from Sugawara no Michizane, who was then on his way to exile. She felt as if she ought to disembark and stay behind at Suma.

As the days and months passed, there were many occasions back in the capital when the courtiers, Emperor Suzaku first among them, experienced pangs of wistful longing for Genji. The Crown Prince in particular constantly shed tears whenever he thought of him, so that his nurses, especially Myōbu, looked on with pity.

Fujitsubo, who had always been fearful about her son’s position, was beside herself with anxiety now that Genji was not there to look after his interests. At the beginning of his exile the princes who were his half brothers and other high-ranking noblemen who had been close to him would send sympathetic notes inquiring how he was faring. Many at the court deemed these exchanges of heartfelt correspondence, which included poetry in Chinese, extraordinarily felicitous. When the Kokiden Consort learned about these letters, however, she harshly disparaged them.

“One might expect a man who has incurred official censure to find it a daily struggle just to savor the taste of food as he would like ... but not Genji. He resides in an attractive villa, writing letters critical of the court, and like that traitorous official in the Qin dynasty, gets his sycophants to go along with everything he says. Why, they’d call a deer a horse if he told them to!” When word spread of what she said and the asperity with which she spoke, people at the court were afraid, and no one wrote to Genji any more.

The passage of time brought no comfort to Murasaki. When the women who

had been serving Genji in the east hall moved to her quarters in the west hall, they had been skeptical of her, wondering why their lord would have brought such a young lady to his villa. But after they got to know her—her charming, endearing looks, her steady, sincere personality, her kindness and deep sensitivity—not one of them chose to leave. Those ladies-in-waiting of higher status and greater discernment were able once in a while to catch a glimpse of her behind her screens, and when they did they saw that their lord's preference for her over his other ladies was perfectly justified.

The longer Genji stayed at Suma, the more living apart from Murasaki became intolerable. Despite his torment, he rejected the idea of having her come to live with him in a place completely unsuitable for her: *How could I have her live in a place I myself consider retribution for past sins?* Everything in this province was so different from the capital. He had never before been exposed to the sight of lower-class people, who had no inkling of who he was, and they were a shock to his sensibilities—naturally he found them uncouth and beneath him. From time to time smoke would rise quite near his villa, and at first he imagined it was from the fires the fishermen used to extract salt. Later he learned it was smoke from smoldering brush that had been cleared on the mountain behind the villa. It was all such a marvel to him that he composed a poem:

*Like brush burning at the huts of rustics
My heart smolders with my constant yearnings
For tidings from my loved one back at home*

Winter arrived and, with it, fierce snowstorms. Genji, lost in his thoughts, looked up at the threatening skies. While he played his koto to distract himself, Yoshikiyo sang and Koremitsu accompanied him on the flute. Genji played with such emotional intensity and skill that the others had to stop to brush away their tears. He remembered the story of the Han Emperor, Yüan,²⁵ who had been tricked by an unflattering portrait of the consort Wang Zhaojun into sending her off as a concubine to a barbarian ruler. Later he came to rue his decision after discovering how beautiful she really was. Genji wondered how much worse Emperor Yüan's sorrow must have been compared to his own. The very thought of sending far away someone as beloved to him as Murasaki gave him an unpleasantly ominous sensation, and he murmured a line of verse: "A dream that follows frostfall."²⁶

Bright moonlight was streaming in, illuminating every corner of Genji's humble, temporary lodgings. The late night sky was visible from where he was seated on the floor.²⁷ Because the moon presented an awesomely lonely aspect,

he recited lines of Chinese verse to himself: “It is not that I go into exile, I simply journey to the west.”²⁸

*Lost, uncertain which cloudy road to take
I feel shame before the gaze of the moon
Which heads so resolutely to the west*

He intoned this verse to himself, unable as usual to doze off. Plovers cried mournfully in the dawn sky. No one else was awake yet, and he lay there murmuring the following poem over and over to himself:

*While I lie awake alone in my bed
The dawn is filled with multi-vocal cries ...
Plovers, my companions, ease my worries*

In the wee hours of the morning he performed religious ablutions, washing his hands and invoking the Holy Name of Buddha. Such piety seemed remarkable to his attendants, since he had so rarely displayed it when they were in the capital. Still, it struck them as nobly auspicious, and they could not bring themselves to abandon him, rarely withdrawing from service even for a short time to visit their own homes.

The strands at Akashi were near Suma, only about five miles away. Yoshikiyo, remembering the story he had once heard about the former Governor of Harima, who had retired to a villa there and taken vows as a novitiate priest, sent a letter to the man’s daughter. She did not answer him. Instead, her father sent a reply: “There is something I must discuss with you. Even a brief meeting will do.” After all that, however, Yoshikiyo decided not to meet with him—he figured that the man would never give up his daughter, the meeting would be futile, and he would end up looking ridiculous.

This former Governor of Harima held a puffed-up sense of his own station, the likes of which had no precedent. While others in the province used their wiles to establish a relationship with the sitting Governor, perhaps to marry their daughters off, he—owing to his eccentric personality—let the months and years go by without giving so much as a thought to the matter. When he learned that Genji was in residence nearby, he said to his wife, “They tell me that the Radiant Prince, born of the Kirtsubo Consort, has been exiled and is living in Suma. It is a sign of the noble destiny of our daughter that such an unexpected turn of events should occur. We must take advantage of this opportunity and offer our daughter to his lordship.”

“Don’t be foolish!” his wife replied. “I’ve heard stories about him from people in the capital, and they say he has many, many wives, all of distinguished lineage. What’s more, I’ve heard that he secretly carried on an affair with a woman in His Majesty’s service and was driven into exile by the scandal. Why would such a man be intrigued in the least by a provincial girl living in a rustic villa like this?”

Irritated by her response, her husband struck a stubbornly resolute pose and retorted with arrogant self-assurance.

“You don’t understand, do you? Our ways of thinking are quite different. But understand this much: I’m determined to give her to him. When the opportunity arises, I’ll find a way to get him here.”

He had had his villa prepared in a most resplendent style, and he lavished the greatest care on his daughter as well. Thus, he was annoyed when his wife remarked, “He may be the Radiant Prince and all, but in seeking her first suitor, why should we place our hopes on someone who has been exiled for his misdeeds? A man like that might be attracted to her for a brief fling, but the idea that he would take her as his wife is preposterous.”

“A man like Genji,” he muttered, “is so superior, so special and different from everyone else, whether in China or at the imperial court in our own land, that inevitably someone will accuse him of a crime. Just remember who he is. His late mother, an imperial consort, was the daughter of my uncle, the Major Counselor. She had a well-deserved reputation as an extraordinarily proper lady, and when she was sent into service at the palace the Emperor cherished her more than all his other women. That’s why she was blessed with a son, Lord Genji, even though she died under the heavy burden of jealous resentment. A woman should display a proud spirit. I may be a provincial rustic, but that doesn’t mean Genji will dismiss my daughter out of hand.”

Their daughter was not exceptionally beautiful, but she possessed a gentle, refined disposition and a quick wit not at all inferior to ladies of great distinction. Fully aware that her social status was regrettably low, she was convinced that no high-ranking nobleman would ever be interested in her, and yet she had no wish for a life in which she made a match with someone of a rank appropriate to hers. Should she live a long life and be left behind by those who loved her, then she resolved that she would become a nun ... or else throw herself into the depths of the ocean. Her father, who had pampered her, seeing to her upbringing with the greatest attentiveness, would send her twice each year to the Sumiyoshi Shrine²⁹ to pray for the protection of the god there. Her father, unbeknownst to anyone else, was confidently expecting a miraculous favor from the deity in answer to his own prayers.

With the coming of the New Year, Genji entered his twenty-seventh year. The days grew longer and with them the boredom of idle time increased. The young cherry trees Genji had planted after arriving in Suma were putting forth blossoms here and there for the first time, and the spring skies were bright and balmy. Thinking back on all that had happened, Genji often wept. It had been one year, from around the twentieth day of the second month, since he departed the capital, and he achingly recalled the pitiful appearance of the ones he had left behind. *The cherry trees in the courtyard in front of the Shishinden are probably in full bloom now.* He then remembered the banquet his father had arranged to celebrate those blossoms all those years ago. *How wonderful my father looked—he was in such a good mood then—and how youthful and magnificent Suzaku looked, still the Crown Prince, when he recited a verse I composed.*

*I always yearn for loved ones at the palace
Yet my longing is stronger still on this date
When once my cap was crowned with cherry blossoms*³⁰

Just when life was feeling most tiresome, Tō no Chūjō suddenly paid a visit. He may have been the son of the Minister of the Left, but he was also the husband of the younger sister of the Kokiden Consort, and so his career had not suffered. He was a man of sterling character and, having been promoted to Consultant at the third rank, he now possessed an impeccable reputation. Despite his good fortune, however, the palace was a dreary place for him with Genji gone, and at every event he found himself longing for his old friend. It finally reached the point where he no longer cared that he might become the subject of malicious gossip and censure, and he decided to venture to Suma. The moment he laid eyes on Genji he experienced a joy, mingled with a few tears, that he had not savored in a long time.

In Tō no Chūjō's eyes, the villa at Suma had a vaguely Chinese style about it. The setting was like something out of a painting, and the effect created by the fence of bamboo wattle, the stone steps, the pine pillars, all as rustic and simple as Bai Juyi's hut, was peculiarly charming.³¹ Eschewing royal colors, Genji was dressed without ostentation, wearing dark bluish-gray hunting cloak and trousers, cinched at the ankles, over a humble light red robe, creating the impression that he was a mountain peasant. Though Genji was intentionally dressed like a provincial, his looks were so dazzling that Tō no Chūjō couldn't help smiling. The personal effects he kept close at hand were simple and humble-looking, and his sitting room was completely exposed to view from the outside. The boards for Go and backgammon, the furnishings, and the pieces

used for playing *tagi*³² had all been fashioned intentionally to have an appropriately countrified look, while the implements used for the Buddhist rituals he practiced showed signs of his wholehearted devotion. Even the meal provided was prepared in an intriguing way in harmony with the setting.

Tō no Chūjō, spotting some fishermen carrying shellfish they had just harvested, summoned them over and asked them what it was like to live for so many years on these shores. They told him about the various hardships and worries that they had experienced, and though their babbling speech was in a rough dialect he found hard to follow, he was nonetheless moved as he observed them—they made him realize that all people, no matter what their status, experienced similar emotions and were not that different. As a reward for the shellfish, he adorned them with robes and other gifts, and the honor he bestowed on them made them think, if only for a moment, that the world was their oyster.

Genji's horses were stabled close by, and Tō no Chūjō watched in amazement as someone brought rice stalks from a strange-looking storehouse in the distance—apparently some kind of granary—to feed them. The scene reminded him of a line from the *saibara* “Asukai,” from which he sang the words “the grasses are inviting.”³³ He then told Genji all that had happened during the months he had been away, alternately crying and laughing.

“My father,” he said, “is always fretting over your son, and it makes him feel sad that the little one should be so innocent about what is happening in the world.” Genji could hardly bear to think about the boy.

There is no way for me to record all that was said between them, and I can't even do justice to a small part of their conversation. They did not sleep that night but passed the time composing Chinese poetry until dawn. Still, even Tō no Chūjō had to be mindful of the consequences of rumors at the court, and so he hurried back to the capital at daybreak. Such haste made his departure all the harder for Genji to take. They took up their cups of wine and toasted one another, reciting together a line of verse composed by Bai Juyi to bid farewell to his friend, Yuan Zhen, who had visited the poet in exile: “Into the winecup in spring pour tears of drunken sorrow.”³⁴ All their companions wept with them, apparently in bitter regret that the two friends should have to part after so short a time together.

A formation of wild geese flew across the dimly lit sky. Genji composed the following:

*In what spring will I be allowed at last
To go and view the capital again ...
How I envy these geese returning home*

Tō no Chūjō could hardly bring himself to leave.

*Will not the wild geese that leave unsated
From this enchanting abode lose their way
On the road to the capital in bloom*

The gifts from the capital were elegant and in good taste. In seeing off his guests, Genji showed his appreciation for them by making a present of a black horse.

“You may think it inauspicious to receive a memento from someone in exile,” he said, “but, like me, this horse misses home, for he tends to neigh whenever he feels a breeze coming from the direction of the capital.”³⁵ It was an exceptionally fine-looking steed.

“Keep these in remembrance of us,” Tō no Chūjō replied, presenting Genji with several items, including a remarkable flute that had a reputation at court for its pure tonal qualities. All the same, he was careful not to give presents that might invite censure. By now the sun was rising. Because it was already late to be starting off, he hurried away, flustered, glancing back over and over. How forlorn Genji looked as he saw the party off. “When will I see you again? Surely your exile won’t last much longer.”

Genji replied with a poem:

*O crane, you who can soar so near the clouds
Above the palace ... look on one whose life
Is pure and spotless as a day in spring*

“While I fully expect to return, it is difficult for people who suffer the misfortune of exile, even the wisest sages of the past, to mingle again successfully in court society, and so ... well, I don’t feel as though I want to see the capital again.”

Tō no Chūjō answered with a verse of his own:

*Longing for the companion who flew beside him
Wing-to-wing, the solitary crane with no guide
To help cries out within the clouds and the palace*

“Your absence is so painful, I now regret the good fortune of being your close friend.” They had not had time to converse at their leisure, and his departure left such a void that Genji spent the rest of the day sunk in melancholy reverie.

On the Day of the Serpent, which fell during the first ten days of the third month, one of Genji's attendants, a person who took pride in his knowledge of such things, told him, "This is a day when a person who has the sort of cares that trouble you should perform rites of purification." And so Genji, who had wanted to go view the shore in any case, headed down to the sea. He had some simple soft blinds erected to create a temporary enclosure for himself, then summoned a diviner, a master of the way of yin-yang who traveled back and forth between the capital and this province. As part of the Purification Ritual, a large doll to which all defilements and malign spirits had been transferred was placed in a boat and set adrift on the waves. Watching it float away, Genji was reminded of his own fate.

*Like a ritual doll drifting out
Into an unknown expanse of sea
I am overwhelmed by my sorrow*

Sitting in the midst of the bright, cheerful scenery, he looked indescribably handsome. The surface of the sea was serenely calm and gave no sign as to which way the currents were flowing, but as he pondered the flow of his own life, his past and his future, he composed another poem:

*Surely the myriad deities
Must take pity on me ... after all
Is what I have done truly a crime*

The wind suddenly picked up, and the skies darkened. People began bustling to get ready to leave, even though the Purification Ritual was not finished. Rain fell suddenly and violently, and his attendants were so flustered that they were unable to raise their parasols as they made their way back to the residence. The party had not prepared for this kind of storm; the wind, unlike anything they had seen before, blew away everything around them, and the waves broke with terrifying power, forcing everyone to flee before their fury. With each flash of lightning and crash of thunder, the surface of the sea shimmered like a silk quilt spread out before them. While the party struggled, barely managing to make it back, they feared they might be struck by lightning at any moment.

"I've never gone through anything like this!" said one of the attendants.
"Usually you see some signs that the wind is going to pick up. This is a shockingly rare occurrence," replied another.

Even as they spoke, stunned and dismayed, the thunder continued unabated,

and the torrential rain fell so hard it seemed as though it would pierce through whatever it struck. *Is the world coming to an end?* they all wondered, feeling forlorn and confounded. All the while Genji was calmly reciting a sutra. The thunder lessened somewhat when darkness fell, but the wind howled on throughout the night.

When it seemed that the storm was subsiding, one of the attendants remarked, “Surely this is a sign of the power of all the prayers I’ve been offering.”

“If it had gone on much longer,” his companion added, “we would have been swallowed up by the waves for sure.”

“I’ve heard that a tsunami can kill a person in an instant,” someone else chimed in, “but I never knew anything like this could happen.”

When dawn approached, everyone was finally able to fall asleep. Genji was also able to rest a little, but as he dozed off, someone—a person whose features he could not make out very clearly—approached him in a dream. “You have been summoned to the palace,” the figure demanded, “so why have you not made an appearance?” The figure was walking about, apparently searching for him. Seeing this, Genji was startled awake. The Dragon King in the sea was known to be a connoisseur of genuine beauty, and so Genji realized he must have caught the deity’s eye. The dream gave him such a horrifying, uncanny sensation that he could no longer stand residing in this abode by the sea.

¹ *Kokinshū* 405 (Ki no Tomonori): “Though our paths must diverge, I know that, like the ends of an obi, we shall circle round and meet again.”

² *Kokinshū* 611 (Ōshikōchi no Mitsune): “Though I do not know what path my love will take, it has no end. And so I feel that I shall do all I can to meet you again.”

³ *Gosenshū* 719 (Ki no Tsurayuki): “By all means I want to ask someone ... to what do I compare dreaded partings before dawn.”

⁴ *Kokinshū* 952 (Anonymous): “Amidst what towering crags would I have to live to no longer hear of this world of woe.”

⁵ *Kokinshū* 756 (Lady Ise): “How it resembles my own face, which yearns for you so ... the tear-stained face of the moon reflecting off my damp sleeves!”

⁶ *Gosenshū* 1333 (Minamoto no Wataru): “That tears of uncertainty, of not knowing what the future holds, are sorrowful is due simply to the fact that they fall in plain sight.”

⁷ The word *Tadasu*—name of the wooded area in Kamo Shrine—also means “to set right” or “rectify.”

⁸ Genji is referring to Qu Yuan (340–278 BCE), a poet who was exiled and had to wander from place to place.

⁹ *Tales of Ise*, section 7: “Yearning to go back the way I have come, how enviously I watch those waves return.”

¹⁰ Bai Juyi, *Hakushi monjū* 695.

¹¹ *Kokinshū* 863 [also, *Tales of Ise*, section 59] (Anonymous): “Is it the spray from the oars of a boat crossing the river of Heaven ... this dew that has fallen on my face?”

12 *Kokinshū* 962 (Ariwara no Yukihira): “Should anyone ask after me, tell them that I grieve on the strands at Suma, where briny water drips from the gathered sea tangle.”

13 A complex set of pivot words—*matsu* (“wait” and “pine tree,” and an element of the place name Matsushima, literally, “Pine Islands”), *ama* (“fisherfolk / diver” and “nun”), *shio* (“salt/brine” and, in the verb *shi[h]otaru*, “to weep”)—creates two parallel poems.

14 *Kokin rokujō* 2345 (Ki no Tsurayuki): “It seems the tears I shed over my regret at leaving you behind must fall till the river overflows its banks.”

15 “Ferns of longing” is the literal meaning of the plant name *shinobugusa*, first mentioned in the *Yūgao* chapter.

16 *Shūishū* 685 (Ōtomo no Momoyo): “What good would it do to die of longing? I want to be with my love for those days I am alive.” The line *ikeru hi* (“those days I am alive”) is misquoted in the text as *ikeru yo* (literally, “the world I live in”).

17 *Kokinshū* 184 (Anonymous): “Looking upon the light of the moon filtering through the trees, I see that autumn, season of anxious grief, has arrived.”

18 *Shoku Kokinshū* 868 (Ariwara no Yukihira): “How mournful, the winds that blow through the barrier pass onto the strands at Suma to chill a traveler’s sleeves.” The allusion here is not a perfect match, and Murasaki Shikibu may have been referring to a different poem.

19 *Shūishū* 1258 (Anonymous): “If the waters of my river of tears should rise, the pillow I lay out on my bedding will float away, and I shall not be able to stop it.”

20 Tsunenori flourished during the reign of Emperor Murakami (946–67). Not much is known about Chieda.

21 *Hakushi monjū* 724.

22 She is mentioned in passing in the *Hanachirusato* chapter.

23 *Kokinshū* 508 (Anonymous): “During this time when my longing has me feeling unsteady and reeling like a ship on the waves, do not think me worthy of reproach.”

24 *Kokinshū* 961 (Ono no Takamura, composed in exile): “Did I ever imagine it? Having fallen in the world, I find myself pulling in trawling lines on the shore of a distant province.”

25 Yüan lived from 49 BCE to 32 CE.

26 *Wakan rōeishū* 702 (a poem in Chinese by Ōe no Asatsuna): The relevant part of the poem reads, “Notes from a single barbarian horn / A dream that follows frostfall / The Han Palace ten thousand leagues away / Regrets before the face of the moon / Had Zhaojun only paid that bribe of gold / Surely she would have lived her life in service to the Emperor!”

27 *Wakan rōeishū* 536 (Miyoshi no Kiyoyuki): “As dawn approaches white frost settles near the blinds ... I look up from my seat on the floor at the blue heavens as the night ends.”

28 *Kanke kōshū* 511 (Sugawara no Michizane): The lines come from a poem in Chinese titled “Reply on Behalf of the Moon.” Michizane’s exile prompts Genji here.

29 The shrine, which was in nearby Naniwa (present-day Osaka), was dedicated to the god of the sea and of poetry.

30 *Wakan rōeishū* 25 (Yamabe no Akahito): “Those who live at the palace are no doubt at their leisure, for they have spent the day crowning their caps with blossoms.”

31 *Hakushi monjū* 975.

32 A game that is similar to Tiddlywinks, except that the object is to flip stones onto a board instead of counters into a cup.

33 This song is cited earlier in the *Hahakigi* chapter.

34 *Hakushi monjū* 1107.

35 The allusion is to a Chinese poem included in *Wen xuan* 29–249.

XIII

Akashi

The Lady at Akashi

SEVERAL DAYS passed, but the rain and wind did not let up, and the thunder did not abate. These endless hardships made Genji increasingly lonely and miserable, and under such circumstances, facing a dark past and bleak future, he could no longer put on a brave front.

What should I do? he asked himself as he pondered his situation. *If this storm drives me back to the capital before I receive a pardon, I'll be a laughingstock. Perhaps it would be best to leave here and seek out some abode deep in the mountains, leaving no trace of myself in the world.* But then he had second thoughts. *Even if I were to leave for the mountains, people would still gossip about me, saying that I retreated in a panic, driven off by the wind and waves. Later generations would consider me utterly contemptible.*

These thoughts weren't the only thing troubling him. The dream he had a few nights earlier, during which he had seen that foreboding figure, kept recurring. Day after day went by without a break in the clouds, and he grew increasingly anxious, fretting about what was happening in the capital and thinking abjectly that, if things continued like this, he would be cast utterly adrift. Yet because it was too stormy to even poke one's head outside, no one arrived from the capital to see him.

At last a messenger arrived from his Nijō villa. The man, who had rashly braved the weather, was soaked to the point of looking weird and unearthly. He was also of very humble station—had Genji passed such a person on the road at an earlier point in his life, he would not have recognized him as human and would have had his servants brush him aside. The fact that Genji now felt a deep kinship with such a man brought home just how far he had come down in the world and how much his self-esteem had collapsed.

The man carried a letter from Murasaki:

“This terrible, tedious storm goes on without end, making me feel as though the skies were closing me off from you even more than before, for now I cannot even gaze in your direction.”

*How fiercely must the winds blow across those strands
During this time when endless waves drench the sleeves
Of one who is longing for you from afar*

The account she gave of her anguish affected him greatly. After opening her letter, his mood turned to dark despair, and he felt like the poet whose river of tears “overflowed its banks.”¹

“Even in the capital,” the messenger informed him, “people are viewing this storm as an eerie omen, and I’ve heard that they plan to hold a ritual congregation of the *Sutra for Benevolent Rulers* to protect against a disaster.² High-ranking officials who usually attend the palace to conduct affairs of state cannot do so because the roads are all blocked.”

The messenger’s way of speaking was stiff and unclear, but because Genji was curious about court matters, he was eager to learn more. He summoned the man to appear before him and questioned him further.

“Day after day the rain falls with no letup and the winds continue to gust,” the messenger said. “Everyone is alarmed and amazed by this extraordinary weather. Of course, we haven’t seen anything like what you’ve had here at Suma, what with hail falling so hard it drills into the ground and with this constant rumbling of thunder.”

The expression on the man’s face, which told of his surprise and fear of the terrible conditions at Suma, sharpened all the more the sense of isolation felt by Genji’s attendants.

As the storm raged on and on, Genji began to wonder if this might not be the end of the world ... but then, the following morning, the wind picked up with even greater intensity, the tide surged, and waves broke violently on the shore, looking as if they might sweep away even the rocky crags and hills. No words could describe the booming thunder or the flashing lightning, which seemed to be crashing down right on top of them. Everyone was frightened out of his wits.

“What misdeed did we commit,” bemoaned one retainer, “that we should suffer this tragic destiny? Must we die without seeing our parents again, without looking on the beloved faces of our wives and children?”

Genji regained his composure, resolute in the conviction that having committed no great crime his life would not end on these shores. Still, his

attendants were in such a state of panic that he had an offering of multicolored strips of cloth made to the gods of the sea. He also made numerous supplications: "O deity of Sumiyoshi," he intoned, "you who calm and protect these nearby shores, if truly you are a manifestation of the Buddha taken form as the guardian divinity of this region, then deliver us from harm!" His attendants were deeply distressed by the prospect that not only they themselves but their lord as well would be swept into the sea and perish in this unheard-of fashion. A few of them gathered their courage as best they could and, regaining a sense of propriety, joined their voices in praying to the Buddha and the gods, each offering his own life in exchange for the safety of their lord. Turning in the direction of the Sumiyoshi Shrine, they made their supplications.

"Our lord was reared in the bosom of the Emperor's palace and had every sort of pleasure lavished upon him. Yet has not his profound compassion spread throughout this great realm of eight islands, lifting up and saving many who were mired in sin and impiety? What crime has he committed that he must now suffer retribution by drowning here amidst these foul, unjust waves and wind? You gods of Heaven and of Earth, show us clearly that you discern right from wrong! Though guiltless, he has been charged with crimes, stripped of office and rank, separated from home, driven into exile. Grieving anxiously morning and night, he has suffered this tragic fate ... is he about to lose his life as well because of some sin in a former life, or some crime committed in this one? Gods and Buddha, if you are just, then put an end to our lordship's suffering!"

Genji once more offered prayers to the Dragon King and to the myriad gods of the sea, but the thunder only crashed all the more loudly, and lightning struck the gallery connecting Genji's quarters to the rest of the villa. Flames leapt up and the passageway caught on fire, throwing everyone into a state of panic. No one had enough wits about him to be able to deal with the situation, and so they had their lord move to the rear of the residence to a room that, from the looks of it, must have been the kitchen. Everyone, irrespective of rank, crowded into the space, and the thunder could barely be heard above the tumultuous din of the crying and shouting there. As the day ended, the sky was black as an inkstone.

Finally the winds gradually subsided, the rain tapered off, and sparkling stars were visible. Genji's attendants felt embarrassed for their lord, thinking it was an affront to his dignity to remain in a place as strange and disreputable as this, and so they wanted to try to move him back to the main hall. They hesitated, however, debating what they should do.

One of them declared, "Even the quarters that escaped the fire have an ominous air about them. The people over there are in a state of shock, noisily stomping about, and the blinds have all been blown away."

Another attendant replied, “In that case, let’s wait until morning.”

All the while Genji was meditating and softly invoking the name of the Buddha. Feeling unsettled and restless, he mulled over all that had happened. After the moon rose he could make out clearly just how close to the villa the tide had surged. Pushing open a door of rough wattle and glancing outside, he gazed off toward the shore at the roiling surf left in the wake of the storm. No one in the immediate vicinity possessed the qualifications—sensitivity, proper judgment, ability to divine past and future—needed to make sense of all this and reliably sort things out. Instead, the only people to make their way to the villa were those strange, lowly fisherfolk, who gathered at a residence where they had heard a nobleman resides, babbling away in an unfamiliar dialect. Even though Genji considered them exceedingly bizarre, he couldn’t very well have them chased away.

One of his attendants remarked, “If the wind hadn’t subsided for a while, the high tide would have left nothing behind. The mercy of the gods is boundless!”

Feeling forlorn, he composed a verse:

*Had the gods of the sea shown no mercy
Then the tide surging from all directions
Would surely have swept me into the deep*

Genji had maintained his composure throughout the tumult of the storm, but it had been terribly nerve-wracking and exhausting, and he began to doze off in spite of himself. The room he was using as a temporary shelter was so crude and rough that he could not lie down, so he slept while propping himself up against a pillar. As he did so, his late father came to him in a dream and stood before him, looking just as he did when he was alive.

“Why do you remain in such a strange, unseemly place as this?” His father took his hand and, pulling Genji to his feet, exhorted him: “Hurry now! Board a boat and leave these shores, following wherever the deity of Sumiyoshi may lead you!”

Genji felt overjoyed. “From the moment I was separated from your august presence,” he said, “I have been beset with all manner of sorrows, so that now I feel I ought to end my life on this shore.”

“Such rash thoughts simply will not do! All these trials are a mere trifle ... retribution for some minor misdeeds. Though I committed no serious breach of conduct during my reign, I was unknowingly guilty of some misdeeds and have spent all my time after death atoning for them³ without once giving any thought to matters of this world. But then I saw how deeply mired you are in your

troubles here, and I could not bear it. I entered the sea and rose up to these shoals. Though I am now utterly exhausted, I must take this opportunity and hurry on to the capital, where I will speak to Suzaku on your behalf.” With that he rose to leave.

Genji was upset that his father was going away so soon, and because he wanted to accompany him, he began to weep. He looked up, but there was no one there—only the shining face of the moon. It had all felt so real, it hadn’t felt like a dream at all. The lingering presence of his father remained, so palpable that Genji was profoundly moved by the sight of the wispy lines of clouds trailing across the night sky like traces of his father’s ghostly presence. He had not seen his father’s figure for many years, not even in his dreams. Now, even though he had glimpsed for only a few fleeting moments the face he had been longing so impatiently to see, the image continued to linger, hovering before his mind’s eye. The poignant sense of gratitude he felt toward his father, who had flown to aid him when his life had reached its nadir and he was in despair and contemplating the end of his life, also made him look at the storm in a different, more positive light. The aftereffect of his dream was a boundless sense of happiness and relief that someone was looking out for him. His heart was full of conflicting emotions, and even though he had seen his father only in a dream, the turmoil in his heart distracted him from the sorrows of the waking world. He wanted to go back to sleep in hopes of seeing his father again, but the irritation he felt at himself for not responding to his father in more detail kept him from being able to close his eyes, and he stayed awake until dawn.

A small boat approached the shore and several men came toward the exile’s abode. When one of Genji’s retainers asked them to identify themselves, they answered, “The former Governor of Harima Province, a novitiate who has recently taken his vows, had this boat readied, and we journeyed here from the bay at Akashi. If Yoshikiyo, the Minamoto Lesser Counselor, is here, our lord would like to meet and discuss some matters at length.”

Yoshikiyo was startled by their arrival and seemed not to know what to make of it.

“I was familiar with the man before he was a novitiate and still Governor of Harima and had opportunities to converse with him over the course of several years. However, we had a mutual falling-out over some trifling matter, and so it has been a long time since we exchanged any correspondence of a particularly personal nature. What business would bring him here over such rough seas?”

Genji’s dream, especially his father’s exhortation, was still vivid in his mind, and he told Yoshikiyo to hurry up and meet with the novitiate. So Yoshikiyo went down to the boat, scarcely believing that it had set out during the storm

amidst such violent waves and wind.

“Earlier this month,” the novitiate explained, “a remarkable-looking figure came to me in a dream and told me something incredible. ‘On the thirteenth of this month,’ he announced, ‘I will give you a clear sign, so have a boat prepared and no matter what happens, make for Suma when the wind and waves subside.’ Because he had informed me in advance, I did as instructed and had a boat ready. I waited as long as I could, until the ferocity of the rain and wind and thunder alarmed me and made me worry for the safety of your lord. Then it hit me that there have been many examples, even in other lands, in which a person who acted on his belief in a dream saved the state. Though your lord may have no use for my message, I could not let the appointed day spoken of in my dream pass without reporting these tidings to him. So I set out in the boat, and a miraculously favorable wind blew it along until we arrived at this strand. Truly this can only be a sign of divine favor. Is it possible that some sign was given to your lord here as well? If so, then please convey my words to him, ashamed though I am to beg your indulgence.”

Yoshikiyo discreetly reported what he had heard.

Genji mulled over the information, turning over in his mind all things past and future—disturbing things he had seen in both his dreams and his waking life—that might be taken as signs from the gods: *If I hesitate out of fear that gossips will ruin my reputation by criticizing me for following after some eccentric novitiate, I could end up rejecting what might be genuine divine assistance. If that happened, I'd be an even greater laughingstock. It is hard enough to turn away from the advice of men ... how much harder, then, to defy the gods. It's proper that I should be deferential, even in minor matters, and yield to the views of those higher in rank who are older, respected and trustworthy. A sage of old once advised that “one cannot be censured for following.” In truth, I failed to heed those words, and as a result I've had to undergo many bitter, unprecedented hardships, including this life-threatening storm. In the face of all that, salvaging my reputation for posterity no longer seems so important. What's more, my father did admonish me in my dream, so why should I have any doubts about the novitiate's story?*

After deliberating in this way, Genji sent his reply: “Though I have encountered unheard-of difficulties in this unfamiliar province, no one from the capital has inquired after me. I have gazed after the sun and moon coursing through the sky to who knows where, and thought of them as my only companions from home ... but now, to my great joy, a fisherman's boat arrives.⁴ Is there a retreat on the shores of Akashi, some place where I might withdraw in peace?”

The novitiate's delight knew no bounds, and he expressed his deep gratitude.

"This is all fine and well," said a member of Genji's escort, "but our lord should go aboard before dawn so that he will not be seen."

Genji boarded the boat accompanied by the usual retinue of four or five of his most trusted attendants. The miraculous breeze that had brought the boat here picked up again, and they arrived at Akashi so quickly it was as if they had flown there. The shores of Suma and Akashi were separated by only a few miles, and so the journey would have been short in any case. Even so, the willfulness of the breeze seemed uncanny all the same.

What Yoshikiyo had told him years earlier was true—the scenery on the shores of Akashi was truly spectacular. For Genji, who was hoping for a peaceful sanctuary, the only distraction was the large number of people bustling about. The novitiate's estate extended from the waterfront up into the recesses of the hills, and he had brought together on his land all sorts of attractive buildings constructed with an eye to how well they suited the seasons and the topography—a thatched-roof cottage near the shore that would intensify the pleasures of viewing the four seasons, a magnificent meditation hall standing beside a stream flowing down out of the hills on a site perfect for performing ritual devotions and focusing one's thoughts on the next world, a row of granaries built to provide for the needs of this world and filled with the bountiful harvests of autumn in order to sustain the novitiate throughout his remaining years of life. Fearful of the recent tidal surges, the novitiate had moved his daughter and her entourage to a residence at the foot of the hills, allowing Genji to comfortably occupy the villa near the sea.

The sun was rising just as Genji was moving from the boat to a carriage. As soon as the novitiate caught a glimpse of him in the dim early morning light, he immediately forgot about his own advancing years and felt as though his life had been extended. With a beaming smile, he at once offered a prayer to the deity of Sumiyoshi. It seemed to him that he had been allowed to grasp the light of the sun and the moon in his hands, and so it seemed perfectly natural that he should busy himself tending to Genji's needs.

To capture the scene in a painting—not just the beauty of the setting, which goes without saying, but also the elegance of the buildings, the indescribable appearance of the grove of trees surrounding them, the rocks and plants in the gardens, the waters of the inlet—seemed impossible for anyone but the most inspired of artists. The residence here was much brighter and more cheerful than the villa at Suma Genji had occupied these many months, and the utterly charming furnishings brought back fond memories. The novitiate's lifestyle was, as Yoshikiyo had reported, no different from that enjoyed at the most

distinguished aristocratic houses in the capital; indeed, the blinding brilliance of his lifestyle appeared, if anything, to be superior.

After Genji had settled in and was feeling more at ease, he wrote several letters to people in the capital. The messenger Murasaki had dispatched earlier from the Nijō villa was still in Suma, lamenting his fate and complaining, “Having set out on a perilous journey, I indeed met with nothing but hardship and misery.” Genji summoned the man and, after presenting him with a number of splendid gifts that were more generous than his status warranted, sent him back to the capital with the letters. No doubt Genji conveyed in detail all that had happened around him recently in notes addressed to eminent priests skilled at divining and purification with whom he was on familiar terms, as well as to the residences of certain other people it was appropriate for him to contact. To Fujitsubo alone he confided his astonishing brush with death and return to the living, while his response to Murasaki’s missives, which had so deeply touched him, was very different from the others—its special quality was its halting calligraphy, the result of his setting down the brush time and time again to lightly wipe away his tears.

Having experienced one bitter misfortune after another, I feel even more strongly that I have had enough already, that I desire to leave behind all thoughts of this world. Yet despite that feeling, not a moment has gone by when the image of your face has not been with me ... in the same way the image of my face has remained with you always, as promised by the words “gazing in the mirror” in your poem. The anxiety I feel at the thought that I may continue on like this and never see you again drives completely from my mind all the other worries and woes I suffer.

*Longing for you in so distant a place
I have moved from one unfamiliar strand
To another even further from you*

I feel this is all but a dream, and so long as I cannot awaken from it, my prattling must sound like foolish nonsense.

Precisely because it was rambling and disjointed, this letter had a special allure, arousing the curiosity of Genji’s attendants, who were driven by a desire to steal a peek at its contents. And indeed, what they saw confirmed Genji’s honest intentions and peerless devotion to Murasaki. Each of Genji’s retainers

also sent forlorn-sounding messages to their respective homes.

The rain clouds that had filled the skies for days on end finally cleared completely, and the fishermen seemed to be in fine mettle as they went about their tasks. Suma had been so desolate, with its scattering of fishermen's huts among the crags. The crowds of people bustling about at Akashi may not have been to Genji's liking, but he was able to console himself that here at least were many achingly lovely sights.

Judging from the way he carried out his religious austerities, the novitiate seemed extremely focused on his life in the next world. There was, however, one thing that troubled the man and kept him attached to worldly matters. What should he do about his daughter? From time to time he would let his concerns slip out when he was talking to Genji—so often, in fact, that it became embarrassingly pathetic. Genji had heard from Yoshikiyo that the lady was attractive, and it did occur to him that the extraordinary circumstances that brought him to Akashi, unintended though they were, suggested some karmic bond might exist between the two of them. All the same, he really did not want to think about anything other than his religious devotions while he was in such a reduced state, and he would feel ashamed if as a result of straying from his abstinent lifestyle, Murasaki thought he had broken his vow to her. So he gave no indication that he might be interested in the novitiate's daughter, even though it could hardly be said that she didn't intrigue him. In fact, he gathered from everything he heard that her personality and looks were anything but ordinary.

Her father, the novitiate, thought that he should show due deference, and so he did not call upon his guest too often. He stayed in separate quarters some distance away from the main hall of the villa where Genji was staying. This is not to say he didn't want to be in Genji's presence all the time, and the dissatisfaction he felt led him to pray all the more fervently to the Buddha and the gods to somehow grant him his heart's desire. He was sixty years old, but as a result of his religious austerities he was trim and slender; he cut an ideal figure for a man his age. His aristocratic upbringing had given him a noble temperament, and despite his eccentricities and occasional absentmindedness, he was knowledgeable about the courtly customs of the old days and was worldly without being vulgar. His stories about the past provided Genji with some welcome diversion from the tedium of his exile. Bit by bit the old man would recount various things that had happened at the court many years earlier—stories that Genji, who had been preoccupied with his own public and personal affairs, had never before heard in full. Indeed, some tales were so fascinating that Genji came to feel it would have been a real loss had he not come to Akashi and met this man.

As Genji warmed to his host, the novitiate gradually came to feel he could speak on more familiar terms; but he remained so overawed by the august majesty of the Radiant Prince that, despite assuring his wife that he would offer their daughter to their lofty guest, he hesitated whenever the chance to do so arose and could not bring himself to mention the one thing he most desired to say. He lamented the situation to his wife, sharing with her his irritation and frustration. For her part, the daughter had spent her whole life in a province where she had yet to see one man—even counting those whose rank normally would be appropriate for her—who had respectable looks or character. However, now that she realized there were men as splendid as Genji in this world, she became conscious of her own status and of just how far he was above her. When she learned that her parents were intent on arranging her marriage to him, she felt that it was completely inappropriate and grew even more depressed than she had been before Genji arrived.

It was now the fourth month, and with the change of the seasons Genji was provided with superb new robes and silk curtains to hang around the dais in his sleeping quarters. He found the tendency of his host to obsess over every last detail when serving him somewhat pathetic and overdone. But, at the same time, he observed that the old man's proud dignity revealed a nobility of character, and so he allowed the novitiate to have his way in such matters.

Murasaki continued to send messages as frequently as ever. One quiet, calm moonlit evening, when a cloudless sky spread far into the distance over the sea, the scene brought to mind the water in the garden pond at his Nijō villa. He was filled with an ineffable yearning—a yearning for what or for whom he could not articulate. Before his eyes, off in the distance, was the island of Awaji. “Ah, how far away it seems ... ,”⁵ he murmured.

*This moon illuminates the poignant beauty
Of Awaji Island ... ahh, how far it seems
Bringing painful longings for my distant home*

He took his seven-string koto from its cover and plucked a few notes. He had not touched it for some time, and the sight of him aroused restless emotions in his attendants, who found their lord troublingly sad and beautiful.

Genji performed a tune titled “Kōryō,”⁶ utilizing all his skills to produce an immaculate rendition. The music mingled with the rustling of the pines and the rippling sound of the waves and wafted toward the lady’s residence at the foot of the hill, sending shivers of delight through the refined young ladies-in-waiting there. The rustic denizens of that shore, who certainly were unable to recognize

the song, walked along the beach feeling exhilarated, even though they ran the risk of catching cold in the sea breeze. Unable to restrain himself, the novitiate relaxed his devotions and hurried over to Genji's residence.

"It would seem I am still driven by memories to return to the world I supposedly left behind when I took my vows," he said, tears welling up. "The atmosphere conjured by your music, which draws me here this evening, is surely a harbinger of the Pure Land paradise I pray for in the coming life."

Memories came flooding back to Genji's heart as well ... the musical entertainments celebrating various seasons at court ... so-and-so playing the koto ... such-and-such on the flute ... the sound of voices singing in chorus ... courtiers praising him lavishly for his own musical skills. How wonderful was the honor and respect shown to him by everyone from the Emperor on down; and of course how grand were the circumstances of those he loved and his own status back then. He felt like he was in a dream, and the overtones his koto produced as he played in that trancelike state conveyed an unearthly, frightening loneliness.

The novitiate could not help feeling maudlin, and he sent for a *biwa* lute and a thirteen-string koto from the villa at the base of the hill. Playing the role of an itinerant priest performing on the lute, he played a couple of very charming, unusual tunes. He presented the thirteen-string koto to Genji, who played a little on the instrument. The novitiate marveled at how brilliantly talented the young lord was in a variety of arts. Even an instrument that does not produce an especially distinct timbre may, depending on the occasion, sound quite superior. As the music drifted across the waters stretching interminably into the distance, the stirring cry of a Water Rail—so like the rapping of some paramour at the gate of his beloved—rang out amidst the shadows of trees in rampant foliage more vivid and fresh than even the blossoms of spring or the leaves of autumn at their peak.

Genji was impressed by the novitiate's koto, which produced such unique tones, and by his host's own sweetly charming skills. "The thirteen-string koto is most delightful when played in a relaxed, informal style by a woman who exudes a gentle and intimate grace." Genji was referring to women in general, but the old novitiate, misinterpreting his intent, smiled and replied, "I'm not sure that any woman, no matter how gentle or graceful, could play better than Your Lordship. I myself learned to play under the tutelage of a disciple of the Engi period Emperor, Daigo,⁷ but as you can see I'm not especially gifted, and so I've cast aside the things of this world. Still, whenever I was depressed I would play a little, and as a result there is someone here who learned the instrument by imitating me, and so her style naturally resembles Emperor Daigo's. Of course, I am just a humble mountain rustic, hard of hearing, and it may be that I am so

used to the sound of the wind rustling in the pines that I can no longer tell the difference between it and the sound of the koto. Even so, would you permit me to arrange for you to hear her in private?” His voice was tremulous, and he seemed to be on the verge of breaking down in tears.

“I should have known that in a place such as this, where people are accustomed to the superior music of nature, my performance would not sound like a koto. All very regrettable ...” Genji pushed the instrument away. “It’s odd, really, but since ancient times the thirteen-string koto has been considered a woman’s instrument. Emperor Saga⁸ passed down the techniques, and it is said that his daughter, the Fifth Princess, was the most skillful virtuoso of her age, though no one remains in her lineage to pass along that style of performance. Nowadays, for the most part, those who have achieved a reputation as master of the koto choose to approach this instrument superficially, as a pleasant diversion and no more. Thus, it’s fascinating that an older style of performance should have survived, hidden away in a place like this. How will I manage to hear this person you spoke of?”

“There is nothing to prevent you from listening to her,” the novitiate said. “You could even summon her. After all, if I may point to the story handed down by Bai Juyi, there was a woman, the wife of a merchant, who won praise for her talent with the lute⁹ ... and what you said of the koto is true of the lute as well. In ancient times there were very few people who could calmly strum that instrument and reveal its true nature, but the lady I mentioned can play it exceptionally well, with a gentle charm and few hesitations. I’m not sure how she managed to learn the lute as well, but when I hear her music mingling with the sound of the waves, it sometimes brings on feelings of melancholy. At other times it provides a respite from my accumulating sorrows.”

Delighted that the old man was a true connoisseur, Genji swapped instruments with him, exchanging the thirteen-string koto for the lute. As expected, the novitiate’s skill on the koto was well above average. He played tunes in a style no longer heard in the modern world. His spectacular fingering showed a touch of continental flair, and the vibrato he produced with his left hand was deep and clear. Though they were not at Ise, Genji had one of his men, who had a fine voice, sing the line “Shall we pick up shells along the pristine shore?” from the *saibara* “The Sea at Ise,” while he himself kept rhythm by using flat wooden clappers. From time to time he joined in the singing, and the novitiate would often pause to praise him. As the night wore on, the old man had unusual delicacies brought out and pressed wine upon everyone so that they would naturally forget the cares of the world.

The late night breeze off the shore was chilly, and the light of the setting

moon seemed intensely clear. As the world grew quiet the novitiate opened up to Genji, telling him one small anecdote after another about all that had happened in his life—the burdens he had assumed when he first moved to Akashi and how he had devoted himself single-mindedly to his religious practice with the next life in mind. He even brought up, without prompting, his daughter's situation. Genji was amused by this show of paternal devotion, but at the same time he was also touched by the young lady's predicament.

"I hesitate to mention it," the old man continued, "but I wonder if your move to a strange province such as this—temporary though it may be—isn't the work of the gods and the Buddha who, by troubling your heart for a brief period, are showing kindness and pity toward an old priest like me who has prayed to them for so long. I say this because it has been eighteen years since I first placed my faith in the deity of Sumiyoshi. From the time my daughter was a little girl I had ambitions for her, and so each spring and autumn, without fail, I go to pray at the Sumiyoshi Shrine. I practice my devotions day and night at each of the six prescribed times. But, rather than concentrating my prayers on the wish to be reborn on a lotus in the Pure Land, I ask that my ambitions for my daughter be fulfilled and that she be granted a noble position at court. Regrettably, sins from a previous life have brought me misfortune in this one, and I've become the miserable mountain peasant you see before you. My father was able to rise in status as a Minister of State, but I have ended up a rustic provincial. It grieves me to imagine what might become of my descendants, how low they might sink should my family's decline continue; that is why from the moment my daughter was born, I've invested all my hopes and expectations in her. As a consequence of my deep resolve to present her by any means possible to a high-ranking nobleman in the capital, I've rejected many suitors who wished to take her as a wife. Some of those suitors were men whose status was higher than mine, and I've suffered harsh treatment on account of their resentment of me. However, I don't consider that a hardship, and I admonish my daughter by reminding her that as long as I'm alive I'll look after her, even though, as you can see from the narrow cut of my sleeves, I don't have much wealth to give her. And I've told her that if I die while she is still young and unmarried, she should throw herself into the sea."

He broke down sobbing. He said so many other things besides, it is impossible to relate them all here. Genji was listening to all this during a period in his own life when he had been beset constantly with various problems, and so the old man's story invited tears of sympathy.

"Accused without basis and cast adrift in an unfamiliar land," Genji responded, "I have wracked my brain trying vainly to identify the misdeed I

supposedly committed. But now, on hearing your tale this evening and reconsidering the matter, I'm deeply moved by the realization that we truly share a bond from a previous life that is anything but shallow. Why did you not tell me earlier that you knew all this? Once I had departed the capital I lost my attachments and came to find the fickleness of the world insipid and tiresome, and while passing the days and months pursuing only religious austerities, I grew disconsolate and melancholy. I heard faint reports about your daughter, but because it seemed likely that you would reject as inauspicious the suit of an exile without status, I had no confidence to even try. Now it appears that you are beckoning me to her quarters. To have her share my lonely bed would be a comfort."

The young lady's father was thrilled beyond measure at these words.

*Do you know as well what it means to sleep alone
Then perhaps you understand the boredom she feels
Waiting for the dawn on Akashi's lonely strand*

"You may well appreciate," he added, "how much greater my own sense of melancholy has been, wearied as I am from years of concern over her." Now that he had finally spoken of his daughter, his body was trembling in agitation—though he did not lose his air of refinement and dignity.

"That may be," Genji replied, "but those who are accustomed to living on this bay may not appreciate how lonely it is for someone like me ..."

*In lonely travel robes, on a pillow of grass
I wait in sleepless grief for dawn at Akashi
Unable to weave a dream and join my lover¹⁰*

Genji was in dishabille; there is simply no way to describe how charming he looked at that moment.

The novitiate talked on and on at length about all sorts of things, but it would be annoying to record them all here. However, because I have not written down everything exactly as it happened or was spoken, I may have accentuated some of the man's more eccentric and stubborn characteristics.

With things going more or less as he had hoped, the novitiate felt as though a burden had been lifted from him. At around noon the following day, Genji sent a letter to the lady's residence at the base of the hill. He had given careful attention to the letter, thinking that the lady seemed on the one hand like someone of dauntingly superior talent who would be hard to approach, and on the other, like

an unexpected find hidden away in this obscure location. He prepared the letter with exquisite care, writing on light brown Korean paper.

*Gazing sadly at the sky, is it near or far ...
How I want to pay a visit to those treetops
At the abode obscured by mist and faint rumor*

“My longing for you has overwhelmed my secret love.”¹¹ Was that the full extent of his letter?

The novitiate had already arrived at his daughter’s residence and was waiting with secret anticipation. Things were working out as expected, and by the time the letter arrived he had already arranged for refreshments for the messenger, plying him with wine until the man was embarrassingly drunk.

The lady took a long time to compose her reply. Her father entered her quarters and pressed her to answer, but she refused to listen to him. Intimidated by the brilliant wit of Genji’s letter, she felt inadequate and ashamed to set her own hand to paper, which would expose the truth about her. Comparing his status to hers, it was obvious that the gulf separating them was enormous. She withdrew to lie down, telling her father that she wasn’t feeling well. Unable to persuade his daughter and with his patience now exhausted, the novitiate wrote the reply for her:

“For a woman whose sleeves have about them the rustic air of the provinces, your graciousness brings a surfeit of happiness that is too much for her to bear. She is too overwhelmed even to read your letter, but observing her ...”

*Lost in lonely thoughts, gazing sadly
At the same sky you are viewing now
Are not her feelings the same as yours*

“Is my view of her perhaps too romantic?”

The note was written on Michinokuni paper, which lent it an old-fashioned aura, but Genji was a little surprised, shocked even, at the seductive allure of the calligraphy, which was embellished with refined flourishes. The novitiate had presented Genji’s messenger with, among other things, an exceptionally fine set of women’s robes.

The following day Genji sent another note:
“I’ve never seen a letter by proxy before.”¹²

*How wretched my uncertain heart
Knowin a there is no one who asks*

Knowing there is no one who does

"Do tell me, how are things with you"

"The difficulty of speaking of my feelings to one I have not yet seen..."

This time he used an extremely soft, thin paper, and his calligraphy was exquisite. Only a young lady who was excessively shy and introverted would have failed to appreciate it, and indeed when the Akashi lady saw it, she was amazed. Still, she remained convinced that the immeasurable difference in status between them made any relationship hopelessly unsustainable, and it made her cry to know that he was courting her even though she was of such inferior rank. She remained outwardly impassive, but this time she did as she was told and replied to him. Writing on heavily perfumed paper of light purple hue, her brushstrokes were thick and bold in some places, thin and wispy in others—a technique she employed to disguise any flaws in her hand.

*How could you ever declare such feelings
To me, a person you have never met
Can rumors really trouble you so much*

Her calligraphy and phrasing had an aristocratic flair not at all inferior to those of the most distinguished ladies.

Remembering all the exchanges he had engaged in with women back in the capital, Genji regarded the lady's letter with delight. Of course, he was mindful of prying eyes and of the censure he would surely suffer if he wrote too often, so he would let two or three days lapse between letters, and even then he corresponded only when he guessed that she might be experiencing emotions similar to his own—on an early evening passed in the quiet diversion of solitary idleness, for example, or a dawn that provided a scene of poignant beauty. Her replies on these occasions were always appropriate, and after thinking about her responses he concluded that she was a lady of discretion and noble character, and thus someone he very much wanted to meet. He asked Yoshikiyo to describe her and reacted with some distaste at the look on the young man's face as he did so—a look that seemed to say, *she belongs to me*—and he felt a twinge of pity that his retainer's aspirations to win the lady for himself, which he had harbored for many years, would be thwarted right before his eyes. Genji believed, however, that he could justify his actions so long as the lady encouraged him to pursue a relationship. The problem was that she was proving even more aloof and proud than most highborn women. Genji found this kind of behavior damnably irritating, and so as time passed they began to engage in a contest of wills.

After crossing the barrier pass at Suma, his anxiety about Murasaki back in the capital only grew worse, and many times his resolve weakened as he wondered what to do—after all, being apart made it difficult to “bear this foolish game.”¹³ Should he have her come in secret to Akashi? Each time he asked himself this question, he ended up thinking better of it. No matter what happened, he believed that he would not spend many more years like this in exile, and so if he brought her here now, he would be criticized.

That same year the court witnessed many uncanny omens and disturbing incidents. On the evening of the thirteenth day of the third month—that is, the very day of the storm at Suma—thunder and lightning crashed, and wind and rain raged at the palace. During the night Emperor Suzaku dreamed that his father, the late Emperor, appeared below the steps leading out to the garden on the east side of the imperial quarters in the Seiryōden. His father was glaring at him, obviously in a foul mood, and so Suzaku sat up in a formal posture to show his respect. His father told him many things, and so must have said something about Genji. Suzaku was extremely frightened, but he was also moved to pity at the realization that his father’s spirit had not yet been reborn in the Pure Land. Later, when he discussed his dream with his mother, the Kokiden Consort, she told him, “On nights when it rains and storms it’s natural for you to dream of things that preoccupy your mind. A sovereign mustn’t allow such trivial matters to upset him.”

For some reason—perhaps because he had looked directly into his father’s furious gaze—Suzaku began to have trouble with his eyes. His suffering was beyond endurance, and purification rites and exorcisms were performed constantly at both the palace and the residence of the Kokiden Consort.

Other incidents also brought grief to the palace. Suzaku’s grandfather, the Minister of the Right who served as his Chancellor, suddenly died. Being advanced in years, his death was not unexpected or strange, but it was still a shock all the same, coming as it did after everything else that had happened. Then, on top of all this, the Kokiden Consort began to suffer from an unknown malady, and she grew weaker over time.

Occasionally Suzaku would give voice to his concerns, telling his mother, “If Genji has been exiled without just cause, then there is no escaping the conclusion that all of these problems are the result of karmic retribution. I think the time has come to restore him to his former rank.”

The Kokiden Consort brushed aside his concerns and strongly admonished her son. “If you do that, you’ll be criticized for lacking substance and lose respect. If you permit a man who has been expelled from the capital to return after less than three years, what will people say?” Her words made Suzaku waver, but as the

days and months continued to go by, the afflictions that he and his mother suffered grew ever more severe.

With the coming of autumn to Akashi, the sea breezes began to blow, stirring melancholy thoughts that were especially poignant. Genji was still sleeping in his solitary bed, but his loneliness was unbearable. He often spoke to the novitiate, telling the old man, "One way or another you will have to devise some pretext to have your daughter come here." Genji was convinced that it would be improper for him to go to her, and in any case the lady had shown no indication that she was inclined to meet him.

Only a provincial woman whose circumstances were utterly wretched, she thought, would frivolously exchange vows as my father has encouraged me to do on the basis of some flimsy, seductive flattery from a man of the capital who has come here for a brief stay. He would never respect me or consider me one of his wives, and if I were to yield to him it would only add to my misery and woe, would it not? During this period of my life, while I remain a young, unmarried woman, my parents, who harbor these unattainable ambitions for me, seem to have placed their extravagant expectations for the future on very uncertain supports. And even if he did take me as a wife, wouldn't that merely add to their worries? So long as Genji remains at Akashi, the happiness I feel just exchanging letters with him is fortune enough for me. For many years I heard reports about him, and now I'm able to catch brief, indirect signs of his presence at a place where I never imagined I might meet such a man. I was told that his skill on the koto was peerless, and when I hear the notes from his instrument wafting to me on the breeze, I can guess what he is doing during the day. Now he has gone so far as to recognize my existence by courting me like this, and that is too great an honor, much more than someone like me, someone whose circumstances have been reduced to the status of the fisherfolk here, could ever deserve.

As these thoughts raced through her mind, she felt more and more ashamed, and could not bring herself to even contemplate the possibility that she might have an intimate relationship with Genji.

Although the lady's parents were confident that the prayers they had offered over so many years would surely be answered, they also began to have ominous misgivings as they imagined how much sorrow they would experience if, having thoughtlessly rushed to give their daughter to Genji, there came a time when he no longer cared for her or counted her among his wives. They had heard how great and magnanimous he was, and yet how bitter would be their misery were he to abandon her! Relying upon the unseen Buddha and gods with no sign or proof of their blessing, knowing nothing of Genji's intentions or of their own

daughter's karmic destiny, they tortured themselves with their obsessive worrying.

Genji was constantly pressing the novitiate. "If only I could hear the sound of her koto mingling with the sound of the autumn waves ... what a waste, not to be able to listen to her play in this perfect season."

The novitiate ignored his wife's concerns and, without a word to his servants, secretly chose a propitious day to arrange a tryst. He went about busily sprucing up his daughter's quarters so that her rooms looked resplendent. Then, on the thirteenth day of the eighth month, with a nearly full moon shining gloriously, he sent a message to Genji that consisted of nothing more than a single line of verse: "On an evening too precious to waste."¹⁴ Though Genji considered the wily old man a rather elegant pander, that didn't stop him from donning an informal cloak and setting out very late that night. A stylish carriage had been provided for him, but he thought it was too ostentatious for an occasion such as this and set out on horseback instead. His escort, which included only Koremitsu and a few attendants, was modest. He realized for the first time that the villa at the foot of the hill was farther away than he thought. From the road he could see all around the shore, and the moonlight reflecting off the inlets brought to mind an old verse describing such a scene as one to be viewed with "dear companions."¹⁵ The words "dear companions" at once brought his beloved Murasaki to mind, and he immediately felt the urge to ride on past the villa and continue on to the capital. Instinctively, he muttered a poem to himself:

*Take flight, my stallion, with autumn moon reflecting
Off your lustrous coat ... carry me through cloudy skies
So I may meet my love, if but for a moment*

The villa of the Akashi lady, a stylish structure with many admirable touches, was set deep in a grove of trees. Whereas the residence near the shore that Genji was using was grand and attractive, the villa here was the kind of place where a person would lead a forlorn, solitary existence. Genji experienced a sweet, sublime sorrow at the thought that living here would allow him to contemplate to the full the sadness of life. The novitiate's handbell sounded a note of profound melancholy as it reverberated faintly from the meditation hall nearby and mingled with the soughing of the pines. The roots of the pine trees growing on the craggy rocks created a tasteful backdrop, and the chirruping of insects filled the garden. Genji glanced about, surveying the scene. The lady's quarters had been burnished with special care, and the door, made of exceptional wood, had been left open a crack so that the moonlight could stream in.

Genji stood uncertainly, hesitating before finally saying a few words of courtship. The lady, however, had been determined not to allow her relationship with him to become as intimate as this, and so she grew sullen and depressed, displaying a cold disposition that signaled she would not permit him to have his way.

She's getting above herself with these superior airs. Genji was irritated and resentful. When a courtship has gone as far as ours, it is customary for the woman, even one whose high status makes her difficult to approach, to set aside her stubborn willfulness and yield. Could it be that she is belittling me for my loss of status? It would hardly be appropriate under the circumstances to force myself on her, but to lose a battle of wills with her would make me look pathetic.

If only his handsome figure, confused and resentful, could have been displayed to a woman who was truly sensitive to beauty!

A curtain close by rustled and one of the silk streamers decorating it brushed lightly across the strings of a koto. The faint notes conjured in Genji's mind a pleasant image of the lady plucking the instrument, looking relaxed and unguarded. "Is this the koto I've heard so much about?" He asked her this and many other things besides, all trying to persuade her to play.

*If there were someone I could talk to
Intimately, would I awaken
From the dream that is this world of woe*

She replied:

*Wandering just as I am, lost in the darkness
Of a night without end, how could I speak to you
Not knowing what is dream, what is reality*

The dignified bearing of her figure, which he could barely make out in the dim light, put him very much in mind of the lady at Rokujō, who was now in Ise with her daughter.

Apparently the Akashi lady had not been prepared for his visit and, unaware of her father's machinations, had been caught off guard. It had never occurred to her that Genji might make such outrageous advances like this, and so she was quite flustered and upset. Moving into a room just off her private chambers, she somehow managed to securely latch the sliding door from the inside. Genji had no intention, it seemed, of trying to force the door open. Then again, how could he simply leave things as they were? The lady was aristocratic and tall, and her

sense of propriety and dignity made Genji feel embarrassed and uncertain. Thinking about how their relationship had been destined by these strange circumstances, he was moved by the depth of the bond ordained by their karma. Surely his love for her would grow stronger the more intimate they became with one another.

He had come to loathe the long nights of autumn, which dragged on tediously for him in his solitary bed. But this night seemed to be rushing toward dawn, and so, mindful as ever that prying eyes might catch sight of his visit, he hurriedly left her, murmuring sweetly gentle words to her.

He discreetly dispatched the customary morning-after letter. His secrecy makes one wonder: was he bothered by a guilty conscience? The Akashi lady, worried about gossip, was equally careful to keep their affair secret, even from the others at her villa at the foot of the hill, and so she did not show the messenger bearing Genji's letter any special treatment or give him any lavish gifts. Her father deplored her aloof behavior.

Following this initial tryst, Genji would from time to time call on the lady in strictest secrecy. Their residences were separated by some distance, and there were nights when he was reluctant to venture out, concerned that he might encounter some of the local fishermen, who were by nature loquacious and prone to gossip. On those nights when he did not visit, the lady would be upset, taking his absence as proof that—just as she had imagined all along—his feelings for her were not sincere. Her father, seeing his daughter suffer and knowing that she had good reason for feeling the way she did, worried about how it would all turn out. He forgot about his devotions and his prayers for rebirth in paradise, unable to focus on anything besides waiting and listening for indications that Genji was calling on his daughter. It was truly pathetic that the heart of a man who had ostensibly taken religious vows could be so troubled by worldly affairs.

The agonies of shame and remorse Genji suffered at the thought that Murasaki might catch wind of his affair with the Akashi lady demonstrated the depth of his extraordinary feelings for her. How hurt she would be and how disgusted to find that a trivial fling, which he had kept from her, had come between them. Though gentle by nature and not prone to jealousy, there were times when affairs like this one had stirred her resentment, and he would wonder why he had caused her to suffer over some meaningless dalliance and yearn to go back to the past and make it up to her. Even while he was calling on the Akashi lady, she provided him no relief or comfort from his longing, and he was prompted to send Murasaki a letter that was longer and more detailed than usual, explaining all that had happened. He added the following at the end of the letter:

By the way, though it makes my heart ache just to recall those times when my impulsive affairs—which never reflected my true feelings—caused you distress, I have once more had that strange, insubstantial dream. I have told you this on my own, without being asked, so that you may understand and remember that nothing will come between us. May the deities of Mikasa judge me should I break my promise to you. No matter what ...

*Though it was nothing more than a passing affair
The sight of sea tangle reminds him of his love
Filling the eyes of the fisher with salty tears*

Murasaki's reply was innocent and sweet:

"I understand many things regarding that dream you could not keep concealed from me."

*Was I naive for waiting, believing
You could no more break the vows you made me
Than waves could break over pine-covered hills¹⁶*

The letter was magnanimous for the most part, but its insinuating tone, which was unusual in Murasaki's writing, made him feel sorry for her, and he read it over and over, unable to put it down. The impression it left lasted a long time, and he ceased his secret nocturnal visits to the Akashi lady.

For her part, the lady took Genji's show of indifference as clear proof that her premonitions about their affair had been correct all along. She felt she really ought to cast herself into the sea.

Having relied solely on my aging parents, who have but a few years left to live, the thought that someday I might achieve some normal position at the court never even crossed my mind. In all the months and years that vaguely passed without incident, have I ever experienced anything that has brought such distress to my heart, such misery and yearning, as this affair?

She had never imagined that it was possible for her to feel as completely unhappy as she did now, and yet she remained outwardly calm and gentle and showed no resentment toward Genji. Her behavior both touched and impressed him, and as time went by his regard for her grew. Still, it was excruciating for him knowing that Murasaki, who was the far superior woman, had spent anxious months and years thinking about him from afar with extraordinary devotion. Because of that pain he preferred for the most part to spend his nights alone. He drew numerous sketches and paintings of Suma and Akashi, adding poems to

them here and there that expressed his thoughts and emotions, and he made sure he left space on them for Murasaki to write her response poems. The elegant charm of his paintings would have fascinated anyone who might have looked at them. Somehow the living spirits of Genji and Murasaki must have traveled through the skies to meet, for back at the Nijō villa Murasaki also began to draw paintings whenever she had no other means to console herself and relieve her sad thoughts. She wrote her feelings and circumstances on her paintings, setting them down just as they were, as though she were keeping a diary.

How, I wonder, will things ever turn out for these two?

The New Year arrived. At the palace Emperor Suzaku was undergoing treatment for his afflictions and, with so many people raising a fuss over his distress, the court was in an uproar. One of Suzaku's children was a prince born to the Shōkyōden Consort. She was a daughter of the Minister of the Right, but her little boy had just turned two and was much too young to ascend the throne. With no one else in line, Suzaku would have to yield the throne to the Crown Prince, and so he turned his thoughts to the question of who might serve his successor as adviser and regent. He concluded that keeping Genji sunk in the obscurity of exile was an inappropriate waste of his talents, and so, ignoring the warnings of the Kokiden Consort, he issued an imperial decree pardoning Genji. Apart from his own illness, his mother had been suffering attacks by malign spirits, which had begun the previous year. The court was disturbed by the appearance of other eerie omens besides. Recently, even the problems afflicting Suzaku's eyes, which had seemed to improve after a series of rigorous abstinences and purification rites, grew more serious, and he was feeling anxious. As a result, just after the twentieth day of the seventh month, he issued an additional decree summoning Genji back to the capital.

Genji had always assumed he would be pardoned in the end, but given the evanescent nature of the world, he could not be sure how things would work out and worried that he might die before the pardon came. Now that he was being called back like this after more than two years, he was overjoyed ... though at the same time he felt a twinge of sorrow that he would now have to leave these shores.

The novitiate had always assumed that Genji's return to the capital was inevitable, and though he felt his chest constrict upon suddenly hearing the news of the pardon, he took heart from the fact that Genji was flourishing again and that his own prayers and dreams were being answered.

During the period just before news of the pardon arrived, Genji had been visiting the Akashi lady every night. He had started seeing her again from about the sixth month, after she began to suffer terribly from morning sickness. Now

that he was to leave Akashi, his feelings of pity for her were stronger than ever —was his growing affection for her the ironic working of destiny? He was troubled by the thought that his fate had foreordained his experience of such strange desires. Though Genji had set out on a sorrowful journey that he never expected to take, he had always found solace in the belief that he would go back to the capital in the end. But now, just as he was about to set off happily on the journey back home, he felt sad that he would leave this place never to return. It goes without saying that the lady was deeply depressed—and wasn't her reaction completely reasonable?

Genji's attendants were ecstatic, each one celebrating in accord with his individual circumstances. Various people were sent from the capital to escort him back, and though the atmosphere was cheerful, the old novitiate was in a sentimental mood as the seventh month came to a close and the eighth month arrived. Even the skies of autumn turned gloomy, matching the mood at the villa at the foot of the hills as the day of departure neared. Genji was torn by conflicting emotions: *Why do I allow myself—now as in the past—to risk my position with these reckless affairs?*

Those who were privy to his feelings observed him and grumbled, “Ah, what a mess! Those same old proclivities ...” Of course, they would gossip like this only when their lord wasn’t around.

“All those months he treated her coldly, never giving her the least indication of how he felt, sneaking around to see her once in a while. And now, just as he’s preparing to leave, he starts treating her kindly. The timing couldn’t be worse, and will only cause her more heartache and anxiety.”

Yoshikiyo was mortified when he overheard them whispering, criticizing and ridiculing him for being the one who first brought the lady to Genji’s attention.

One evening, two days before the scheduled date of his return, Genji went to call on the lady at an hour earlier than was his custom. Her face and figure, which up to now he had never seen clearly, were so lovely and aristocratic that he was astonished and filled with regret at the thought of how hard it would be to abandon her. He determined that he would devise some appropriate pretext to bring her to his residence in the capital and told her of his decision in order to set her mind at ease. Even though his face was quite thin as a result of his years of religious austerities, his looks were magnificent beyond the power of words to describe. The lady, who had never expected or hoped to spend her life with him, observed his sad, anxious expression, his eyes tearing up as he pledged deeply heartfelt vows of devotion, and felt that his tender solicitation alone provided her with all the happiness she would ever need. Feeling such happiness, she wondered uncertainly if she shouldn’t give up any further expectations ... after

all, his radiant splendor was a never-ending reminder of her own insignificance.

The roar of the waves took on special overtones in the autumn breeze, faint trails of smoke wafted from the salt-making fires, and all the elements of the scene came together to produce a sublime sadness. Genji whispered a poem:

*You and I may part when I begin my journey
But like trailing lines of smoke from salt-making fires
Our hearts will drift along following the same course*

The Akashi lady replied:

*Though troubled thoughts pile up like sea tangle
Gathered by fishermen to burn for salt
I will not utter useless grievances*

Having collapsed in sorrow and able to utter only a few words, she had nevertheless managed a sincere, affecting poem appropriate to the moment. Genji was frustrated that he had not yet listened to her play the koto, which he had long wanted to hear. "If you really aren't going to complain," Genji said, "then play one song on the koto for me as a keepsake for my heart."

He sent for the seven-string koto he had brought with him from the capital and softly plucked an especially tender melody. The clear tone of his playing, which echoed in the late night air, was incomparable. Unable to restrain himself, the lady's father brought his thirteen-string koto and slid it inside his daughter's curtains. His action drew fresh tears from the lady, and because there was no other way to keep her emotions in check, she gathered herself to play. It was a quiet melody, her style superbly refined. Genji was of the opinion that no one of the current generation could match Fujitsubo's skill—a virtuosity of the very highest order, able to impress him with its bright, modern charm and to conjure in his mind a vision of her face and figure. In comparison, the Akashi lady played with absolute precision and clarity, producing overtones that were enviably accomplished. Even to a man of Genji's exquisite sensibility, her performance sounded original and profoundly endearing. He was tantalized by melodies and techniques unfamiliar to him, and was frustrated whenever she broke off, feeling that she had not played enough to satisfy him. He bitterly regretted that he had let all that time go by without insisting that she play for him. He made fervent promises about their future together, telling her, "Take this koto as a memento until the time when we will play together again."

She replied in an almost inaudible whisper:

*Trifling words to make me think you're true ...
Should I hold them always in my heart
Even while I weep these endless tears*

Genji resented her skepticism.

*Would that our relationship remain in tune
Like the middle string of this koto I leave
As a memento until we meet again*

“We will definitely see each other before this koto goes out of tune,” he promised. Regardless, it was perfectly natural for him to focus on his impending departure with no thought of the future.

On the morning he was to set off for the capital, Genji left the Akashi lady’s quarters while it was still dark. In the hustle and bustle raised by the party that had come to escort him back, his heart and mind were distracted. Nevertheless, he found an opportunity, when no one was around, to send her a poem:

*As I depart these shores like a wave drawing back
Leaving its traces behind, I wonder in grief
How will you fare, you who are also left behind*

She replied:

*The thatched fishing hut where I've passed the years
Is fallen to ruins ... wretched, I long
To follow after the departing wave*

He recognized that she was writing exactly what she felt, and, try as he might to hold them back, tears streamed from his eyes. People who observed him at that moment without knowing what was really in his heart naturally assumed that he had grown accustomed to living in this place, and that, no matter how humble and rustic it was, he felt sad to leave it behind.

Yoshikiyo, who knew better, thought in bitter consternation: *It would seem he is seriously attached to her after all.*

Although the men of Genji’s escort were all happy to be going back to the capital, they too were genuinely sad about leaving these shores. Apparently they each had their own reasons for feeling that way, which they discussed sentimentally among themselves. However, there is no need to go into the details of their conversations here.

The Akashi lady's father had gone to tremendous effort to make it a grand occasion. Every member of the party, right down to the lowest-ranking attendant, looked amazing in his travel attire. It made one wonder just when the novitiate could have had the time to complete all these arrangements. Genji's outfit was spectacular, and he was accompanied by porters shouldering numerous chests filled with robes. There were a variety of gifts, each chosen with a specific purpose in mind to make appropriate keepsakes once they were back in the capital. No detail had been overlooked, suggesting just how much care the novitiate had put into the preparations for the day. A poem from the Akashi lady had been attached to the hunting robes her father presented to Genji for the journey:

*These layered travel robes I cut and sewed for you
In a place where waves roll in, will they displease you
For having been washed with saltwater and my tears*

Despite all the commotion around him, Genji managed to compose this reply:

*If we must exchange robes as tokens of our love
Let them be middle-layer robes to remind us
Till we meet again of the days we'll be apart*

Considering her gesture a sweet courtesy, Genji put on the hunting robes she had sent and in return gave her the robes he had been wearing. They would likely be a memento that added yet another layer to the yearning she would inevitably feel for him. The scent of his perfume, which permeated his incomparably stylish clothing, would surely cling as well to the heart of the Akashi lady.

"I know that I have taken vows and turned my back on the world," the novitiate declared, "but I still have feelings of regret at not being able to see you off."

His blubbering face, with his mouth twisted down at the corners like a shell, certainly looked pitiful, but because he was simply too old to act like that, the younger attendants couldn't help laughing. The old man composed a poem:

*Weary of this world of woe, I left it behind ...
Now, steeped so long in the salty air of these shores
I can no longer tear myself away from here*

"From now on I will be further lost in the darkness of a parent's heart as my

worries for her increase ... I ask you, then, to permit me to accompany you to the provincial border.” Then, trying to gauge Genji’s intentions, he added, “It may be presumptuous of me to say so, but if there is ever a time when you remember my daughter, please write to her.”

Genji’s heart ached out of pity for the old man, and the redness around his eyes left by his tears gave him an exquisitely attractive aura.

“Knowing your daughter’s condition as I do, it is impossible for me to ever abandon her. You may think me cold for leaving now, but soon your view of things will change once I have summoned her to the capital. Still, I do find it so difficult to leave this place. What should I do ... ?”

*Leaving these shores where I passed so many years
Are the sorrows of this autumn any less
Than of that spring when I left the capital*

Seeing Genji wipe tears from his eyes, the old man lost his composure and began sobbing. It was alarming to watch him as he tottered and reeled.

Nothing could compare to what the Akashi lady was feeling, but she did not want others to see how distressed she was over Genji’s departure, so she pulled herself together. She was resigned to his leaving, knowing that nothing could be done to change things and that it was the working out of her sad destiny. Still, she couldn’t help feeling aggrieved at being left behind. The image of his face was constantly in her mind’s eye, and in the end she had no recourse other than to sink into her sadness. Her mother was at a loss, unable to comfort the lady.

“What were we thinking to conceive of a scheme that would cause you such anguish?” she said. “How foolish of me to go along with your stubborn, eccentric father!”

“Enough already,” the novitiate snapped at his wife. “He has a very obvious reason for not abandoning her. He may be leaving now, but he’ll keep her in his thoughts.” He turned to his daughter. “Calm yourself and take your medicine. It is bad luck to be carrying on the way you are.”

After the old man sat down in a corner, leaning against the wall, the lady’s mother and her nurse began disparaging him.

“He spent all those years trusting and believing that someday soon, somehow, he would live to see things turn out as he had hoped. Just when he thought his dream was about to be realized, and he managed to arrange a marriage for her ... well, look at the situation; it’s brought nothing but pain and grief from the very outset!”

Hearing them criticize him this way, and feeling sorry for his daughter, the old

man grew increasingly distracted and absentminded. He would spend the entire day sleeping and then resolutely get up to spend the whole night praying before a statue of the Buddha, rubbing his empty hands together and mumbling, “Now where has my rosary gone?” His underlings made fun of his befuddlement, thinking him a caricature of a priest. One night he went out into the moonlit garden to practice the Invocation of the Holy Name, but he ended up falling into the stream there, bumping his hip on the edge of a stunningly elegant rock and injuring himself. He was laid up, but his convalescence provided him with a diversion from his troubles.

Genji arrived at Naniwa and underwent purification. He then sent a messenger to the Sumiyoshi Shrine with a promise to make a pilgrimage there to thank the deity for his safe return and for answering his many prayers at the time of the storm at Suma. He felt constrained and thus unable to go to the shrine on his own at this time because the entourage accompanying him had suddenly grown quite large. He proceeded to rush back to the capital without making any special side trips along the way.

When he arrived finally at his villa on Nijō, the people who had been waiting for him there and those who had come back with him from Akashi all felt as though they were in a dream, and they raised such a din with their tears and cries of happiness that it was almost inauspicious, given the occasion. Murasaki now seemed to regard her life as blissfully fortunate, though she had once resigned herself to thinking of it as something vain and useless. She had matured into an absolutely ideal woman, perfect in all respects. Her hair, which before had been overly thick and unruly, had thinned a little as a result of the stress of his absence and was now most charmingly attractive. Genji experienced a sense of peaceful contentment upon realizing that from now on he would always be able to see her like this. At the same time, that realization also brought pangs of sympathy and remorse as he recalled the suffering figure of the Akashi lady, who, to his great dissatisfaction, had to be left behind. Would his heart never find respite from the constant cares brought on by his relationships with women?

He told Murasaki all about the lady at Akashi. Murasaki observed his demeanor as he reminisced about the other woman and discerned that his feelings were not shallow. Was it possible she was seeing something serious in the relationship? For she responded nonchalantly with a line of poetry that hinted at her true feelings: “Unconcerned about myself ...”¹⁷ The manner in which she expressed her jealous resentment endeared her to Genji, who surprised himself by wondering how he had ever been able to endure all those years separated from a woman who—once he had seen her—he never wanted to let out of his sight. Recalling the circumstances that led to his exile, his anger toward the court

returned.

Genji was soon restored to office with his appointment to the ad hoc post of Acting Major Counselor—an appointment that brought with it a promotion from junior to senior third rank. One after another his retainers were also reappointed to their former offices, insofar as the position was appropriate to their status. As soon as they were pardoned they were in a celebratory mood, feeling like dormant trees that had been blasted by winter but were now greeting the spring and coming back into bloom. A summons from Suzaku arrived, and Genji went to the palace. When he presented himself in service before His Majesty, looking more splendid than ever, those in attendance watched and wondered how he could have spent all those years in such a dismal, forbidding abode.

The ladies-in-waiting who had been in attendance at the palace since the reign of Genji's late father were now old and senile, and as they praised Genji they also broke into loud weeping in grief over all that had happened. Suzaku appeared to be feeling somewhat diffident under the circumstances, and when he came out, it was obvious he had paid special attention to his clothing for the occasion. He had been feeling ill for such a long time that he was in a greatly weakened state—though he had been feeling a little better the past two days. He and Genji conversed quietly well into the night. The full moon on this fifteenth day of the month was magnificent, and events of the past naturally came to mind in the stillness. Suzaku dissolved in tears. No doubt he was feeling lonely and isolated.

"How much time has passed," he said, "without the pleasant diversion of music, without hearing you play your instruments as in the old days."

Genji responded with a poem:

*The years passed by and the Leech Child,
Unable to stand, wept aloud
Sunk in bitter grief by the sea*

On hearing this Suzaku was touched, but also ashamed.

*Now that we have gone around the sacred pillars¹⁸
To meet once again, do not let the bitterness
Of that spring we parted ever come between us*

Suzaku looked extraordinarily refined as he spoke.

The first thing Genji did was to arrange for the Rite of the Eight Lectures¹⁹ to be performed for the spirit of his late father. He then paid a call on the Crown

Prince. It gave Genji no end of pleasure and pain to see how the boy had matured into a superior young man and how remarkably happy he was to meet Genji again after so much time had passed. The Crown Prince had proved to be an incomparably gifted student, and so Genji felt confident that he was wise enough to assume the duties of the emperorship. Once Genji had collected his emotions a little he had an audience as well with the Crown Prince's mother, Fujitsubo. One can only imagine the overpowering emotions that they must have shared during the course of their conversation.

That reminds me—he sent a letter to the Akashi lady to be delivered by the novitiate's men who had served as part of the escort to the capital and were now heading back to their province like a receding wave. It appears that he wrote privately, at considerable length, keeping the letter hidden from Murasaki.

“How do you fare on those evenings when the waves draw near?”

*I feel for you, wondering if the tears of grief
You shed for me while waiting for the dawn to break
Give rise to the morning mists at Akashi Bay*

The daughter of the Assistant Governor General of Kyūshū—the lady who had once performed as a Gosechi dancer—felt her secret longing for Genji, which had been hopeless from the start, cool at last. She had a messenger deliver an anonymous letter on the sly with instructions that the man should give Genji a wink to provide a clue to the author's identity.

*If only the sailor could show you her sleeves
Just as they are, tattered from the tears of one
Who sent her heart like a wave to Suma's strands*

Genji guessed the identity of the writer, noting how much she had improved her calligraphy. He sent this reply:

*It is I who should feel resentful of you
For the letter sent into shore like a wave
Left behind it sleeves that will never dry out*

He had always thought the Gosechi lady a delight. The sudden arrival of her letter caught him by surprise, and warm memories of her charms came back to him. In spite of his feelings, however, he had recently grown more cautious and restrained about engaging in amorous affairs. Indeed, he sent a letter to his lover

at the villa of the scattering orange blossoms, but did nothing more; as a result, the lady, instead of being happy over the letter, felt anxious, irritated, and resentful.

¹ *Tosa nikki* 9 (Ki no Tsurayuki): “The river of tears has overflowed its banks and further dampens the sleeves of both the one who goes and the one who stays behind.”

² This congregation, called *Ninnōe*, was held in the palace in the fall and spring or in times of emergency to protect the realm.

³ This statement by Genji’s father is an apparent reference to a vision by the monk Nichizō, who saw the historical Emperor Daigo suffering the torments of Hell.

⁴ *Gosenshū* 1124 (Ki no Tsurayuki): “To my great joy a fisherman’s boat arrives, borne by a breeze that blows on one who has been soaked by waves.”

⁵ *Shinkokinshū* 1515 (Ōshikōchi no Mitsune): “Ah, how far away it seemed ... the moon I viewed at Awaji. Is it the special atmosphere of the setting here this evening that makes it look so near?”

⁶ A “secret” song composed by the legendary musician Reirin for the Yellow Emperor.

⁷ Daigo (885–930) ruled 897–930 CE and his reign included the Engi period, from 901 to 923 CE.

⁸ Ruled 809–823 CE.

⁹ “Lute Song,” *Hakushi monjū* 603.

¹⁰ This poem, like the one it answers, plays primarily on the word *akashi*—referring to the place name and to dawn breaking. Lovers would share robes as part of their bedding, and it was believed that this act ensured that they would meet in their dreams. Travel robes convey an image of sleeping alone, thus making it impossible to meet one’s lover in a dream and intensifying the sense of loneliness.

¹¹ *Kokinshū* 503 (Anonymous): “Though I never wanted to let the colors of my love show, my longing for you has overwhelmed my secret.”

¹² The word Genji uses, *senjigaki*, refers to a letter dictated by the emperor or by an aristocrat.

¹³ *Kokinshū* 1025 (Anonymous): “When I try to stay away and not meet you, just to see what will happen, my yearning is so great that I can no longer bear this foolish game.”

¹⁴ *Gosenshū* 103 (Minamoto no Saneakira): “On an evening too precious to waste, if only I could show the moon and the blossoms to one who understands, as I do, true beauty.”

¹⁵ The source is not clear. An early commentary cites the following poem: “Shall we go to view it, dear companions ... the moon’s visage in the depths of the inlets at Tamatsushima?”

¹⁶ A possible allusion to *Kokinshū* 1093 (Anonymous, a Michinokuni song): “If I ever possess a fickle heart and abandon you, may waves break over Mount Suenomatsu.”

¹⁷ *Shūishū* 870 (Ukon): “Unconcerned about myself, now forgotten by you, why would I worry over the life of one who made vows, now broken, to vengeful gods.”

¹⁸ Both poems refer to a story that is part of the creation myth of Izanagi and Izanami in *Nihon Shoki*. After the two gods create the island of Japan and descend to it, they make a mistake in their marriage rites (Izanami, the female deity, speaks first, ahead of her husband after the two circle a sacred pillar) and as a result the first child born to them is the Leech. Because it is unable to stand after three years, they cast it adrift in a boat.

¹⁹ This rite is explained in the *Sakaki* chapter.

XIV

Miotsukushi

Channel Markers

AFTER THE vivid dream he had at Suma, Genji couldn't get the image of the late Emperor out of his mind. He was grief-stricken to learn his father was suffering retribution for sins that hindered his salvation, and he wondered how he might be able to save him from such torment. Now that he was back in the capital, he immediately made preparations for memorial services and arranged for the Rite of the Eight Lectures to be performed during the tenth month. Just as in the old days, everyone at court, acting as one, complied with his orders.

The Kokiden Consort was gravely ill and troubled at heart because in the end she had been unable to eliminate this man, Genji. In contrast, her son, Emperor Suzaku, had always been concerned about the final instructions that he had received from his father and had a premonition that he would suffer certain retribution for not obeying them; now that Genji had been restored to his former position, Suzaku felt as though his heart had been purified and revived. Even his eyes, which had bothered him from time to time, seemed to be getting better. In spite of these improvements, however, he continued to be preoccupied with the melancholy thought that the cares of this world would shorten his life. Aware that nothing lasts long, he was constantly summoning Genji to be in his service. They discussed affairs of state openly, without reserve, and the government was now operating in the way it should have all along. The courtiers, viewing Suzaku from a distance, rejoiced that His Majesty was content at last.

As Suzaku prepared for the day of his abdication, which was rapidly approaching, he couldn't help but sympathize with Oborozukiyo, who looked terribly forlorn as she bemoaned her circumstances.

"Your father is gone," he told her, "my mother's illness is growing worse and shows no signs of easing, and I sense that I have but a few years left to me. It's a

great pity that you will be left behind in a world where everything will be changed, leaving no trace of what once was. You have long preferred Genji over me, but it is my nature to be steady and faithful—a virtue of mine, I dare say, inferior to no one—and so I have always had special feelings for you alone. It hurts me to think that, even if the man you favor should do as you wish and take care of you, the uncommon love I have for you is beyond compare.” With that, he broke down.

Oborozukiyo’s face went red and, displaying an endearing allure, her tears overflowed as well. Suzaku was moved by pity and love and forgot all her transgressions.

“Why didn’t you at least give me a child? It’s really a shame,” he continued. “It is even more disappointing to think that now you’ll probably give a child to the man with whom you share such a deep bond. It’s disappointing because he *is* after all bound by his status, and any child you two may have will be a commoner.”

He rambled on, speaking of things to come, and she felt ashamed and sad. His face and figure were youthful and refined, and he had treated her in a manner that proved his boundless affection for her had only grown and strengthened over the years. Genji was remarkably attractive, to be sure, but she had come to know from his attitude and temperament that he would never be as devoted to her as Suzaku. *Why did I give myself over to my youthful passions and cause the furor that led to his exile and damaged both of our reputations?* As memories came back, it was clear that hers was truly an unhappy destiny.

The coming-of-age ceremony for the Crown Prince was held during the second month of the following year. Now eleven, he was tall for his age, grown-up and handsome, with a face that was an exact replica of Acting Major Counselor Genji’s. When they were together they were dazzlingly radiant, and everyone at court remarked on their splendor. Fujitsubo was of course deeply dismayed by the resemblance—embarrassed to the point that she felt like running away—and she was always tormented by the fear that someone might make the connection.

Suzaku also considered the Crown Prince to be a splendid young man and informed him in a gentle manner that he would soon be stepping aside. Indeed, that very same month, some time after the twentieth day, he suddenly announced his abdication. His mother was shocked and upset by his rash action, but he consoled her: “Even though I’ll now be superfluous, at least I’ll be able to meet you with my heart at peace.” Suzaku’s son by the Shōkyōden Consort was named the new Crown Prince. The court was renewed, appointments were redistributed, and many other matters were brought up to date. Because only two

ministerial posts were normally available—the Ministers of the Left and Right—there was no appropriate position for Genji, and so he was promoted from Acting Major Counselor to the supernumerary post of Palace Minister.

It was expected that Genji would assume control of the government, but he declined, saying, “I’m not up to taking on such heavy responsibilities.” Instead, he ceded the post of Chancellor to his father-in-law, the former Minister of the Left, who in turn tried to refuse the offer. “I resigned as Minister of the Left due to poor health,” he explained, “and at my advanced age I could govern neither wisely nor well.”

In spite of his protestations, both official and private opinion held that, with the change of the imperial sovereign, there could be absolutely no cause to censure a man for taking up once again offices he had vacated due to illness. Indeed, there were examples of men in ancient China who disappeared into the mountains during times of upheaval and political instability only to reappear, unashamed of their white hair, and serve the state when peace and order were restored. Such men were revered as sages; in the face of such examples, the former Minister of the Left could hardly refuse the appointment. Thus, at the age of sixty-three, he became Chancellor.

Genji’s father-in-law had withdrawn from the court earlier because it had become a cold and unwelcoming place. Now that the previous order was restored and he was flourishing as Chancellor, all of his sons, who had been languishing in obscurity, rose to the top with him. Tō no Chūjō was doing especially well. He had been promoted from Consultant Middle Captain, a post at the fourth rank, to Acting Middle Counselor, a position that raised him to the third rank. Moreover, his principal wife, who was the fourth daughter of the late Minister of the Right, had given him a girl, a child he had raised with lavish attention in the hopes of offering her in service to the new Emperor, Reizei, when she turned twelve. In addition, his second son—the boy who had sung “Takasago” just before Genji went into exile—underwent his coming-of-age ceremony and looked every bit like an adult who was capable of achieving whatever he set his mind to. Tō no Chūjō’s various wives had given him so many children, one after another, that his household had a bustling, lively atmosphere that Genji envied.

Genji’s young son by his late wife was exceptionally good-looking, and he had been permitted to serve as a page to both Suzaku and the former Crown Prince, now Emperor Reizei, in order to learn the proper manners and customs of the palace. The boy’s grandparents—the Chancellor and his wife, Princess Ōmiya—once more experienced the sharp pangs of grief that had assailed them when their daughter died. Still, though she was gone, they could now bask in

Genji's gracious radiance, having achieved with his support such a glorious station in life that no traces remained of the years they had spent sunk in despair. Genji's kind solicitude was no different from what he had shown them in the old days. Whenever he called on them, depending on the occasion or event, he always remembered to look after the well-being not only of his son's nurses but also of the lesser women in the household who had not left and gone their separate ways after the death of his wife. His generosity made them all feel happy and fortunate.

Genji was sympathetic and compassionate toward the women at his Nijō villa. Just like his son's attendants at the Sanjō residence, all of them had been waiting for his return, and so he wanted to lighten hearts that had been dark and depressed for so many years. He showed special kindness toward his own ladies-in-waiting, in particular Chūjō and Nakatsukasa, each according to her respective status, and as a result he had no free time to go out on romantic visits to his other women. Genji had inherited from his late father a pavilion that was located just to the east of his Nijō villa, and he had the building remodeled and enlarged in a suitably splendid fashion. His purpose in undertaking the construction of this annex was to provide those of his women who were in pitifully straitened circumstances—women such as his lover at the villa of the scattering orange blossoms—with a proper residence near him.

Oh, that reminds me ... not a moment passed when Genji was not thinking about the condition of his lady at Akashi, who had seemed so miserable when he left. Though he was busy and distracted by public and private obligations and could not visit her as he had intended, he was concerned that she would soon give birth and, with secret feelings of love and pity for her, dispatched a messenger at the beginning of the third month. The man soon returned to the capital bearing news: "The birth took place on the sixteenth of last month. The lady safely gave birth to a girl."

Genji's joy at now having a daughter was boundless, but his elation was tinged with a sense of regret. *Why, he wondered, did I not bring her to the capital so that the child would be born here?*

An astrologer had once foretold that Genji "would definitely have three children: one would be Emperor, another would be the mother of an Emperor, and the least of the three, a commoner, would rise to the position of Chancellor." Obviously the prediction had proven accurate so far. Although a number of other diviners and physiognomists had also predicted that Genji would rise to the highest position at the court and unite the realm under his command, his long years of hardship had driven such expectations from his mind. Now that his son had ascended to the throne like this, however, he was overjoyed that his hopes

would in fact be realized, and he himself was finally convinced that his father's decision to remove him from the line of succession had been the correct one. Genji privately mulled over the situation: *My father considered me the most accomplished of his many sons and favored me above all of them. Yet when I think about his reasons for making me a commoner, I understand that it was not my destiny to become Emperor. Still, it is my son who now occupies the throne, and, though I can never make that public, it shows that the Korean diviner did not speak in vain.* Genji now turned his thoughts to the future. *This is all the working of the deity at Sumiyoshi, who led me to the lady at Akashi. Her destiny must be an extraordinary one as well. After all, didn't her eccentric father embrace expectations for her well beyond his station in life? My daughter is destined to become the mother of an Emperor, and so it's a pity and a shame that she should have been born in such an inappropriate, rustic setting. I'll let the period of purification pass, then send for her.* Spurred on by this urgent consideration, he moved to speed up the construction of the annex on the east side of his villa.

Genji knew it would be difficult in a place like Akashi to find someone efficient and reliable enough to serve as his daughter's nurse, but he heard about a woman who might be a suitable choice. Her mother had been a high-ranking lady-in-waiting who served his late father as a close intermediary, conveying messages verbally for him; her father had been a Consultant in the Household Ministry. Both of her parents had passed away, however, and she now had her own child to care for. With no one to support her, she was at present living in considerably reduced circumstances. Genji summoned a person who, through certain connections, knew the woman's situation and could provide details about her, and he had the man approach her to see if she would agree to serve as nurse. The woman was still young and naive, and because she was spending all her despondent days and nights in a desolate, isolated residence, she did not have to give the proposal a second thought. To her, the prospect of serving as a nurse was simply a stroke of good fortune, and so she readily agreed to take the position. Genji, showing gracious compassion, decided to send her off to Akashi.

As soon as the opportunity presented itself, Genji went in strictest secrecy to visit the woman before she left. The arrangements had been made in great haste, and she was now reconsidering, since she felt a little torn about leaving for the provinces. His visit, which was a humbling honor, reassured her. "I will do exactly as you request," she told him. That very day was an auspicious one for travel, according to the Bureau of Divination, and since that was a crucial consideration for his daughter, who was destined to be the mother of a future Emperor, he urged her to set off at once.

"I may seem strangely unkind to you in pressing you to leave so quickly," Genji said, "but I have special reasons for my request. Please remember that I myself experienced unexpected tribulations while living in exile, so bear with the hardship for a while and take comfort in the knowledge that this will all be for the best in the long run."

He then explained the situation at Akashi and what he wanted her to do. Because the woman had served his late father on certain occasions, Genji had seen her at the palace. *She's much thinner now*, he thought, looking her over. Her residence, an enormous structure located within a stand of trees that lent the surroundings an indescribably eerie atmosphere, had fallen to ruin. *How could she stand living in such a place for so long?* She was still young and pretty, and he couldn't take his eyes off her. "I just might change my mind and keep you here for myself," he teased. "Would you like that?" She gazed at him thinking that, all things being equal, it would truly provide solace for her dreary existence if she were permitted to serve him intimately.

*It can't be said that our relationship
Has been so close that we never parted ...
Still, somehow, I regret your leaving now*

"If only I could follow after you," he added.

The woman smiled at his words, then replied:

*You say you regret my sudden departure
Having only just met ... a pretext I fear
To follow the one you really long to see*

He found her witty parrying exceptionally adroit.

She left the precincts of the capital by carriage, and Genji had some of his most trusted men escort her, ordering them to maintain strict secrecy and not let a word of this leak out. He took extraordinary care and consideration in the selection of gifts appropriate for his daughter, including the customary sheathed dagger that would symbolize his protection of her; he sent along so many presents that the carriage was stuffed full. The generosity that he lavished on the nurse as well was nothing if not astonishing.

Genji often smiled whenever he conjured in his mind an image of the old novitiate fussing over his granddaughter and pampering her, and the fact that his own feelings of love and concern for his little girl were constantly with him indicated just how deeply his karmic destiny was intertwined with that of the

Akashi lady. In his letters to the nurse he would repeatedly admonish her to be mindful and to never neglect her responsibilities to his daughter.

*If only I could hold her in these sleeves of mine
That she might live as long as it takes a feather
From an angel's robe to wear away a mountain¹*

The party traveled by boat as far as Settsu Province, then hurried on from there on horseback until they reached their destination.

The novitiate had been expecting the nurse, and his joy and expressions of gratitude knew no limits. Turning to face the capital in supplication, he reflected on Genji's extraordinary magnanimity and realized with a sense of fearful awe just how important his granddaughter was. The little girl was peerless, so divinely beautiful that it was almost ominous. The moment the nurse saw her, she thought Genji was perfectly reasonable to want the child to receive the best possible upbringing, and at that instant her own worries about traveling to such a strange place, which had seemed like a dream to her, dissipated completely. The girl was so sweet and adorable that the nurse looked after her with exceptional diligence.

The Akashi lady had been lost in her thoughts and depressed for months, ever since Genji left. As her spirits waned, increasingly she came to feel she no longer wanted to go on living. She did, however, take heart at Genji's show of concern in dispatching a nurse to serve her, and so, raising her head from where she lay, she warmly welcomed his messenger as well.

"I must return at once," the man said, anxious to be off.

Seeing that the messenger had to leave, the lady wrote down a few of her thoughts and feelings:

*These sleeves are just not wide enough for me alone
To cradle and protect her ... so I wait, hoping
The pine will take her under its sheltering shade²*

Genji was so preoccupied with thoughts of his daughter and so eager to see her that it was astounding. He had neither said much nor spoken directly to Murasaki about all of this, but he was worried that she might find out from someone else. Thus, he finally explained all that had happened.

"So that's how things stand, as far as I know," he concluded. "It's an annoying twist of fate that the one I want to have a child doesn't ... that things don't work out as I expect or wish. I'm told the child is a girl, which makes the

situation extremely troublesome. I suppose that I really shouldn't recognize the baby at all, but, then again, I simply can't abandon her. I would like to have them come here and have you see the girl. You mustn't be jealous or hateful, though."

Murasaki blushed in resentment at his offensive words.

"What a curious thing for you to say. You've always taught me to guard against jealousy, and so I have come to detest such emotions. So tell me just when would I ever have learned to envy another woman?"

Genji smiled warmly at her. "You're right—was there ever anyone who might have taught you such a thing? Still, I never expected to see you like this, complaining and suspecting me of harboring thoughts that never crossed my mind. It makes me sad to think about it."

Seeing tears come to his eyes, Murasaki looked back on the deep, insatiable love they had shared with each other over the years and recalled all the letters they had exchanged on so many occasions. Convinced that all of his other affairs were mere flings, her fears were allayed.

"I have a very specific reason for being so concerned about my daughter and for inquiring after her. I can't tell you about that just yet, because you would certainly misinterpret my motives," Genji added. "Though the lady at Akashi is a woman of charming character, I believe it was the setting there that made her seem remarkable to me."

He then related other details of their affair: the keenly affecting trails of smoke from the salt fires at evening, the poems they had exchanged, the glimpse he had of her appearance—a detail he merely hinted at, out of consideration for Murasaki's feelings—and the precision and fresh elegance of her skill on the koto.

Genji's attitude as he told her all of this showed just how attracted he was to the Akashi lady. *Here I was, grieving over my enormous loss, Murasaki thought, and all the while he was sharing his heart with another ... even if it was just a fling.* Assailed by emotions she had never experienced before, Murasaki turned away from him and gazed outside. *I am who I am ... doesn't my status mean anything?* Repeating her thought, she sighed and whispered, "Was our relationship all that special once?"

*The spirits of lovers float along the same course
Like smoke from salt fires carried on a wafting breeze ...
Would that I might drift away, like smoke from a pyre*

"What do you mean?" Genji responded. "What a deplorable sentiment!"

*For whose sake did I wander seas and hills
Whose fate was it to have to rise and sink
Suffering in an endless flood of tears*

“I do so want to show you how I really feel, but it seems difficult to do all one might wish in a single lifetime. Even so, it is for your sake, and yours alone, that I do not want to be disparaged by another woman over some trivial matter.”

He pulled a thirteen-string koto over and began softly playing a song to tune the instrument, as if he were encouraging Murasaki to play for him. She refused to touch it, however, perhaps miffed after hearing about the supposedly superior skills of the Akashi lady. Usually openhearted and sweetly gentle, there were also times when she could be decidedly strong-willed—though it must be said that he found her fits of jealousy quite alluring and her angry snits charmingly delightful.

He secretly calculated that the fiftieth day following the birth of his daughter, the day when the period of confinement would end, would fall on the fifth day of the fifth month. He was in a state of excited anticipation, eager to find out what the little girl looked like. *If only she were here in the capital, he thought, I could be of service to her in all sorts of ways. How happy that would make me ... what a shame that she should have been born under such miserable circumstances in that provincial backwater.*

If the child had been a boy, Genji would certainly not have been as engaged as he was. But because he now had a daughter, one destined to be an Emperor’s mother no less, the circumstances surrounding her birth struck him as an act of lèse-majesté, at once disrespectful and shameful. Yet it also occurred to him that his misfortune and the failure to fully realize his own destiny had all happened just so this child could be born. He sent a messenger to Akashi, telling the man, “You must get there by the fifth day of the fifth month.” The messenger arrived on the appointed day, and the splendid gifts and practical items he brought with him from his lord seemed remarkably generous to everyone there.

*The little sea staghorn that lives in the shadows
In rocky shallows ... how will she know that today
Is also the day of the Sweet Flag Festival*

“My heart is restless with longing to see her. We cannot allow things to continue like this, and so you must make up your mind once and for all to come to the capital. Trust me, I will give you no cause for worry or dissatisfaction,” he wrote.

As usual, the novitiate wept with joy upon reading the letter. On this occasion, however, it was entirely reasonable for the old man to be sobbing, his mouth twisted into a childish pout, because he realized that his life had been worthwhile.

They had gone to great lengths at Akashi as well to make elaborate preparations for the fiftieth-day celebrations—though without the presence of Genji's messenger their efforts that day would have passed unnoticed, a wasted glory like the wearing of gorgeous brocade at night. The nurse, who had been anxious at first about coming to the provinces, found comfort from her cares through conversations with the Akashi lady, who proved to be as gentle and sensitive a mistress as she could possibly have hoped for. The lady's other attendants had been brought here from the capital through family connections—women who had once served in aristocratic households, but who had since fallen considerably in the world and come to Akashi seeking only to live out their lives quietly, as if lingering on in an abode amidst the crags. The nurse was in no way superior in status to any of them, and yet she was different from the others in that she maintained a sense of great dignity and pride and would impart useful information by relating anecdotes about the goings-on at court. She would yield to her feminine tendency to gossip and prattle on endlessly about Genji—his looks, his reputation, the high esteem in which he was held by the other courtiers—so that the Akashi lady gradually came to realize that, having given birth to the little girl who so occupied his thoughts and memories, her own status and destiny must be truly exalted.

The nurse read Genji's letter together with her mistress. *What an extraordinary stroke of good fortune for my lady*, she thought. *Compared to her, I've had nothing but bad luck.* Though these sorts of ideas crossed her mind, she was nonetheless embarrassed and grateful that Genji had expressly mentioned her in his letter and asked how she was doing. His concern was a source of comfort to her.

The lady's reply included this poem:

*Even on a day of celebration like this
There is no one to ask how fares the crane that cries
In the shadows of this inconsequential isle*

"How uncertain is my life," she added solemnly, "that I should find respite from my hopeless despair in an occasional letter from you. How truly wonderful it would be if I could decide to move to the capital, as you request, with no regrets or worries for the future."

Genji read her letter over and over, then gave out a long sigh. Murasaki glanced sidelong at him, then turned to gaze outside. Pensive and sad, she murmured a line of verse: “The boat the fisherman rows out to sea, away from the inlet ...”³

Genji resented the implication and retorted, “You really have no reason to be suspicious of me. My sigh is nothing more than an expression of pity for her. Each time I suddenly recall the scenery of Akashi, I mutter to myself about things in the past that I find hard to forget. You don’t let the slightest thing escape your notice, do you?”

He showed her the cover of the letter, but nothing more. The calligraphy was quite artful and would have put even the most distinguished noblewoman to shame. *No wonder he is so attached to her*, she thought.

During the period following his return to the capital, as he was trying to soothe Murasaki’s feelings, he felt guilty that he had not once called on his lover at the villa of the scattering orange blossoms. He was preoccupied with his official responsibilities and constrained by his high status, all of which made him reluctant to resume his romantic affairs. Hanachirusato herself had done nothing special to attract his attention, and his interest in her remained dormant until the idle period of the rainy season, when there was a lull in both his public and private obligations. His longing for her stirred and he went to pay a visit.

Genji, knowing that the lady’s household depended on his generous support for everything just to get by from day to day, had developed a nonchalant attitude about staying away so long, and he was therefore confident that she would not sulk or complain resentfully like other pouting, peevish wives of a more modern outlook. Her residence had deteriorated even further during the three years he was away, taking on a frighteningly eerie atmosphere. He conversed with the lady’s older sister, the former Reikeiden Consort, until the night was well advanced, and then entered the west hall through the hinged double doors. The moon, obscured somewhat by mist, shone into her quarters, making visible the resplendent beauty of his movements. The lady felt all the more insignificant and inadequate in the presence of one so grand; but as she sat near the veranda, gazing out on the garden, lost in thought, her gently demure figure seemed very attractive to him. A Water Rail cried out close by, and the lady composed a poem:

*Had I not been wakened by the cry of the Water Rail
Sounding like a guest tapping at my desolate abode
Would I have been able to welcome the radiant moon*

Genji was moved that she spoke with such tenderness, her voice trailing off.
All of my women, each in her way, have qualities that make it impossible for me to abandon them. It makes my life very trying.

*If you can be wakened by the Water Rail's cry
Which sounds like it could be tapping on any door
Might you not be welcoming in a fickle moon*

"I'm concerned about this," he teased, though he knew her character well enough to know that her faithfulness was beyond doubt. He could not lightly dismiss out of hand all those years she had spent waiting for him, and she reminded him of the promise of support he had made to her on that occasion, just before he went into exile, when he admonished her to "gaze not in longing at the cloudy sky." She then told him, in her endearing manner, "Why was it that I should have been so miserably depressed, thinking at the time that I would never again experience such pain. My anguish now is just as great, for even after you returned you did not call on me." As he always did, he cajoled and comforted her with an endless stream of words—though where those words came from is anyone's guess.

Even at moments like this, he did not forget his lady of the Gosechi dance either. Though he was always thinking about how much he wished to see her again, it was extremely difficult to arrange a tryst without being exposed. The Gosechi lady had never been able to rid herself of her desire for him, and even though her parents had tried everything they could think of to change her feelings and have her consider other men, in the end she gave up the idea of following the normal path of marriage. Genji intended to build a completely new, expansive leisure palace and gather women like his Gosechi lady there, and if any children were born to him who would have to be raised in the manner that he demanded, then they could be looked after and supported there as well. His plans called for a new villa that would have many more amenities and a more modern style than his current residence at Nijō. He had selected provincial governors of good taste and proper breeding and pressed each of them to undertake their respective tasks at once in order to finish the construction in short order.

Oborozukiyo was also unable to get Genji out of her heart and give him up. For his part, in spite of all that had happened, he gave every indication that he had failed to learn his lesson and wanted to resume their relationship. She, on the other hand, had learned from her awful experience and would not meet with him as she had in the past. Since he was also quite constrained now by his lofty

position at court, he came to the lonely and frustrating conclusion that their relationship, though destined to be, would never be fully realized.

Suzaku, who had just recently abdicated, was feeling more at ease. He was apparently in fine spirits as well, for he now sponsored fabulous musical diversions, each one in keeping with the particular season. His consorts and concubines served him as before—all except the Shōkyōden Consort, the mother of the new Crown Prince, who had been pushed aside in Suzaku's affections by Oborozukiyo and thus was no longer the object of any special attention. In recompense for her loss, however, she did enjoy the auspicious fortune of being the mother of a future Emperor, and so she withdrew from Suzaku's service to be with her son at the palace.

Genji returned to the Kiritsubo, the chambers of the paulownia courtyard where he had resided in the past, and used it as his ministerial quarters. The Crown Prince was residing in the Nashitsubo, the chambers of the pear courtyard, which was just to the south of the Kiritsubo. He grew close to Genji, seeking his advice on all matters and receiving his support and assistance.

Fujitsubo was not allowed to assume the position of Imperial Mother because she had taken vows, but she was granted an honorary title that gave her income and staff equivalent to those received by a retired sovereign. Imperial officers were appointed to manage her household, and their presence created a special air of grand elegance. Her daily routine was taken up with her Buddhist devotions and acts of charity and other meritorious good works. For years she had avoided court intrigues and found it difficult to visit the palace, and her grief at not being able to see her son had left her weary and depressed. Now, however, she could come and go as she pleased, and because she was very happy and blessed, it was the turn of the Kokiden Consort to lament the changes that had overtaken the court. Genji would perform some service or other for the Consort, which made her feel awkward, and he even demonstrated goodwill toward her. His kindness was hard to take, since she had been so hostile toward him in the past, and the courtiers gossiped maliciously about how pathetic she looked.

The attitude and behavior that Murasaki's father, Prince Hyōbu, had displayed over the past few years had been a painful shock. Genji thought the Prince's obsequiousness, his tendency to simply follow the prevailing power and popular opinion at the court, was despicable, and so he broke off the friendly, familiar relationship they had once shared. Though Genji generally displayed a gracious magnanimity toward all of the other courtiers, there were times when he would show flashes of anger in the presence of Prince Hyōbu—moments that Fujitsubo viewed with sorrow and regret.

The administration of the government was divided, for the most part, between

the Chancellor and Genji, who conducted affairs of state as they saw fit.

The daughter of the Acting Counselor, Tō no Chūjō, entered service at court during the eighth month that year. The Chancellor, her grandfather, fretted over the details of the girl's ceremony, which as it turned out went very much as he had hoped. Prince Hyōbu had raised his middle daughter with unusual care, and she had grown into a woman of high reputation he wanted very much to send into the Emperor's service as well. It was said, however, that Genji did not consider her at all superior to other ladies and thwarted her father's plans. What, I wonder, are we to make of that?

In the autumn, Genji went on a pilgrimage to the Sumiyoshi Shrine. He planned a magnificent procession in order to offer thanks to the deity there for granting his prayers, and the preparations caused a stir as both high-ranking officials and palace attendants offered their help.

By coincidence the lady at Akashi was also planning to make a pilgrimage. It had been her custom to go to Sumiyoshi around this time each year, and because she had not been able to go the past two years due to her pregnancy and the birth of her daughter, she had been thinking for some time that she must make up for her neglect. She set out by boat, but when she reached the shore at Sumiyoshi and surveyed the scene, she saw the beach packed with bustling, noisy pilgrims and a procession moving along bearing precious offerings to the shrine. Ten musicians, obviously chosen for their handsome features, were performing a dance of the Eastern Provinces, all dressed in identical ceremonial robes dyed with patterns of birds or flowers in bluish-green with red cords dangling from their left shoulders. When one of the Akashi lady's retainers asked about the procession, an uncouth, low-ranking functionary burst out laughing and replied with a knowing attitude, "So, there are actually people who don't know that it is his lordship, the Acting Minister, who comes on pilgrimage!"

The instant the lady realized that Genji was there, she was genuinely shocked. *Of all the days and months he could have picked!* Looking at him from afar did not make her happy to see him again after all this time but rather made her acutely aware of her own insignificant status. She was filled with bitter regret. Even if they did share a destiny through the birth of a daughter who bound them closely together, it made her unbearably sad that she had started out on her own pilgrimage knowing nothing at all about Genji's plans, which were evidently so widely known that even a menial servant felt no qualms in basking in the reflected glory of such a noble lord. As she anxiously wondered what deep sin she might have committed to deserve such a fate, she privately broke down and wept.

Against the dark green backdrop of the fields of pine trees there, the countless

ceremonial robes of all hues, light or dark according to rank,⁴ resembled the scattering blossoms of spring or the foliage of fall. Among the courtiers of the sixth rank the men of the Chamberlain's office stood out vividly in their fresh, yellowish-green robes. The young Lesser Captain of the Right Palace Guard, who had once expressed his regrets at the enclosure of the Kamo Shrine on the day he accompanied Genji into exile, was now a Chamberlain serving in the Right Gate Guard. Having risen to this new position, he was accompanied by an impressive escort of his own. Yoshikiyo was now an Assistant Commander in the Gate Guard, and he too cut a splendid figure, cheerful and carefree in the spectacular red robes he wore as a courtier of the fifth rank. Scattered among the crowd were people that the lady had known at Akashi, all of them looking gloriously radiant, as if they hadn't a care in the world. Young officials and palace attendants competed among themselves to draw attention, each one arranging and polishing his horse's caparison and providing a dazzling display for the rustics.

When the Akashi lady caught sight of Genji's carriage off in the distance, she was overcome with an unpleasant sense of inferiority and could no longer look for the figure she so longed to see. In imitation of the precedent set by Minamoto Tōru, the minister who once resided at the Kawara villa,⁵ Genji had arranged for an escort of ten charming page boys, all the same height and outfitted in a most delightful style, their long hair bound in loops at their ears with thin white cords that had been dyed purple at the tips. All in all, they presented a vibrant, refined appearance that was strikingly modern.

Genji's son by his late wife had been brought up with meticulous attention, and his stable boys were all dressed in identical livery that made them stand out from the others. The imperial court above the clouds seemed so magnificent, so far away that the Akashi lady felt afraid, worried that her daughter might not be considered worthy of such august company. She turned toward the shrine and prayed all the more fervently.

The Governor of Settsu Province arrived, having gone to extraordinary lengths to prepare a banquet far more elaborate than any he had ever held for any other minister of state. The Akashi lady could bear it no longer.

Even were I to mingle among that crowd, she thought, the Sumiyoshi deity would never notice a pathetic little offering from someone as insignificant as I. Yet it wouldn't do to just leave and go home. I'll have my boat put in at Naniwa and undergo purification there. She had her men row the boat away.

Genji, of course, never dreamed that the Akashi lady might be there, and he spent the night participating in various rites and celebrations, doing everything in his power to honor and please the god. He not only made offerings to express his

gratitude for having his prayers answered but also had remarkable music and dances performed throughout the night until the break of dawn. His closest retainers—men such as Koremitsu who had been with him through everything—felt a deep sense of elation and appreciation for the blessings bestowed by the god. When Genji suddenly emerged from the shrine, Koremitsu approached and presented himself, offering this verse:

*The sight of these pines at Sumiyoshi
Brings sad memories of times in exile
That age when we relied upon this god*

As Genji recalled all that had happened, he felt that Koremitsu's sentiments rang true.

*Though we were beset by violent wind and waves
Could such hardships have ever been severe enough
To make us forget the god of Sumiyoshi*

"We were blessed, were we not?" he added, feeling truly grateful.

When he was informed that the Akashi lady's boat had been driven off by the pageantry, he was sorry he had not known she was coming. Mindful that everything, including the birth of his daughter, was the working of the deity, he knew that he could not simply ignore the situation. *I must send at least a brief message to comfort her*, he told himself. *She will no doubt be upset at this turn of events*. He left the shrine and completed a leisurely tour of various sites in the province, then underwent an awe-inspiring Purification Ritual at the seven streams in Naniwa.⁶ Viewing the district around the Horie canal, famous in poetry for the poles used to mark out the boat channels, Genji instinctively murmured a line of verse: "Now, in this very city of Naniwa ..." ⁷ Koremitsu, who was riding beside the carriage, must have heard him, for at the next stop he handed Genji the short-handled brush and paper that he apparently always kept in the breastfold of his robe for just such an occasion as this. Genji was delighted by Koremitsu's wit, and wrote the following on a piece of the folding paper:

*How deep the destiny that guides our hearts
Like the channel markers leading us here
Showing how deeply I channeled my love*

He handed the poem to Koremitsu, who in turn had an underling familiar with

the situation at Akashi deliver it to the lady. Her heart fluttered when Genji's procession rode past, and, though his letter was brief, she was so touched and embarrassed by his gracious attention that she wept.

*As one whose status is of no account
Whose vain life has little purpose being
Why have I channeled all my thoughts on you*

She attached her poem to one of the cords of paper mulberry bark used during the Purification Ritual she underwent on Tamino Island and sent it to Genji. It arrived as the sun was setting. The evening tide was rising and cranes, with their lovely cries, were calling out from the inlet. Was it due to this poignant setting that Genji wanted to meet her regardless of who might see them?

*Even the name Tamino,⁸ isle of straw raincoats
Cannot keep the drenching dews off my travel robes
Robes as damp as in those tearful days of exile*

Although he spent a pleasant time sightseeing along the route back to the capital and enjoying music along the way, the Akashi lady preoccupied his thoughts. Female entertainers gathered near Genji's retinue, and it seemed as if the young men of his party, even those who were high-ranking officials, couldn't help eyeing them curiously. Genji was of the opinion that in all cases a woman's charm and true beauty derived from the quality of her character, and since he was not inclined to indulge in the trivial delights offered by women such as these, they had no power to attract him even for the most casual encounter. Indeed, he found their loose behavior, flaunting their looks and talents, offputting.

The Akashi lady waited until Genji's procession moved on. Then, because the following day was auspicious, she went to make her own offerings to the deity of Sumiyoshi. She had thus managed to perform her prayers in a manner befitting someone of her status. After she returned to Akashi, however, her anxiety and sense of insecurity increased, and she spent day and night lamenting her wretched fate. A messenger arrived within a few days, making her wonder if Genji had even had time to reach the capital yet. She was informed that he would send for her soon, but despite this welcome news, her thoughts were troubled.

Outwardly he gives every sign of being trustworthy, and he agrees to count me among his wives ... but how can I be sure, once I have rowed away from these familiar isles of home, that I will not be cast adrift?

Her father, the novitiate, would likely be worried about her leaving for the capital, and yet she knew that spending the rest of her life hidden away in this provincial backwater would bring even greater misery than all the years she had lived here already. Her reply was demure and respectful, but also irresolute.

Ah, I just remembered ... I should mention that with the change in the government a new High Priestess for Ise had to be appointed. After the lady at Rokujō returned to the capital with her daughter, Genji showed her every kindness, just as he had before, inquiring after her well-being and tending to the needs of her household. She greatly appreciated all of this, but she also gave up all hopes for their relationship, since she did not want to see any vestiges of the coldness he had displayed toward her long ago—a recurrence of which would only cause her more regrets. Thus, he made no special effort to visit her, and even if he had prevailed on her and stirred her feelings for him once more, it was difficult for him to gauge his own feelings, which might change in the future. In any case, given his current position, he felt uncomfortable pursuing romantic liaisons, and so he did nothing unreasonable to further their relationship. He was, however, extremely curious to see how her daughter, the former Priestess, had matured.

The lady's old residence on Rokujō had been kept in very good repair, and she lived there in courtly fashion. Her taste and sense of style were as superb as ever, she had many accomplished ladies-in-waiting, and her residence became a place where men of refined sensibility gathered. Although she seemed lonely, she passed the time enjoying her life with an unburdened heart. Then, suddenly, she fell gravely ill and was overwhelmed with anxiety, afraid that her years at the Shinto shrine in Ise had added to her sins by taking her away from the teachings of the Buddha. Her fears drove her to take vows and become a nun.

When Genji heard what she had done, he thought it regrettable that she should have taken such a step—after all, even if theirs was no longer a lovers' relationship, she was still someone with whom he could share his feelings on occasion. Shocked, he rushed to see her and conveyed his heartfelt concern. She had him seated near her pillow, just outside her curtains, and talked with him while she reclined on an armrest. From what he could tell, she seemed to be in a very weakened condition, and he wept in bitter remorse, thinking she might die before he could show her that his love was unwavering. On seeing the depth of Genji's devotion to her, the lady was overcome by a welter of emotions and spoke to him of her daughter.

"I shall probably leave her in a precarious situation, so please, by all means, count her among your dependents whenever the occasion demands. She has no one else to turn to for support, and she will be extremely vulnerable. Even

though my own status makes me useless to her, so long as I'm alive, even if I have little time left to me, I am determined to see to it that she learns those things she needs to know to make her way at court." Finding it hard to breathe, she broke down and wept.

"Even if you had not made this request," Genji told her, "I would never have abandoned your daughter. And now that you have asked me, I am more determined than ever to do all I can to look after her interests."

The lady replied, "It's such a difficult matter. Even a young woman who has a father whom she can truly depend on will have a hard time of it should she lose her mother. And if her guardian should come to consider her an object of his desire ... well, there may be unfortunate consequences, with other women treating her cruelly. This may be an unpleasant issue to bring up with you, but please ... do not even consider a relationship with my daughter. My own sad destiny tells me that a woman must confront unexpected sorrows in her life, and so I want to try to spare my daughter the vicissitudes that would come with such a troubling affair."

Genji felt awkward and found her concerns misplaced, but he reassured her.

"I am wiser now as a result of my years in exile, and despite your insinuation that traces of my old amorous tendencies remain, I have no intention of pursuing your daughter. I suppose it's natural that you feel that way, but you'll see in the end."

It was dark outside her sleeping quarters, and so he could make out the dim flickering of an oil lamp inside her curtains. Thinking he just might catch a glimpse of her daughter, he stealthily peeked through a gap where the curtain panels had not been completely stitched together, and in the faint light he could just make out the scene inside. The lady was reclining on an armrest, and her hair caught his attention at once. Cut short now that she was a nun, it was quite alluring all the same. Her beauty was breathtaking—a figure so lovely he wished that he could have a portrait done of her just as she was. And there, on the east side of the sleeping quarters, was a young woman reclining as well. *Surely that would be her daughter*, he thought. Because one of the panels of the inner curtains had been pulled open rather untidily, it caught his eye, and he could peer straight through the opening at her. She was cupping her chin in her hands, looking as though she were lost in pensive reflection. He could barely make her out, but she seemed extremely attractive to him. From what he could see, her abundant hair cascaded down around her shoulders, and her head had an elegantly refined shape. Her slight body, which was more clearly visible to him, was adorable and roused his passions. He was eager to see more of her, but, given what her mother had just said to him, he thought better of it.

"I am not feeling at all well," the lady said, "so please forgive me. I'm embarrassed to have to ask you to take your leave so soon." An attendant helped her lie down.

"It would have made me happy had my visit made you feel better. Instead, I seem to have disturbed you. What is the nature of your ailment?"

She sensed that he was peeking in on her and answered, "I must look a frightful mess. That you should have honored me with a visit just as my illness is bringing me to the end of my life proves that truly the bond between us is not shallow. Now that I have been able to tell you some of what has been on my mind, I can leave this world feeling reassured."

"I am touched that you have included me among those who will receive your last wishes. I have many half brothers, but I don't feel close to any of them. My father thought of your daughter as one of his own children, so I promise to look after her as though she were my younger sister. Now that I'm twenty-nine and have reached greater maturity, it makes me feel dissatisfied not to have anyone to look after, as if something's missing in my life." And with that, he left. Afterwards he sent numerous inquiries and letters asking about her health.

The lady at Rokujō died seven or eight days later. Genji was stunned and made painfully aware once again of the fragility of life. He did not go to the palace but ordered preparations for memorial rites. No one else could be counted on to take care of such details, though the more experienced of the officials who had served the lady's daughter during her time in Ise did manage a few of the arrangements.

Genji personally went to the lady's villa on Rokujō and sent in a note to the daughter. She replied through the woman who was the head of her staff, telling him, "I am at a complete loss."

"I discussed your future with your mother," Genji answered, "and it would please me to have you consider me your confidant."

He then summoned her ladies-in-waiting and explained to them the various tasks they needed to carry out. He inspired confidence in his reliability, and his attitude seemed to have changed, since there was nothing of the coldness he used to exhibit. The memorial rites were truly magnificent, with many of the attendants at Genji's Nijō villa called in to assist.

Sad and pensive, Genji lowered his blinds and retreated inside to perform his religious devotions. He stayed in constant communication with the lady's daughter, and when she regained her equilibrium, she replied to him herself. Though she was in awe of him, her nurse and the other women encouraged her to reply, reminding her that it wouldn't be proper to have someone write the letters for her.

One day, as snow and sleet were blowing and swirling about, he conjured an image of her, thinking in sympathy how sad and anxious she must be. He sent a messenger with a note:

“How must these skies look to you at this moment?”

*Gazing down upon your house of sorrow
Her spirit seems to hover in these skies
Where snow and sleet fall wildly without cease*

He wrote his poem on a piece of matte azure-colored paper, paying special attention to its presentation with the aim of catching the young woman’s interest. And indeed, she found it startlingly beautiful. It was difficult for her to compose a reply, but her women pressed her to do so, insisting that having a proxy write for her was out of the question. She chose a light gray paper—a color to match her mourning robes—heavily suffused with an elegant perfume, and employed brushstrokes that laid down the ink thickly in some places, thinly in others.

*I have outlived my sorrow and linger
Like snow that falls and does not melt away ...
In this dark world, I know myself no more*

Her calligraphy had a diffident grace, calm and gentle; while her hand was not especially accomplished, he could see that it possessed an endearing dignity. At the time she left for Ise, he had the feeling their relationship would not end there, and he thought that now he could certainly do as he wished and take her for himself. But then he reconsidered and, as he had on that earlier occasion when talking with her mother, restrained his desires—an act of self-control that was becoming more common for him.

When she made her final request to me, the lady at Rokujō seemed very anxious about her daughter’s welfare, he recalled, afraid she would end up being hurt if I had an affair with her. Such concerns were not at all unreasonable, of course, and the courtiers probably all assume I’m having an affair with her anyway. So I’ll confound expectations and treat her in a chaste and honorable manner. When the Reizei Emperor is a little older and more discerning, I’ll send her into his service. I don’t have many children, so I may as well raise her as my daughter.

He sent detailed, thoughtful messages and called on her on appropriate occasions.

“Please forgive me if I am being presumptuous,” he wrote, “but it is my

sincerest hope that, in remembrance of the close relationship I had with your mother, you will not be nervous or reserved around me."

She, however, was so shy and retiring that it was unthinkable for her even to let him hear the sound of her voice, no matter how faintly she might speak; her refusal to respond was trying for her ladies-in-waiting, who lamented her introverted personality.

She is, after all, a Princess, Genji mused, and some of her women—the head of staff, for instance, and the Principal Handmaid—are her relatives, and thus members of the imperial family. She has many women of outstanding character and breeding in her service, and if I can secure a place for her at the palace, as I privately hope to do, she would not appear at all inferior to the other consorts. One way or another, I'd really like to get a closer look at her.

Did he perhaps still lack the paternal instincts that would put her at ease? His own feelings were as yet unsettled—should he take her for himself or present her to Reizei?—and so he did not share his thoughts on the matter with anyone else. In any case, he certainly made special efforts to ensure that the funeral of the lady at Rokujo was conducted in a magnificent manner, and the daughter and her attendants were grateful for the generosity of his heart.

The villa on Rokujo was located in the lower district near Kyōgoku on the eastern outskirts of the capital, and as the days and months passed by in empty succession, the daughter's loneliness and sense of isolation grew; even her attendants gradually withdrew one by one from her service. Few people passed by, and, day after day, upon hearing the tolling of the temple bells at eventide, she would weep aloud, unconcerned that someone might hear. Her mother was a parent like any other, and yet the two of them had never been separated, even for a brief period—indeed, the mother had taken the unprecedented step of accompanying her daughter to Ise. Now the former Priestess was consumed with sad regret that her mother had been forced unreasonably into going with her, and she cried constantly, feeling guilty that she had not been able in turn to accompany her mother on her final journey.

Her staff included people of both high and low status, and Genji was concerned that she would attract the interest of numerous suitors. Playing his role as father, he told her ladies-in-waiting, "None of you, not even the nurses, is to act on your own as an intermediary for any man." Genji projected such an imposing figure that the women took every precaution to ensure that their mistress heard not a hint of anything improper, keeping any proposal of an amorous nature from ever reaching her.

Suzaku had seen her once during the solemn ceremony at the Shishinden on the day that she departed for Ise, and her stunning appearance—so beautiful as to

seem ill-omened—had made a lasting impression on him.

“Come to my villa,” he told her, making the same proposal he had made to her mother earlier, “and you can serve me in residence with my sisters, including the former Kamo Priestess.”

At the time the lady at Rokujō carefully considered his request, but she knew that Suzaku already had several distinguished noblewomen in his service and that her own daughter did not have many supporters. Adding to her concerns was the fact that Suzaku had been ill, and she feared that her daughter might end up experiencing the same misfortune as she by suffering the untimely death of her husband. As she was still hesitating over the proposal, she passed away. Her daughter’s attendants were feeling deeply troubled, wondering who might look after their mistress, when Suzaku once again generously indicated his desire to have her.

When Genji heard about Suzaku’s plans, he thought it might be an act of lèse-majesté to thwart a retired sovereign’s will and take the woman for himself, and yet he found it hard to give up someone who possessed such an alluring figure. He spoke to Fujitsubo about the situation.

“I have been wracking my brain trying to decide what to do with her under the circumstances,” he said. “Her mother, the lady at Rokujō, was a woman of great dignity and sensitivity, but because of my own unruly, amorous nature, I gained a reputation for outrageous behavior, and I very much regret that in the end she grew to detest me. While she was still alive her wounded pride kept her from ever softening her attitude, but when she knew her death was approaching, she made a final request. She must have heard from others that I could be trusted and would look after her daughter, and so even though she still harbored ill feelings, she unburdened her heart. When I realized she was putting her faith in me, in spite of everything, it was hard to bear. Even under normal circumstances one cannot simply ignore such a heartrending request, and I so wanted, one way or another, for her spirit to let go of her grievances against me. I am fully aware that her daughter is older and more mature than Emperor Reizei, but don’t you think it might be a good idea to have an experienced woman serving your son? He is, after all, still quite young. The decision, of course, is yours to make.”

“How wonderful that you show such consideration for him,” Fujitsubo replied, taken with the idea. “Of course, you must be mindful of Suzaku’s feelings, since he will surely be disappointed. I suggest you just pretend that you don’t know anything about his proposal and use the mother’s last request as your pretext for moving her to the palace. In any case, Suzaku is probably not overly fixated on his relationships with women anymore, since he is concentrating on his religious devotions, and it isn’t likely that he would be deeply offended when

you tell him you will send her to the palace.”

“In that case,” Genji said, “if you’re willing to go along with this plan and include her among the women at the palace, then I would like to say a few words of encouragement to her. I have thought about this from all angles, and I have explained my plans to you exactly as they have developed to this point ... though I remain a little hesitant, unsure what people at court might say.”

I will act as though I know nothing of Suzaku’s request, he thought, and then, later on, move the former Priestess to my Nijō villa. He informed Murasaki of his plans.

“So that is what I’ve been thinking,” Genji remarked. “She is twenty now, just a year younger than you, and so she’s the right age to make a good companion.” Murasaki was delighted and hurried to make preparations for the woman’s arrival.

Fujitsubo was troubled that her brother, Prince Hyōbu, was still going to such great lengths to train his own daughter in hopes of sending her to the palace, and she worried how Genji would deal with this, since the two men were on such bad terms.

Tō no Chūjō’s daughter was now installed as the new Kokiden Consort. The Chancellor had adopted the girl as his own daughter and looked after her in spectacular fashion. Since she was so young, she was considered a perfect companion for Reizei.

Fujitsubo mulled over the situation: *Since Prince Hyōbu’s middle daughter is also about the same age as my son, the palace has a rather childish atmosphere, as if they are all playing in a dollhouse. Thus, my son should welcome having someone more mature to serve him.*

She explained to Reizei the plans that were being made to bring the Rokujō Princess into the palace. Genji was meticulous in his administration of all matters at the court—not only supporting the young Emperor in public affairs, but also paying close attention to everyday matters. Fujitsubo was deeply touched when she observed his actions, knowing now that he was someone whom she could trust completely. Recently her own health had begun to fail, and so it was difficult for her to serve her son even when she was at the palace. For that reason, she was convinced that having an older woman to look after His Majesty was an absolute necessity.

¹ The poem refers to a “small *kalpa*,” which is equivalent to the time it takes to wear away a huge rock by brushing it once every hundred years with the feather from a heavenly robe. There are various estimates of

this time span (e.g., 16 billion years) and of the size of the rock or mountain (e.g., 16 cubic miles), but the meaning of the image is clear—he wants his daughter to live forever.

² *Gosenshū* 64 (Anonymous): “If only I had sleeves wide enough to cover the heavens, I would not leave spring blossoms to the mercy of the wind.”

³ *Kokin rokujō* 1888 (Ise): “The boat the fisherman rows out to sea, away from the inlet at Kumano, leaves me behind as it moves off into the distance.”

⁴ On the whole, ranks were denoted by color as follows: 1 = dark purple; 2 and 3 = light purple; 4 = dark red or crimson; 5 = light red or pink; 6 = green or light blue; 7 = light green; 8 = blue; starting rank = light blue; no rank = yellow. Please note that, as the text makes clear, *these colors represent general designations* and many variations were possible. The designation of rank by color is an important consideration in the *Otome* chapter below.

⁵ The riverside villa of Minamoto Tōru (822–859) is thought to be the model for the deserted residence where Genji spent his ill-fated night with the lady of the evening faces in the *Yūgao* chapter. Minamoto Tōru was the first imperial son to be given the commoner name Genji (“Gen” is the Sinitic-based pronunciation of the character 源, which is also read “Minamoto”).

⁶ This ritual involved setting an effigy afloat on seven different streams—a ritual similar to the one Genji performed with a single effigy at Suma. The emperor normally performed this ritual in the capital, and so it is worth noting that Genji’s purification and his plans to construct a massive new villa suggest that he is beginning to assume a position parallel with that of the emperor.

⁷ *Shūishū* 766 [also *Gosenshū* 960] (Prince Motoyoshi): “Being lost and forlorn, I must give all that I have, following my heart’s destiny as I follow these channel markers, to meet my love now in this very city of Naniwa.”

⁸ The place name Tamino contains the word for “straw raincoat,” *mino*.

XV

Yomogiu

A Ruined Villa of Tangled Gardens

DURING GENJI'S period of exile, while he was drenched in tears amidst the dripping brine of salt-making fires, many women back in the capital grieved over him, each in her own way. For those who had a reliable source of support, their suffering arose mainly from the pain of longing. Murasaki, for one, was able to take comfort in her correspondence with him and so found some peace of mind. She at least understood the conditions he faced at his residences in Suma and Akashi, and as each season rolled around, bringing a sad reminder of the impermanence of the world and of time lost, she knew the appropriate robes to sew for him—robes shorn of any mark that might indicate his previous high rank.

He also had numerous lovers that no one knew anything about, and their hearts were secretly broken. They could only imagine from a distance, as if they had no connection with him at all, what he had looked like and how he must have felt when he was banished from the capital. One of these women was the Hitachi Princess—Genji's Princess Safflower. In the wake of her father's death, she found herself in a precarious situation with no one to support her. Once Genji had begun his astonishing visits, he sent a steady stream of gifts in order to see to her needs. Of course, their relationship meant nothing to a man in the full flower of his power and vitality, and it was really nothing more than a fleeting attachment. But to a woman whose circumstances were constrained by poverty, whose prospects were as narrow as the sleeves she wore as she waited for him, receiving even the slightest attention made her feel as though the radiance of the very stars in the heavens were reflected in the surface of the basin she used to wash.

Unfortunately, with the onset of Genji's tribulations he became so

preoccupied and distracted by the woes besetting him from all sides at the court that he apparently forgot those women for whom his affections were not especially deep. Then, once he was far away from the capital, he was no longer able even to go to the trouble of asking after the Hitachi Princess. She cried every day after he left, but in the early days of his exile her household was able to get by on what was left from his generous support. As the months and years passed, however, her existence became increasingly lonely and desperate.

The older attendants who had been with her for many years whispered mournfully among themselves:

“Ah, how star-crossed our mistress has been. The Radiant Genji appears unexpectedly, like some god or the Buddha, bestows his gracious attentions on her, and then ... well, the world is an uncertain place and no one ever knows when misfortune will strike. Still, it is so sad to see her like this again, with no one to look after her.”

The Hitachi Princess had grown accustomed to her indescribable loneliness. Having lived so many years in the absence of any support, she had come to take her situation for granted until Genji came along. Thanks to his help she got a taste of a slightly more normal existence for a brief time, but now that he was gone, that experience must have given rise to unbearable grief and regrets. During the period of her life when Genji supported her, women who were suitably qualified to serve a Princess had of their own volition entered her household staff. After Genji left, those women all went their separate ways, one after another, while others in her retinue passed on. As time went by the number of her attendants, women of both high and low status, dwindled.

The villa had started to decay and crumble soon after the death of the Princess’s father, and as it increasingly fell to ruin, it became a haven for foxes and a place where owls could be heard day and night in the eerily deserted groves surrounding the estate. Such creatures had once been driven into the shadows by the presence of people, but now spirits of the forest and other weird and fantastic beings appeared more and more frequently, as if they had the run of the place. There seemed to be no end to the horrifying desolation, and the few attendants who remained in the household entreated their lady to do something.

“Try as we might, we simply cannot go on like this any more. There are a number of provincial governors, men taken with the idea of constructing fashionable residences, who have their eyes on the groves of your estate, and who, through close connections to your family, have asked about your intentions, whether or not you might be willing to let your property go. Please agree to their proposals and consider moving somewhere less terrifying. Those of us who have remained in your service are at our wits’ end.”

"What a horrid idea! I have to keep up appearances ... otherwise, what would people at the court think? How could I possibly get rid of the last vestiges of my father's estate while I'm still alive? This place may have fallen to ruins, and it may give off a frightening appearance, but to me it is an old, familiar residence that makes me feel as though the spirit of my father is still with me. That thought brings me comfort and solace ..." The Princess burst into tears and refused to listen any further to suggestions that she sell.

Her furnishings were very old and worn, but they were beautifully crafted in the ancient, conservative style—the kind of pieces highly sought after by superficial dilettantes who fancied themselves refined connoisseurs of the past. They would inquire knowingly about the provenance of a particular item—had it been made by this master craftsman or that one—with the ulterior motive of trying to get her to sell it to them. Judging from the looks of her decaying villa, they assumed rather contemptuously that she would have no choice but to sell. And, as they had earlier, her ladies-in-waiting tried to convince her to do so.

"What else can you do? Others do this sort of thing." All the while they were wheedling their lady, they also tried at times to see to the repair of the unsightly damage wrought by the poverty pressing in on them ever more urgently with each passing day.

The Princess, however, reproached them severely: "My father had these things made with the understanding that I would take care of them. How can I allow them to become mere decorations in the homes of vulgar, pretentious people? It would be terrible to go against the wishes of the deceased." And with that, she refused to allow anything to be sold off.

Her position was so precarious that there wasn't a single person she could turn to for help with even the most trivial need. Her only family was an older brother, a priest, who would look in on her on those rare occasions when he came to the capital to perform special services at the palace. He was, however, an eccentrically old-fashioned man, one who lived as a hermit and who, even compared to his fellow monks, was cut off from the world with no means of making a living. Thus, it bothered him not a bit that he now had to wade through a tangle of mugwort and grasses just to enter her villa.

The gardens were so overgrown that the ground had disappeared beneath the wild profusion of satin-tail grass and mugwort, which had grown so tall that they seemed to be vying with each other to reach the eaves. Though the tangle of false cleavers, hopvine and other weeds may have created a sense of security, they had choked off the entrances through the gates on the east and west sides. Horses and oxen tramping through gaps in the crumbling earthen wall that surrounded the grounds had marked out paths, and during the spring and summer

impudent boys allowed their herds to graze freely in the gardens.

During the eighth month of the year of the great storm—the same storm that had threatened Genji at Suma—the wind blew down sections of the galleries and left behind only the bare framework of the lower servants' quarters, which had been roofed by plain wooden shingles. As a result, not a single one of the servants living there stayed on to work. Smoke from the kitchens no longer rose to the sky, creating a great deal of misery. Even the most pitiless, ruthless thieves ignored the place on the assumption that the villa was so desolate and deserted-looking that there couldn't possibly be anything of value to steal. Thus, though the grounds had reverted to a wild thicket of weeds, the furnishings and trappings inside the residence remained as they were, unchanged. Even so, with no one to clean and polish, dust accumulated, and the Hitachi Princess had to spend her days in lonely idleness with nothing to divert her.

Trivial things such as old poems or romances may provide relief from the tedium of idle hours, and they might have been a means to bring some comfort to a lady living in a residence falling to ruins. The Princess, however, wasn't mature or sophisticated enough to appreciate such pastimes. Even someone who is not especially fond of elegant diversions will still correspond with some like-minded companion during a period of idleness when there are no pressing matters to attend to, and she will almost certainly find some consolation in writing about nature—the trees and plants around her. Unfortunately, the Princess's father had made her excessively timid by constantly cautioning her about dealing with the world, and now she was afraid to show herself or grow closer to those with whom she might otherwise have corresponded, even if only once in a while. Instead, she would amuse herself from time to time by opening up a well-used cabinet and glancing through illustrated versions of old tales—*Karamori*, *Hakoya no toji*, and *Kaguyahime*.¹

Even old poems have value, so long as they have been chosen for their charming qualities or their recognizable authors and clearly understood topics. In contrast, familiar poems that possess no special merits, that have been copied on the dull formal paper officials use or on thick inelegant Michinokuni, have absolutely nothing to recommend them. Yet it was precisely the latter sort of boring, clichéd poetry that the Princess would pull out and spread before her whenever she was in a pensive mood. She found it acutely embarrassing to do the kinds of things—the chanting of sutras or the practice of religious devotions—that so many others were doing nowadays. She never even took out her rosary, despite there being no one around who would have seen her in any case, but continued to live in a narrowly constricted, proper manner.

Jijū, the daughter of the Princess's nurse, had decided not to move to another

household, but stayed on for years serving at the Hitachi villa. Over the same period she had occasionally served the former Kamo Priestess as well, but when that lady passed away, Jijū's misery became unbearable. In the meantime, one of the Princess's maternal aunts had fallen in status and was now the principal wife of a provincial Governor. This aunt was raising her own daughters with the greatest care and had brought in a number of exceptional young ladies to serve on her household staff. Because Jijū's parents had often visited this aunt's residence, she knew the circumstances there and thought she should pay a visit from time to time.

The Hitachi Princess was estranged from this aunt and had never been on friendly terms with her. The aunt once remarked to Jijū, "My older sister looked down on me and considered me a disgrace to the family. It makes my heart ache to know my niece is in such dire condition, but there is nothing I can do about it." Her words were tinged with bitterness, but she did send a note to the Princess every now and then.

The average wife of a provincial Governor, a woman born into that status, normally strives to imitate the manners of the nobility and, in doing so, cultivates a sense of pride that may lead her to get above herself. Not so the Princess's aunt. Her fate had been to fall so far that despite having been born into a distinguished lineage, she instead became somewhat vulgar and common.

I was scorned because I had to take the inferior position of Governor's wife, she thought. Now that there has been this reversal of fortune, I really want my niece to come and attend to my daughters. Her character and sensibility are, to be sure, eccentric and old-fashioned, but she would be a dependable support for them.

"You must come and visit once in a while," she wrote to her niece. "There are people here who would love to hear you play the koto." Jijū encouraged the Princess to comply with her aunt's suggestion, but her mistress could not bring herself to do so—not because she was resisting but simply because she was too shy—and her aunt came to resent her refusal to establish closer ties.

As all this was going on, the aunt's husband was appointed Assistant Governor General for Kyūshū. After managing to arrange marriages for her daughters so that they at least could remain in the capital, the aunt prepared to join her husband on the journey to his new posting. She was now more intent than ever that her niece should accompany them and, in her wheedling manner, tried her best to get the Princess to agree to go.

"I know we didn't always check on you or help you in your forlorn circumstances," she wrote, "but so long as you were nearby I felt confident that you would be all right. Soon, however, we'll be going off to a distant province,

and I'm very concerned about the hardships you will face in the future, you poor thing ...”

When the Princess failed to reply, the aunt is reported to have said, “What a miserable ingrate! Just who does she think she is? She can hold on to her aristocratic pride all she wants, but her precious Captain of the Inner Guard—that Genji—certainly won’t be attracted to a woman who has spent so many years in an overgrown jungle!”

As things turned out, Genji was finally pardoned, and there was a great stir when he returned to the capital as everyone at the court celebrated. Men and women scrambled desperately to be the first to swear their allegiance. “I always remained deeply devoted to you, my lord,” they would assure him. After repeatedly observing this kind of obsequious behavior by both high and low, Genji sadly realized that fickleness was the way of the world. During this busy, stressful period, as the days and months rolled by, he gave no indication that he remembered his Princess Safflower.

This is the end. It's hopeless now, the Princess thought. *All this time I imagined how sad and miserable he must have been in such unthinkable circumstances, and I prayed with all my heart that he would once again greet the flowering spring of success. And now that his rank has been restored and people of all classes are celebrating with a joy that reverberates from the lowest pebbles to the highest roof tiles, I have to hear the news from others, as though all of this had nothing to do with me. How vain was our relationship ... the misery of that tragic moment when he was sent away is now mine alone.*² She wept in private, her heart broken by bitter grief.

The Princess’s aunt was now firmly convinced that her niece was behaving foolishly.

Just as I thought. What man would ever take in a woman in such dire straits with no one to support her? They say that the Buddha and holy men will lead those whose sins are few to enlightenment, but for someone in her situation to look down on the world with that proud attitude of hers, which she learned from her father and mother ... well, it's just pathetic.

“You really must make up your mind,” she wrote, once more adopting a cajoling manner in an effort to convince her niece. “When the trials of the world become too much, you should seek out mountain recesses.³ You seem to think it a hardship to live in the provinces, but nothing shameful or disreputable will befall you there, so ...”

The Princess’s attendants were in utter despair, muttering complaints amongst themselves.

“If only she’d listen to her aunt’s advice!”

“Whatever can she be thinking, holding on to such proud expectations when she has no bright prospects at all.”

Apparently Jijū had made promises to a young man who was the nephew of the newly appointed Assistant Governor General, and since he did not want to go to Kyūshū and leave her behind in the capital, she now had to move out of the Hitachi villa, even though she preferred to stay. “It is very hard for me to abandon you here,” she said, urging her lady to accompany her. Yet the Princess persisted in placing her hopes and trust in a man who had for so long kept his distance from her.

He may be neglecting me now, she told herself, but surely some chance occurrence will stir his memory eventually, no matter how long it takes. After all, he looked so sincere and sensitive when he pledged his love to me. So what if my plight is wretched and I've been forgotten ... when some passing breeze carries rumors about my dire straits to him, I am sure he will come to my rescue.

She had been clinging to these thoughts for so long that, despite the continuing decay of her residence, which was now more dilapidated than ever, she remained true to herself and refused to part with even the most trivial of her furnishings, resolutely enduring and continuing her life in the same manner as always.

Deeply depressed, she was prone to breaking down and sobbing. As a result, her profile resembled nothing so much as the face of a mountain peasant who had permanently affixed a red berry to the middle of her face. No ordinary person would have been able to endure looking at her ... but I don't want to go into any more detail about such pitiful matters here. To do so would sound like mere malicious gossip.

With the coming of winter and with fewer and fewer people to turn to for assistance, the Princess would pass her days staring out with an air of sorrow, lost in her thoughts. The whole court was abuzz over the Rite of the Eight Lectures Genji had commissioned to be held at his villa for the spirit of his late father. He had chosen priests of the highest order to conduct the ceremonies—extraordinary holy men who were remarkably erudite and who had undergone the most rigorous of austereities. As it happened, one of the priests in attendance was the Princess's older brother. After the ceremonies were completed, he dropped by to see her on his way back to his hermitage.

“I have just come from the Rite of the Eight Lectures that the Acting Major Counselor commissioned. It was an exceptionally noble ceremony; every detail was carried out with the utmost solemnity. It was so delightful it equaled in every way the sublime beauty of Amida's Pure Land. Genji himself seems to be an arhat, the very incarnation of the Buddha. How was it that he came to be born

into this world, which is so deeply corrupted by the Five Defilements?" After telling her about the ceremony, he quickly went on his way.

Her brother never exchanged more than a few words with her and, unlike most people, he never engaged in trivial or vain gossip.

If he's a Buddha or an arhat, she thought somewhat sardonically, then he's a rather cold one. Here I am, having reached the limits of endurance, but he pays no heed to the anxiety caused by my miserable fate. She was slowly coming to the realization that her hopes were at an end and that Genji would not come to her, when her aunt suddenly paid a visit.

Though they had never been all that friendly, her aunt had prepared gifts of clothing and other goods, still intending to convince the Princess to go with her to Kyūshū. She boarded a fine carriage and, affecting a smug, prideful air in both expression and manner, hurried over to the Hitachi villa. As soon as the gate was open, limitless desolation and ruin spread out before her. All the doors on both sides, left and right, sagged on their hinges, and it was a struggle to open them even with the help of several men. They searched for the proverbial "three paths" to a hermit's hut⁴ that would lead them to the isolated villa.

The carriage was pulled into a space in front of the entrance on the south side of the main hall, where the lattice shutters were raised a little. The Princess, shocked by her aunt's presumptuousness, grew increasingly flustered and unsure, but Jijū came out to greet the carriage, pushing aside a soot-stained curtain that had not been changed in years. Jijū's looks had faded a little; she had grown very thin, but she still possessed a noble bearing that somehow gave off an air of fresh beauty. The aunt was filled with wistful regret the moment she saw Jijū, thinking, *If only my homely niece had this woman's looks.*

"We're planning to depart soon," the aunt said, "and I have come for Jijū. However, I find it difficult to abandon you to such misery. You detest me and keep your distance, never once coming to see me even for a temporary visit, but you must at least allow Jijū to go. How could anyone stay in these awful, gloomy surroundings?"

She ought to have broken down and wept at this point, but as she thought about the road that lay before her and the high honor of her husband's appointment, she felt a triumphant glee that made tears impossible.

"While your father was alive," she continued, "I was disowned as an affront to a noble family's honor, and so you and I were deeply estranged. However, I've wondered for some time why things should be like this between us. I was aware of your distinguished lineage and awed by the good fortune you had experienced when Genji chose to court you, and so as the years passed I often felt hesitant about trying to get closer to you. But the world is a changeable, uncertain place,

and now, even though my status is insignificant, it turns out that I'm more secure and comfortable than you, who remain a member of the imperial family. It's very sad and painful to find you in this state, since you once held an honored position well beyond my reach. It's true that all this time we lived near each other I was negligent about contacting you, but still my mind was at ease knowing that being near you I could always help. Now that we're moving far away, I'm filled with pity and concern for you."

Her words failed to move the heart of the Hitachi Princess, who refused the offer: "Though what you have said makes me glad, I am not like other people, so how could I possibly leave my home? I shall remain here always until it crumbles around me and disappears."

When she said nothing more, her aunt lectured her.

"It's perfectly natural for you to feel the way you do, but how can you just throw your life away by remaining in a place as strangely eerie as this? You may be hoping that Genji will set about remodeling and cleaning your villa, transforming it into a gleaming jeweled palace, but I've heard that at the moment his affections are fixed solely on the daughter of Prince Hyōbu. He has abandoned his fickle, amorous ways of the past and no longer pays any attention to all the women he used to visit. In any case, it would be extremely difficult for him to call on someone who lives in a wilderness—even a woman who relies on the purity of her devoted heart to bring him back."

She's right, the Princess thought. Feeling even more deeply dejected, she broke down and wept.

Although the aunt spent the entire day using every argument she could think of, in the end she failed to persuade, and her niece did not change her mind.

"Very well, then, come along Jijū," she said, hurrying to return home as darkness fell.

Upset and flustered, Jijū could not stop her tears as she whispered privately to her lady, "Since I am being pressured like this, I will go with her today just to see her off. What your aunt says makes sense, and yet at the same time, it's reasonable for you to feel torn about leaving this place. It's so painful to be caught in the middle."

The Princess felt sad and bitter that even Jijū was abandoning her, but there was nothing she could say to stop her. Her sobbing grew even louder.

She had nothing to give Jijū as a memento for her long years of service—the well-worn robes she ought to have presented were stained and worn from her tears—and so she took a hair extension, a very beautiful tress over nine feet long that she had braided from her own hair, which had been pulled out by her combs, and placed it in a lovely box along with a jar of fragrant clothing incense she had

kept from the old days.

*I always believed the bond between us
Strong as these vinelike braids, would never break
But now, to my surprise, you are leaving*

“My nurse, your late mother, told you before she died that her final wish was for you to stay with me. Useless though I am, I had thought that you at least would remain always in service here. I understand the reasons why you are abandoning me, but it makes me sad to wonder who will look after me now.”

Once more she wept most piteously. Jijū was at a loss for words. At last she spoke up, saying, “You do not have to remind me of my mother’s last request. Though I have shared unbearable trials with you all these years, I am being called away on a journey I never imagined I would take, leaving for a distant land.”

*Though these jeweled braids may someday come undone
I swear to the deities who will guard me
On my journey that our bond will never break*

“Of course, I do not know when death may part us.”

“What’s going on in there?” her aunt muttered. “It’s getting dark.”

Thus prodded, Jijū left in a daze, feeling as though her heart was drifting up to the sky. As the carriage pulled away, she instinctively glanced back, over and over.

Now that the one woman who had been with her through the many years of tribulations was gone, the Princess felt utterly lost. Her old attendants, who had stayed because they were of no use to other households, whispered among themselves: “Well, you can hardly blame Jijū, she had a good reason to leave. I wonder what kept her from leaving before now? After all, it’s intolerable for all of us as well!” They all considered leaving, and tried to remember connections they could call upon to help them move. The Princess, who overheard them, was mortified.

The eleventh month came around, and the weather was blustery with snow and sleet. Patches where the snow had melted could be seen in the gardens of other residences, but around the Hitachi villa it piled up deeply in the shade of tangled weeds—the mugwort and false cleavers that blocked the sun at morning and dusk. Not even menial servants could come and go through the drifts, which called to mind the snows of Hakusan in Koshi.⁵ The Princess spent many tedious

days staring out, lost in thought. With no one to divert her with some trivial banter, no one to change her mood with tears or laughter, she slept alone at night inside her dusty curtains, experiencing extremes of misery and grief.

Back in his villa at Nijō, Genji increasingly focused his affections on his precious Murasaki and made very little effort to visit any of his other women, particularly those he deemed unworthy of special attention. Given his feelings at that moment, he was even less interested in thinking about the Hitachi Princess, and though there were times when he remembered that his Princess Safflower was still alive in the world, he felt no pressure to call on her. And so the days passed by, and the New Year arrived.

Some time around the fourth month his thoughts turned to the villa of the scattering orange blossoms and, after taking leave of Murasaki, he secretly set out to see his lady there. A light drizzle was falling, the remnants of a rainstorm that had fallen steadily the past several days; then the moon broke through the clouds with exquisite timing. It put him in mind of the first time he had called on that villa so long ago, and, just as he was conjuring memories of all he had seen along the way on that bright, elegant moonlit evening, he passed by a thick stand of trees surrounding a residence so dilapidated and on the verge of collapse that it was hard to make out the original form of the building.

Wisteria vines, drooping from a large pine tree, were swaying gently in the moonlight when he suddenly caught a scent wafting on the breeze—a fragrance that was somehow familiar to him. Because it was an alluring substitute for the scent of mandarin orange trees he had been anticipating, he leaned out of his carriage and saw some willow trees, their branches cascading down in wild profusion. The scene was unobstructed by the earthen wall, which had collapsed. Then it struck him. *Where have I seen this grove before? ... Of course, it once belonged to Prince Hitachi.* Deeply moved, Genji had his carriage halted. Koremitsu was close by, on duty as he always was whenever his lord went out on one of his secret nocturnal visits. Genji summoned him.

“Is that the Hitachi villa?”

“Yes, my lord,” Koremitsu replied.

“Is the Princess still living here in these lamentable ruins? I really ought to be calling on her, but it’s such a bother making the effort to come here while trying to remain discreet. Let’s use this opportunity to inquire inside. But, before you say anything, make sure that this is the right place. It would look ridiculous if I were to call on the wrong woman.”

As it so happened, the Hitachi Princess had grown increasingly withdrawn and despondent recently. She had seen her late father in a dream while napping during the daytime, and her feeling of sadness lingered even after she awoke.

Perhaps because she was thinking of her father, she had the edges of the eaves chambers wiped dry where rain had leaked in, and she had several rooms cleaned and tidied, dealing with matters in a normal manner, which was unusual behavior for her. She even composed this poem:

*Wet from tears of mourning for one who died
My sleeves have not yet dried ... and now the rain
Leaking through the eaves soaks them once again*

It was an emotionally wrenching moment.

Koremitsu entered the grounds and searched about, trying to catch some indication that someone was living there, but there wasn't the least sign of any human presence. *I should have known. All of the times I've passed by this place and peeked in from the road, it has always looked deserted ...* But just as he was about to give up and head back, bright moonlight broke though the clouds, and he could make out his surroundings. Two lattice shutters hanging between pillars had been raised, and he could see that the blind just inside the shutters was rustling. Sensing that something was in there, he felt afraid, but he drew closer anyway and coughed softly to announce his arrival. He heard someone clear her throat and say, "Who are you? Is anyone there?" The voice was that of a very old woman.

Koremitsu announced himself, saying, "I would like to have a word with the woman named Jijū."

"I'm afraid she's left to go serve another household. However, if you wouldn't mind speaking with me instead ..." The quavering voice was beyond decrepit, but it also sounded somehow familiar to Koremitsu.

A man dressed in hunting robes, slipping furtively into the villa, moving with a supple grace—to the eyes of the women inside, no longer accustomed to seeing such a figure, this unexpected guest made them anxious, worried it might be a fox or some other creature that had taken human form. But then the man came closer and said, "If it please you, I would like to ascertain if the lady who once lived here is still in residence. If the situation with her is unchanged, it seems that my lord's feelings are unchanged as well, and he wants to call on her. This evening, as he was passing by, he stopped his carriage outside. He desires a reply, so what shall I tell him? Come now, do not be anxious ..." At that the women inside all broke into laughter.

"If our lady's situation had changed at all, don't you think she would have moved out of this tangled wilderness by now? Just look around. You can see how things are, so we leave it up to you as to how you want to reply to your lord.

For those of us who have lived into old age, our hearts have endured many years bearing witness to strange misfortunes that you would find simply astounding.” The women seemed quite ready to tell him all about their circumstances, but Koremitsu thought it would be annoying to let them start blathering on unbidden, and so he cut them off.

“All right, all right … I shall inform my lord,” he said, and made his way back to Genji’s carriage.

“What took you so long?” Genji asked. “What’s happened here? Every trace of the old villa is hidden beneath a tangle of weeds!”

“I followed this path and that and finally made my way up to the residence where I met Jijū’s old aunt, Shōshō,” Koremitsu replied. “I recognized her voice, which hasn’t changed a bit.” He then went on to describe the appearance of the residence, which upset Genji terribly.

“How must she feel,” he said, acknowledging his own cruel neglect, “having to live in the midst of a wilderness all this time? I wonder how I should handle this? It’s not easy to keep a tryst of this sort secret, and yet if this opportunity hadn’t presented itself to me, it’s unlikely that I would ever have set out to see her. If the Princess really hasn’t changed, if she is still the same eccentric, purehearted woman I knew, then it really isn’t surprising things have turned out as they have.”

As he was speaking, it occurred to him that entering the villa suddenly and unannounced might be awkward for all concerned. He very much wanted to send in an elegant letter first, but he gave up on the idea. After all, if she were still as demure and tongue-tied as before, his poor messenger might be stuck waiting forever for her reply.

“The dew on the mugwort is so heavy,” Koremitsu warned him, “you won’t be able to make your way through at all. I’ll have to brush away some of it in order for you to go in.”

Whereupon Genji murmured a poem to himself:

*Though deep tangles of weeds obscure the path
Now that I am here I long to see her
This woman whose heart has remained constant*

His mind made up, Genji alighted. Koremitsu took a riding crop from one of his escorts and used it to sweep away the dew as he walked ahead of his lord. As they entered the grounds, drops of rain fell from the trees above them. It was like a cold autumn shower.

“I have a parasol,” Koremitsu said. “Truly, the dew from the branches falls

harder than the rain.”⁶

The cinched cuffs of their trousers looked to be soaked already. The central gate, which had been so broken down even in the old days as to be virtually impassable, had long since completely crumbled away, and as he made his way in, Genji was relieved that no one was around to see how clumsy and foolish he must have looked at that moment.

The Princess was thrilled that her fervent hope, which she had clung to for so long, was at last about to be realized. And yet she was also extremely embarrassed by her shabby appearance and found it difficult to go out to meet Genji. She had put away the gifts and robes that she had received from her despised aunt without so much as a glance at them. However, her ladies-in-waiting had stored them in a scented chest fashioned in the ornate Chinese style of carpentry, and when they brought the robes out for her to change, they were suffused with an attractive, familiar perfume that steeled her wavering resolve. After she had her soot-stained standing curtains set off to the side, she sat down to receive Genji.

Genji entered and told her, “I know that I’ve been away and out of touch all of these years, but my heart has not changed, and you were always in my thoughts. Still, I resented you for never once surprising me with some appropriately timed note and came to question the feelings you’ve had for me up to now. Taking this grove around your villa as a sign of your devotion, I could not pass by, even though there are no cedars to beckon me,⁷ but gave in to my feelings and entered.”

He peeked through a small opening between the panels on the lady’s inner curtains. She looked as excessively reserved as ever and did not respond to him right away. Nonetheless, she realized that his feelings were not shallow, since he had taken the trouble to come here through the heavy dews; she finally replied in a faint whisper.

“You have suffered extraordinary sorrows over the months and years you spent hidden away in this tangle of grasses,” Genji continued, “but it is my nature to remain constant and devoted, and I have come to you, making my way along the dewy path, even though I had no guide to show me what was in your heart. So how do you feel about me? Will you be able to forgive my long period of silence, knowing that I have neglected all of my women? From now on, if ever there comes a time when I do not treat you as you wish to be treated, then I will acknowledge the sin I have committed in breaking my vows to you.” He cajoled her with many phrases like these that expressed a depth of feelings—though in truth he was not really as enamored of her as his words might have suggested.

Normally he would have been expected to spend the night, but given the state of both the villa and the Princess, who was rather blindingly difficult to look at, he chose to make some plausible excuses instead and prepared to go on his way. Although no gardener had planted the pine with the wisteria twined about it, Genji was touched by its appearance—how tall it had grown over the years⁸—since it reminded him of how long she had pined for him. As he pondered his own change of fortunes, it all seemed like a dream.

*What appeared before me, making it hard to pass
Was that pine covered in waves of wisteria
A marker of the villa where you pined for me*

“As I calculate all the months and years that have passed, it seems such a long period of time, and the many changes that have come to the capital fill me with keen sorrow. Soon, when we have a quiet moment to share, I must tell you all that befell me during my exile in the provinces.⁹ When I consider that you had no one to whom you could unburden your heart and speak of the difficulties you faced with each passing spring and autumn, I find it amazing that you have remained so openhearted and gentle.”

Upon hearing his words, the Princess replied with a poem:

*Having pined so long for you, I wonder ...
Have you not called on my humble abode
Just to view those wisteria blossoms*

He heard what he took to be the furtive rustling of her robes and caught the scent of perfume wafting up from her sleeves. These sensations created the impression that perhaps she had matured gracefully.

The moon was about to set. The hinged doors on the west side of her chambers were open, and beyond them he could see that there was no gallery and that the edge of the eaves was gone. With nothing to block it, the moonlight flooded in, brightly illuminating the room all around them. Genji could see that it was furnished exactly as it had been in the past. The interior looked far more courtly and elegant than the exterior of this ruined villa, which was hidden beneath the *shinobugusa*, those ferns whose very name evoked aching memories. Comparing in his mind the conditions under which the Princess had lived for years to those described in that old romance about the children who destroy the tower their father had built for them,¹⁰ he felt a surge of compassion. That she had, for the most part, maintained a sense of dignity in the face of such misery

showed the effects of a refined upbringing on her character, and he was impressed. He had taken pity on her earlier, thinking it was her refined nobility that made her hard to forget, and yet now he felt sorry that she had been hurt by his negligence during the period of his exile and return, when he remained heedlessly distant, preoccupied with his own concerns.

Like the Hitachi Princess, Hanachirusato—his lady at the villa of scattering orange blossoms—did not make a show of herself in the lively modern style of women nowadays. Comparing the two in his mind's eye, he found little difference between them and was able to overlook most of the Princess's faults.

It was now the time of year for the Kamo Festival and the Purification Ritual, and many people curried favor by sending gifts to Genji on the pretext that their lord was busy with preparations for the events. He affectionately distributed those gifts among all his ladies as appropriate to their status, but he showed special favor to the Hitachi Princess, giving orders to his most trusted retainers to look after her, and dispatching menial servants to clear the garden of weeds, to make temporary repairs, and to erect a wooden fence to shore up the unsightly earthen wall that ran around the estate. If word got out that he had called on the Princess only after neglecting her for so long, his reputation would be damaged. For that reason, he did not go to visit her but sent long, detailed letters instead. He explained to her that he was constructing an annex to his Nijō villa.

"I intend to move you there," he wrote, "so search out some little girls and bring them into your service."

He was worried about the people who were attending her, so he assisted by providing servants. Now, in this ruined villa amidst tangled gardens, there was no place left to put all the words of gratitude—the women there looked up to the sky and, facing in the direction of Genji's residence, offered joyful prayers of thanksgiving.

People at court knew that Genji had not the slightest interest in common, ordinary women, even for the most casual, temporary fling—that he was instead the type of man who would seek out a woman and grow close to her once he was convinced that she was a rare find with some special feature that captured his imagination. So what could have driven him to treat a woman as eccentric as the Hitachi Princess, whose appearance and circumstances had nothing even remotely normal about them, as someone special? Perhaps there was some bond between them from the distant past.

Her former attendants, those of both high and low rank, had made light of her, convinced that she had reached the limits of her fortune, and each one of them had tried to leave her service for other households. Now some of them were competing with each other to come back into their mistress's service. The

Princess's gentle refinement had been perfected to the point that she was excessively introverted and demure, and so her ladies-in-waiting had grown accustomed to serving someone whose disposition made their lives easy. Those who had left her to serve in other households, such as the residences of nondescript provincial governors where nothing especially good or interesting happened, now had a hard time adjusting. They felt miserable and awkward, and many came back to the Princess after a sudden unseemly change of heart, which exposed their capricious natures.

As Genji prospered and as his fortunes eclipsed his past glory, he treated the Princess with greater kindness and generosity than ever before. He conceived exquisitely designed plans for renovating the Hitachi villa, and it eventually gave off an elegant glow that gradually drew more and more people to it. The tangled foliage of trees and grasses had once presented an eerie, melancholy prospect, but the garden stream was cleared and dredged, and the plants in the front garden were tended to and pruned so that cooling breezes could circulate. Genji even instructed the lower-ranking members of his staff—people to whom he normally paid no attention—to treat the Princess with extra special care. Those servants, observing that Genji appeared to be uncommonly devoted to the lady, discerned his true intent and curried favor by carrying out his wishes.

For a full two years the Princess remained at her old villa, lost in melancholy idleness, until she moved at last to the annex of the Nijō villa. It had been difficult for Genji to meet her face-to-face, but now that she was nearby, residing in the same district, he could peek in on her whenever some business took him by her quarters. In no way did he treat her lightly or with disrespect.

I know no one has asked me to do so, but I would love to tell you a little more about all that happened after that—how surprised the aunt was after returning from Kyūshū to learn of her niece's good fortune, or how Jijū, delighted though she was for her former mistress, felt ashamed of her own shallow heart and lack of patience. Unfortunately, I have a terrible headache, and it is simply too much to go on with the story. I am not up to it now, but there will be another opportunity, and by that time the details will have come back to me and I will definitely tell you everything then.

¹ The first two of the tales mentioned here have been lost. The third is an alternate title for the famous work *Taketori monogatari* (*The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter*).

² *Kokinshū* 948 (Anonymous): “Have relationships always been a source of misery since ancient times, or has this misery become mine alone?”

³ *Kokinshū* 955 (Mononobe Yoshina): “To escape the trials of the world, I want to seek out mountain recesses, though I remain fettered to the one I love.”

⁴ This is a reference to the Chinese poet Tao Yuanming (or Tao Qian, 365–427), who retired from public life for the contemplative life of a hermit. His poems often describe the landscape where he retired—descriptions that center on five willows, three paths, and bamboo.

⁵ *Kokinshū* 391 (Fujiwara Kanesuke): “Though I know nothing of Shirayama, where you travel, I shall follow the footsteps you have left behind in the snow.” Shirayama, which means “White Mountain,” is one reading of the characters 白山, which may also be read Hakusan. Hakusan is located on the border between Ishikawa and Gifu prefectures in what was once Etchū Province. Koshi refers more generally to the Hokuriku region (or to the road that ran through the provinces of that region, including Etchū).

⁶ *Kokinshū* 1091 (a song of Azuma, the Eastern Provinces): “Servants, remind your lord to wear a sedge hat, for the dew that drops from the trees in Miyagino falls harder than the rain.” Koremitsu’s statement also alludes to a *saibara* titled *Azumaya* (“A Hut in the Eastern Provinces”).

⁷ *Kokinshū* 982 (Anonymous): “If you truly long for me, come to the foot of Mount Miwa, to my hut . . . to the gate where the sacred cedars stand.” This poem is alluded to in the *Sakaki* chapter.

⁸ *Gosenshū* 1107 (Ōshikōchi no Mitsune): “Naturally the person who planted it has grown old . . . but how tall the pine is now!”

⁹ *Kokinshū* 961 (Ono no Takamura): “Did I ever imagine it . . . that I would waste away in my exile in the provinces, reeling in a fisherman’s line?”

¹⁰ This tale has been lost; the plot of the story is not fully known.

XVI

Sekiya

The Barrier Gate

DURING THE year following the death of Genji's father, the man who had been Vice Governor of Iyo was appointed Vice Governor of Hitachi. The old man had to leave the capital to assume his post, and his young wife—the woman Genji thought of as his lady of the molted cicada shell—had no choice but to accompany him. While living in that distant province she learned of Genji's exile to Suma, and though she continued to yearn for him in secret, she had no intermediary who could carry a letter to him. The winds of gossip that blew across the peak of Mount Tsukuba¹ struck her as baseless and unreliable, and so the years passed with no correspondence at all between them. Though the term of his exile had not been set, Genji did eventually go back to the capital. The year after his return, the Vice Governor of Hitachi, having finished his four-year term of service, also moved back.

By coincidence, on the very day the Vice Governor was scheduled to reach the barrier gate at Ōsaka Pass² on his way home, Genji was setting out on a pilgrimage to Ishiyama Temple near the southern end of Lake Biwa. The sons of the Vice Governor, including the former Governor of Kii Province, had come out from the city to greet their father's party, and they informed him that Genji's procession would be heading to Ishiyama. The Vice Governor knew that the road would be congested with people and carriages if the parties were to meet up, so he decided to set off quickly at dawn. Unfortunately, his party included many women's carriages, and as they lumbered along slowly, the sun rose high in the sky. When they reached the beach at Uchide on the southern shore of Lake Biwa, outrunners from Genji's procession came crowding in, filling up the road so that the Vice Governor's party scarcely had space to cede the right-of-way.

"Our lord's procession has already crossed the eastern edge of the capital at

Mount Awata," the outrunners announced.

Upon hearing this, the members of the Vice Governor's party dismounted and pulled their carriages up the slope just below the barrier gate. Withdrawing to various spots beneath the cedar trees there, they unhitched the oxen, set the carriage shafts down discreetly in the shade of the trees, and respectfully made way for Genji's procession to pass. Although the Vice Governor's party was strung out along the way, some carriages trailing behind, others out ahead, it was still impressive-looking. The colorful hems of the ladies' sleeves and trousers draping out from beneath the blinds on ten or so of the carriages were splendidly refined—not at all provincial-looking—and put Genji in mind of the carriages of spectators who came out to view a procession on some splendid occasion, such as the journey of the High Priestess to the Ise Shrine. Genji's men, too many to count, all fixed their eyes on these women's carriages, even though they themselves were part of the magnificent procession of a lord whose fortunes were prospering.

It was the end of the ninth month, and the autumn foliage was a blaze of colors. Clumps of grass withered by the frost—some darker in hue, some lighter—stretched out delightfully all around as far as the eye could see. As the men in Genji's retinue came streaming down through the barrier gate, they cut attractive figures in the harmonious embroidery and dappled cloth of their colorful hunting robes. Genji lowered the blind on his carriage and summoned the younger brother of his lady of the molted cicada shell. He had once served as Genji's page and was now an Assistant Commander in the Right Gate Guard. Genji gave him the following message to deliver to his sister: "Can you ignore the fact that I came to meet you at the barrier gate today?"

He recalled many sad, poignant things that had happened between them, but because he had to be mindful of prying eyes, his message was rather trite and would likely come to nothing. For her part, the lady had never forgotten those events of long ago, which she had kept to herself, and as memories flooded back, she grew melancholy.

*Both times I passed this gate, going out, coming back
I could not stop my tears ... will he mistake them now
For the clear spring that flows forever on this slope*

She was certain that he would never understand her feelings, that it was all for naught.

A few days later the lady's younger brother went out to meet Genji, who was heading back from Ishiyama. The young man apologized for having continued

on with his sister's party instead of joining Genji's retinue that day at the barrier gate. Many years ago, when he was a page, he had been a favorite of Genji, who supported and protected him until he was promoted to the fifth rank. But then, at the time of Genji's unexpected troubles, the young man chose to accompany his sister to Hitachi, fearful of gossip that might implicate him. Genji considered his action disloyal, and the two men grew distant over the intervening years—though Genji never openly let it be known how he felt. Indeed, he continued to count the young man among his closest retainers, though they were certainly not as intimate as they had once been.

The man who was Governor of Kii when Genji began his unsuccessful courtship of the lady of the molted cicada shell was now Governor of the province of Kawachi. His younger brother was none other than the Lesser Captain of the Right Imperial Guard—the young man who had gone into exile with Genji after being stripped of his post. As a reward for his act of loyalty, the Lesser Captain had been promoted to Chamberlain serving in the Right Gate Guard, and Genji now treated him with special favor. Courtiers who observed his success regretted their own behavior at the time and wondered ruefully how they could ever have allowed gossip and innuendo to sway them.

Be that as it may, Genji summoned the lady's younger brother again and gave him a letter to deliver. The brother was amazed to find that, after all these years, there was still a place in Genji's heart for an affair he should have forgotten long ago.

"The other day," Genji had written, "I realized that the bond between us is strong, but ... I wonder if you realize it as well?"

*Though we passed by chance on the road to Ōmi
A name that promised us a tryst at Lake Biwa
In vain I searched for you beside its fresh waters³*

"How I resent that guard at the barrier gate," he concluded his letter, "so damnably officious!"

As he handed the letter over, he added, "It's been so many years since I last contacted your sister. I feel like a shy youth starting an affair. Still, she has always been in my heart, and so I tend to feel as if it all happened just yesterday. Will she detest me all the more for being so amorous?"

The young man showed great deference on receiving the letter and took it to his sister.

"You must send a reply," he told her. "I was convinced that he was estranged from me, but to my amazement, he's as warm and kind as in the old days. You

may find such distractions needless, but you cannot refuse to reply just because it violates your moral sensibilities. You're a woman, after all, so it will hardly be considered an unpardonable sin if you give in to your feelings and send him a letter."

She was now even more shy and diffident than she had ever been, but perhaps because a letter from Genji was so rare and precious, she couldn't resist replying:

*What is this place, Ōsaka barrier gate
Its name promises a meeting, yet to reach it
One must cut through overgrown thickets of sorrow*

"This is all like a dream."

Genji had found it impossible to forget the regrets and bitterness of his affair with this woman, and he would disturb and disconcert her heart by sending letters on various occasions.

In the meantime, her husband, the former Vice Governor of Hitachi, was suffering from infirmities likely caused by the ravages of old age. Feeling anxious and depressed, he gave final instructions to his sons concerning his young wife. "Please let her do as her heart desires," he told them repeatedly just before his death, "and serve her just as I did during my lifetime." The old man had seen how tormented his young wife had been, how she had lamented her woeful destiny, and he wondered what would become of her, where would she go once she was left on her own with neither husband nor parents to look after her. He spoke to his sons of the grief and worry that preoccupied his thoughts: "A man's lifespan is limited, and no matter how much he might wish it otherwise, there is no way to halt the passing of time. If only my spirit could be left behind to help her! I'm not even sure about the intentions of my own sons ..." In the end he died without knowing for sure that his wishes would be carried out.

For a time his sons treated her kindly in keeping with his final wishes, but as things turned out, their feelings were superficial, and she endured many bitter experiences. Knowing this was the way of the world, she spent her life grieving over the hardships brought on by her uncertain fate.

The only son who was inclined to treat her with any tenderness was the Governor of Kawachi, who had been attracted to her for many years. "I was deeply moved by my father's last words," he told her, "so please speak to me without reserve, though I know I do not count as a person of any significance." He flattered and cajoled her, making advances that exposed his shockingly base

intentions. Facing such misfortune, she privately came to the realization that if she were to go on living much longer under these dreadful circumstances, rumors that she was involved in a vile relationship would spread eventually. Thus, without saying a word to anyone, she became a nun. Her ladies-in-waiting were upset that she took such an irrevocable action. The Governor of Kawachi was also extremely resentful.

“You may have considered me hateful and wanted to avoid me, but since you have many years ahead of you, how, pray tell, will you get by?”

I have heard that he acquired a reputation as a pompous fool who meddled in things that were none of his business.

¹ *Kokinshū* 1098 (Anonymous): “How I long to send her news over the peaks of Kai, using as my messenger the winds that blow across the mountains.”

² Because the characters used for Ōsaka mean “the slope of meeting,” this place name is often used in poetry for its romantic connotations. The pass is located between the capital and Lake Biwa to the east and was crossed by the main road that led to the Eastern Provinces.

³ This poem turns on two word plays. The first is Ōmichi—the road to Ōmi/the road of meeting (a play identical to that in the place name Ōsaka); the second is *kainashi*—in vain/without shellfish (i.e., not the salt water of the ocean but the fresh water of a lake). Lake Biwa was also known as the lake of Ōmi.

XVII

E-awase

A Contest of Illustrations

FUJITSUBO HAD her heart set on bringing the former High Priestess at Ise into service at her son's court, but Genji was uneasy about such a plan, since the young lady had no special supporters who could provide the kind of assistance she would need at the palace. He was reluctant to bring up the matter with Retired Emperor Suzaku, and he gave up the idea of bringing her to his own residence at Nijo—at least for the time being. Instead, he pretended to know nothing at all about her affairs, all the while discreetly taking on the responsibility of making preparations for her move to the palace, assisting her as if he were her father.

Suzaku was disappointed when he learned that the former High Priestess would go to the palace and that he would not have her for himself. Since it would reflect badly on his reputation if it got around that his wishes had been ignored, he stopped sending notes to her. Still, he had many gifts prepared with special care and sent to her on the day that she began serving Emperor Reizei: a stunning set of robes; a box of ornamental combs like the one he had placed in her hair that time when she left for Ise; a box with various toiletry items; a box of incense jars, all of them exceptional and rare; many varieties of incense and sachets to perfume her robes, all so exquisite that their fragrance permeated far beyond the hundred paces that was the standard for the highest quality scents. It may have been that Suzaku assumed Genji would see these gifts, for he had apparently gone to obsessive lengths in their selection, leading anyone who saw them to believe that he had been planning this for a long time.

As it turned out, Genji happened to be in the young lady's chambers when the gifts arrived. The head of the staff there showed him how they were all arranged. Genji could tell from a glance at just the top of one of the comb boxes that the

gifts were all rare items of the finest craftsmanship. A poem from Suzaku had been attached to the floret knot on the box of ornamental combs:

*That time I placed the Comb of Parting in your hair
And sent you off, saying “Return not!” did the gods
Believe me and decree that we must live apart*

When he read this, many thoughts came to Genji; he felt ashamed and pitied Suzaku. His own uncontrolled passions had brought him much pain and misfortune, and on the basis of his experience, he surmised that Suzaku had fallen in love with the young High Priestess at the Parting Ceremony when she left for Ise. Now she had returned after all these years, and just when he should have been able to realize his desires, he was thwarted by a change of plans for her.

How must he feel? Genji reflected sorrowfully. Having abdicated his position to live in quiet retirement, does he bitterly resent the world? If I were in his place I would certainly be upset. Why did I insist on this arrangement and make sure it was carried out? Why did I cause him such hurt and unhappiness? It's true that I once resented Suzaku bitterly, but he has a kind and gentle nature that I also find endearing. Genji was soon lost in a chaotic swirl of complicated emotions.

“How will she respond to the Retired Emperor? And wasn’t there a letter from Suzaku as well?” Genji interrogated the head of staff, who seemed unsure and hesitant and could not bring herself to produce the letter. The young lady was feeling indisposed and not at all in the mood to compose a response, but her attendants worriedly pressured her, saying, “If you don’t respond at all, it would be an act of disrespect and make you appear heartless.”

Genji overheard the women’s protests and added, “A reply is absolutely required of you. You must send something for the sake of appearances.”

The young lady was quite embarrassed by both Genji’s admonition and the Retired Emperor’s attentions. She recalled Suzaku as she had seen him at the Parting Ceremony, and her memory was so vivid that it seemed as if he was once again before her at that very moment—so youthful and handsome, with tears filling his eyes. Her girlish heart had been deeply moved for reasons she had not been able to fully fathom at the time. This memory led to sorrowful thoughts of her late mother, and, spurred by her emotions, she was able to write a reply, which consisted of just this poem:

*You gave me the injunction to go far away
Never to return — and now that I have returned*

I never to return... and now that I have returned

Those words make me regret that I did not obey

She rewarded the imperial messenger with gifts appropriate to his rank. Genji was curious about what she had said in her reply, but he couldn't very well ask her about it.

Genji's heart was torn, and his thoughts were troubled.

Suzaku is so handsome, I'd love to see him as a woman. And from what I can tell, the young lady's beauty is peerless. They would be a great match, both in terms of looks and age. After all, Emperor Reizei is still a boy, only thirteen, and it may be that privately she regrets that Suzaku's wishes for her have been thwarted.

Now that he had come this far, however, there was no way he could change his mind, and so he ordered that all of the necessary arrangements be carried out. After explaining in detail what he needed to the Consultant who was serving as head of the Office of Palace Repairs—a man with whom he was on familiar terms—he visited the palace.

Out of deference to Suzaku's feelings, Genji had the preparations for the former High Priestess's move carried out discreetly, thinking that he did not want to give the appearance of a proud, doting parent. After the move was completed, whenever he went to the palace he made a show of visiting Emperor Reizei only. Many highborn women who had waited on the young lady previously when she had been the High Priestess at Ise continued serving her. Other fine ladies-in-waiting who had been residing at their family homes also gathered at the Umetsubo, the chambers of the plum courtyard, so that the atmosphere of her salon was second to none.

Ahh, Genji sighed to himself, recalling the temperament of the lady at Rokujō in the old days, if only her mother were still alive! With what delight and efficiency would she be looking after the affairs of her daughter? So many memories came back to him: Her looks and personality were so superior to ordinary women! How I regret that she is gone. There will never again be anyone that extraordinary. Her accomplishments and breeding were beyond compare.

Fujitsubo, being the Imperial Mother, was also at the palace. Her young son, Emperor Reizei, had heard that there was a splendid new lady arriving at the court to be installed as the Umetsubo Consort,¹ and his excitement at the prospect was touchingly sweet. He was mature beyond his years, at ease and worldly in his bearing. Fujitsubo told him, "You must be on your most proper behavior around such a remarkable lady." Secretly, in his heart, Reizei was a

little nervous, afraid that he might be shy and intimidated around a woman nine years his senior. As it turned out, she arrived very late at night. Truly calm and reserved, she was, from what he could tell in the dark, slight of build and delicate—features he found quite alluring.

Because Reizei was accustomed to being with the young lady of the Kokiden, he was comfortable around her and thought her sweet and dear. At the same time, the Umetsubo Consort had about her an air of calm and mature composure, and Genji's behavior toward her was so proper and solicitous that Reizei felt that it wouldn't do at all for him to be distant or aloof with her. And so, as a compromise, he alternated the nights he spent in the chambers of the two ladies, dividing them equally. During his days, however, he spent far more time at the Kokiden, where he could relax and engage in more youthful amusements. Tō no Chūjō, the father of the young lady in the Kokiden, harbored imperial ambitions for his daughter when he presented her to the palace, and he couldn't help but feel uneasy when he learned of the arrival of the new consort, who promised to be a formidable rival.

When the Retired Emperor Suzaku read the Umetsubo Consort's reply to the poem he had attached to the box of ornamental combs, it was all the more difficult for him to get his feelings for her out of his heart. Genji called on him just after he had read the poem, and the two men shared stories. One thing led to another, and Suzaku once again mentioned the occasion when Umetsubo left for Ise to serve as the High Priestess. Though he was still in love with her, he did not let on that he had such feelings, especially given Genji's decision to send her to the palace. For his part, Genji gave no indication that he knew how Suzaku felt, but, driven by curiosity to discover the reasons for Suzaku's attachment, Genji brought up things he had heard about her. By the way Suzaku reacted, it was clear that his feelings for the woman were anything but shallow, and Genji was very sorry for him.

If he is this smitten with her, just how beautiful must she be? Genji wondered, his curiosity piqued. He was now jealous of Suzaku, annoyed that he had never had a good look at her himself. She was so dignified and reserved—if only she had been a bit more innocently careless and let her guard down a little, he might have been able to catch a glimpse of her for himself. The hints of her elegant beauty, which he had gleaned indirectly, had strongly aroused his interest; he was attracted to her, thinking that—on the basis of what he had been able to surmise—she had to be most desirable.

Prince Hyōbu observed that with two women now serving the young Reizei, there was no room for a third, and so he accepted the fact that it would not be easy to send his own daughter to court. Instead, he chose to bide his time.

When Reizei is more mature, he calculated, he won't be able to ignore my daughter then. He may be attracted to those two women for now, but eventually they'll grow competitive with each other, and that will provide an opening.

Reizei had a passion for painting above all other interests. He was so fond of the art, in fact, that his own skills as a painter were unsurpassed. The Umetsubo Consort was also exceptionally gifted at the art, and so she found favor with His Majesty. Reizei's feelings shifted in her direction, and he began to frequent her chambers, where they would sketch and paint for each other. Reizei had long looked kindly on the young noblemen in his service who had studied the art, so it was hardly surprising that he was captivated by the elegant atmosphere of the salon of this beautiful young woman who drew so freely, without regard to formal rules of composition, and who would recline next to him, looking young and vibrant as she paused her brush to consider what she would draw next. His feelings for her grew noticeably stronger than before, and his visits more frequent.

Tō no Chūjō caught wind of Reizei's change in attachments. A man of brash, modern temperament, competitive and unwilling to accept defeat, he wondered, *Is my daughter inferior in any way?* Rousing himself to action, he summoned the top master painters and, swearing them to secrecy, had them create wonderful paintings on paper of the finest quality. Tō no Chūjō told them, "Illustrations based on scenes and characters from tales are familiar to the viewer and can be understood at a glance. Their quality is thus more easily discernible." He then set about collecting the most interesting tales and had the master painters illustrate them. He also commissioned paintings of events or scenes from each month of the year, adding captions to them in a fresh, original style. He had these illustrations brought out for Reizei at his daughter's chambers in the Kokiden. They had been carefully prepared specifically for the delight of His Majesty so that he would want to come to the Kokiden to look at them again. For that reason, Tō no Chūjō was reluctant to bring them out casually or to let them circulate around the court. Instead, he refused to share them and hid them away.

Genji laughed when he heard that his rival was monopolizing those illustrations and unwilling to let them be shown in the Umetsubo. "It would seem," he remarked, "that Tō no Chūjō has yet to mend his youthful ways." Later, when he was speaking with Reizei, he went even further: "I'm shocked that he has so rashly hidden away these illustrations. It must be upsetting to Your Highness not to be allowed to peruse them at your leisure. I have some illustrations dating back to earlier reigns, and I shall have them brought to you."

Genji had chests and cabinets containing old and new illustrations at his Nijō villa brought out and opened, and together with Murasaki he selected and sorted

various illustrations that still had an appealing modern sensibility. Among the illustrations that he inherited from his father were some depicting the stories of the beautiful consorts Yang Guifei and Wang Chao-chün. These were fascinating and moving, but they decided against including them in the selection because they depicted inauspicious subjects inappropriate for the present occasion.

Genji pulled out a box that contained the illustrated journal recounting his travels through Suma and Akashi and took this opportunity to show it to Murasaki. Anyone with a modicum of sensitivity, even a lady who was seeing these illustrations for the first time without knowing anything at all about Genji's feelings, would have found it hard to hold back her tears. That being the case, how much more difficult it must have been for Genji and Murasaki to forget that period in their lives when they were constantly tormented by the feeling of being caught in some horrible dream. They grieved as they recalled all that had happened, and Murasaki expressed her resentment of Genji for not showing her the journal sooner:

*Grieving alone in the capital
I should have gone to see them myself
Those shores where the fishermen abide*

"Had I gone there perhaps I might have found comfort for my lonely anxieties."
Genji was moved to compassion.

*Viewing these sketches, their scenes even more vivid
Than when I looked upon those strands with grieving eyes
My tears come back like waves returning to the shore*

He must show these illustrations to Fujitsubo as well and to no one else. He selected only those paintings that had no imperfections and that clearly represented the appearance of the bays he had seen, and as he went through each one he was constantly thinking fondly of that lady at the villa in Akashi and wondering how she was faring.

Hearing that Genji was collecting illustrations, Tō no Chūjō grew increasingly competitive and began having spindles, mounting paper, and decorative cords of the highest quality prepared. It was around the tenth day of the third month—a delightful season when skies were balmy and clear and everyone felt relaxed. Even at the palace courtiers had leisure time, since there were few ceremonies and events scheduled during this month. Both the young lady in the Kokiden and

the Umetsubo Consort passed the time absorbed in their paintings. Genji was similarly preoccupied. Driven to present something amazing for Reizei's viewing pleasure, he began to collect paintings even more earnestly than before. Many kinds of paintings were brought to the salons of the two ladies, but because illustrations of stories were the most detailed and familiar type, the Umetsubo Consort's salon focused on collecting examples from tales of old that had the highest reputation, while the salon of the Kokiden lady commissioned and collected only fresh and unusual illustrations based on contemporary tales—illustrations that, at a cursory glance, looked incomparably superior. It seemed that the higher-ranking ladies-in-waiting of the Emperor Reizei—at least those who had refined taste and good breeding—were spending all their time during this period judging this or that illustration.

Fujitsubo also happened to be in residence at the palace at that time, and, because it was difficult for her to set aside her interest in these various illustrations, she relaxed her religious austerities to look at them. Hearing the ladies who served her son debating the merits of individual illustrations, Fujitsubo divided them into two sides, the Left and the Right, in the manner of a poetry contest. The Left was composed of attendants who served in the Umetsubo—Heinaishi, Jijū, and Shōshō—while the Right was represented by women who served in the Kokiden—Daini, Chūjō, and Hyōe. These women were among the most discriminating at the court at that time, and Fujitsubo enjoyed listening to their clever, distinctive styles of argumentation. The first round pitted an illustration from *The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter*, a work that was the ancestor of the tale as a literary form, against one from the “Toshikage” section of *The Tale of the Hollow Tree*.

“This has grown old over the generations like graceful bamboo piling joint on joint,” the Left stated, “and though there is nothing particularly elegant about it any more, Kaguyahime’s destiny, which was to ascend to the far heavens without being defiled by the corruption of the world, was noble. Because it is a tale from the age of the gods, it is no doubt beyond the understanding of superficial women.”

The Right responded, “Since the heavenly realm to which Kaguyahime ascended is truly beyond human conception, no one can know anything about it. As for her ties to this world, she was born inside a stalk of bamboo and would thus appear to be a person of humble lineage. Though her radiance illuminated a single house, she never became Empress, and so it never shone alongside the gracious radiance of the Emperor. Abe no Ōshi threw away a thousand pieces of gold thinking he would buy the robe made of the fire rat’s pelt, but the robe disappeared in an instant and his efforts came to naught. Kuramochi no Miko,

while knowing the deep truth about Hōrai, made a forgery of the jeweled branch and thereby damaged its reputation—a serious flaw in the story.”

The illustration for *The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter* was by Kose no Ōmi, and the caption was by Ki no Tsurayuki. It was mounted on broidered silk and Kan’ya paper with a magenta binding and a sandalwood spindle—all in all a rather ordinary presentation.

“Although Toshikage was buffeted by heavy waves and wind and carried off to an unknown country,” the Right retorted, “he was still able to reach his planned destination. Subsequently, he spread his wonderful talents in China and Japan and left his fame behind him. This illustration combines Chinese and Japanese elements. It has many beautiful points and is without equal.”

The illustration was on white paper with blue binding and a yellow jade spindle. Because the illustration was by Tsunenor and the caption by Michikaze, it possessed a lovely, up-to-date quality that seemed to shine before the eyes. The Left had no response.

Next, illustrations from *Tales of Ise* and *Jōsanmi* were brought together. Again, it was difficult to decide. In this case as well the painting presented by the Right depicted in a bright, engaging style the appearance of the palace and the contemporary world. It was exceedingly beautiful. Heinaishi made the case for the Left:

*Show no regard for the deep spirit
Of the sea at Ise, must thoughtless waves
Sweep away all of these ancient remains*

“Can the reputation of Narihira possibly be sullied by a common love story, however clever and well told?” She was, however, unable to argue with any spirit. Daini countered for the Right:

*To a heart summoned by His Majesty
Above Heaven’s clouds, the thousandfold depths
Of that sea appear quite shallow indeed*

Fujitsubo interceded: “Though the noble heart of Hyōei no Ōkimi is truly difficult to set aside, Narihira’s fame cannot be sullied.”

*At a glance perhaps these bays have grown tedious
But can the fame of the fisherman of Ise²
That has been passed down through the ages be sullied*

Debating vigorously back and forth like this in feminine disputation, the women exhausted their words on each scroll, unable to come to a judgment. The younger ladies in attendance, whose knowledge of these matters was shallow, were completely caught up in the discussions, living and dying with every word. Unfortunately for them, Fujitsubo kept most of the illustrations hidden away, so that even the ladies-in-waiting who served Emperor Reizei and those who served Fujitsubo were able to glimpse only a small portion of the entire collection.

Genji came to the palace and thought the women's discussions were captivating. "Let's hold a similar contest before His Majesty and decide the winners and losers then," he suggested. He had in fact been considering such a contest for some time and had been holding in reserve some extraordinary works from his collection. He included among those special illustrations his two scrolls from Suma and Akashi, which he had thought to show to Fujitsubo alone. Tō no Chūjō was not to be outdone. It had become something of a fad during this period for all the courtiers to collect interesting illustrations mounted on paper for the purpose of including them in scrolls. "It doesn't seem quite sporting," Genji suggested, "to have new ones created specially for the contest. We should simply go with what we already own." Regardless, Tō no Chūjō secretly opened a studio and commissioned more works. Retired Emperor Suzaku, when he learned of all these goings-on, made a present of his personal collection to Umetsubo.

Suzaku's illustrations were truly magnificent. They included scenes from the calendar of court events drawn by various old masters. Emperor Daigo had added explanatory captions in his own hand. In addition, Suzaku commissioned Kose no Kinmochi to paint an illustration of the Parting Ceremony held when the Umetsubo Consort left for Ise to serve as High Priestess—the event that had so deeply touched his heart. Suzaku had given minutely detailed descriptions of the ceremony to Kinmochi, and this illustration was added to a scroll depicting the events that had taken place during Suzaku's reign. These scrolls were placed in an elegant aloeswood box that had been carved with lattice fretwork and secured with equally fashionable floret knots. It made a dazzlingly modern presentation. A Captain of the Left Guard who was serving at the Retired Emperor's residence delivered the box and recited Suzaku's message. To the solemn painting that depicted the arrival of the High Priestess's palanquin at the palace for the Parting Ceremony, Suzaku had simply added a poem:

*No longer at the court, I remain as apart from you
As when duties and the sacred rope separated us ...
Yet even now I cannot set aside all my feelings*

It would have been disrespectful had she not replied. Struggling with painful emotions, she broke off a piece of the ornamental comb used years earlier at the Parting Ceremony, and attached the following to it:

*Once inside the sacred straw rope, now inside the palace ...
I feel as though nothing is as it was and find myself
Longing for those times when I served as Priestess to the gods*

She wrapped the piece of her comb in light blue Chinese paper and had it taken to Suzaku. The gifts and stipend that she presented to the imperial messenger were exceptional.

Suzaku was deeply moved when he read her reply poem, and wanted so much to return to the time when he had ruled as Emperor. He resented Genji's behavior, but he realized that it was perhaps justified—recompense for all that had happened at the time of the exile.

Suzaku had inherited paintings from his mother, the former Kokiden Consort, and reportedly sent many of them to the young lady who was now installed in the Kokiden. Oborozukiyo likewise was no ordinary connoisseur of painting, and she too collected many works of charming design.

The date was set for the contest to be held before Emperor Reizei. The announcement seemed rather sudden, but preparations were carried out with a sense of propriety—though everything was handled with a light touch to ensure a stylish event. Paintings from both the Left and the Right sides were brought forth. Reizei was seated in the Dining Room Court of the Seiryōden, and the women of the two sides were arrayed to his north and south. He faced toward the Kōrōden, to the west of the Seiryōden, where the male courtiers were seated on the hurdle veranda, each man facing his favorite lady. The scrolls of the Left were in rosewood boxes that had been set on sappanwood stands covered with dark, plum-colored cloth of figured Chinese silk. The legs of the stands were carved in floral designs and rested on purple Chinese brocade. Six young page girls sat next to the stands, each wearing a ceremonial outer robe of white with red lining and layered robes of scarlet and wisteria underneath. They looked truly beautiful—not only because of their appearance but also because their bearing revealed how well they had been trained. The paintings of the Right were contained in dark aloeswood boxes that rested on top of small desks of light aloeswood. The carved legs of these desks had been set on top of aquamarine Korean brocade, which was attached to the legs by cords. The overall presentation created an effect that was lively and modern. The young page girls for the Right were dressed in white ceremonial robes with willow

green linings over robes of mountain-rose yellow. The page girls all arranged their boxes in front of Emperor Reizei, whose ladies-in-waiting were also divided into Left and Right, with those on the Left seated in front of him and those on the Right seated behind. These women were each decked out in distinguishing colors appropriate to their respective sides—reddish-purple for the Left, greenish-blue for the Right.

At His Majesty's summons, Genji and Tō no Chūjō were in attendance. Genji's younger half brother, Prince Sochinomiya, was also there. Reizei had not sent out many invitations to this contest since it was, after all, not strictly a formal public event. However, because Sochinomiya was a well-bred man of exquisitely refined taste and a true connoisseur of painting, a summons went out for him to appear when Reizei learned that he was at the palace. Had Genji been privately lobbying for him to attend? As it turned out, he was asked to serve as judge.

The illustrations were all spectacular, and Sochinomiya couldn't come to a decision. The works depicting events of the seasons brought out by the Left were incomparable. The old masters had chosen interesting subjects and painted them with a fluid style that betrayed no hesitation in their brushstrokes. However, because they were painted on paper, they were smaller than screen paintings and thus incapable of representing fully the abundant beauty of mountains and bodies of water. In contrast, the illustrations presented by the Right seemed preoccupied with mere technique, with whimsy and artistic imagination. Yet despite their shallowness, these more modern works were in no way inferior to—or shamed by—the works of antiquity, since they possessed superior qualities of vitality and immediacy. As a result, numerous engrossing arguments flew back and forth all day between the Left and the Right.

By having the sliding doors on the north side of the Dining Room Court kept open, Fujitsubo was able to watch and participate. Genji knew that she had a deep appreciation of the arts, and he considered her taste and discernment second to none—so much so that he was delighted whenever she intervened to correct an unsatisfactory judgment. Still, it was impossible to come to a final decision, and the contest continued on into the evening.

At the end, when the Left brought out its last scroll—Genji's illustrated journal of his travels in Suma—Tō no Chūjō was in a state of agitation. The Right had given careful consideration to the order of its presentations and had selected an astoundingly beautiful scroll to bring out last. The scroll presented by the Left, however, was magnificent beyond description—executed by a master in full command of his art who had quietly and deliberately created a work that gave full range to his talents and imagination. Beginning with

Sochinomiya, everyone was moved to tears. They looked at the pictures and realized to an even greater degree than at the time Genji was exiled how sad and painful it had been for him. The appearance of the world in those days and the feelings he had kept in his heart at the time came back as if they were being experienced at that very moment. Genji had clearly represented the unfamiliar bays and strands at Suma just as he had seen them, keeping nothing from view. Here and there *kana* were mixed in with cursive characters. It was not a conventional, formal diary, and yet the breathtaking manner in which the poetry had been incorporated into the illustrations made the viewer yearn to see more. It utterly captivated everyone. Interest shifted away from the many other paintings to focus on this one scroll alone. Its beauty was so deeply felt that everything gave way before it, and the Left was victorious.

Dawn was approaching, and Genji felt a mix of emotions, both triumph and sorrow. As cups of wine were passed around, he began to reminisce, telling stories of bygone days.

“From the time I was little,” he said to Sochinomiya, “I devoted myself to my studies, and my late father, seeing that I might perhaps have acquired some small talents, admonished me. He warned that those who get too deeply immersed in their studies find it extremely difficult to achieve both happiness and a long life, and he wondered if that wasn’t because scholarship is so prized by society. He reminded me that I was of royal birth, inferior to no one, and that there was no reason to go out of my way to pursue the path of scholarship. Even so, he had me tutored in various arts, and though I did not lack skill in any of them, there wasn’t one in particular that I could consider my special talent. Strangely, for some reason I was drawn to the arts of the brush—painting and calligraphy. Trivial diversions, to be sure, but there have been times when I longed to paint to my heart’s content. Then came that unanticipated time in my life when I was exiled; seeing directly for myself the sublime depths of the sea spreading out in all directions, I was able to realize my full potential as an artist, which I’d never dreamed of possessing. Still, there are limits to what a brush can represent of reality, and I am aware that I was not able to render those scenes exactly as I experienced them in my soul. Having had no opportunity until now, I was not inclined to show them to you. And now that you’ve seen them under these circumstances, I worry about my reputation. Will later generations think me frivolous and self-absorbed?”

Sochinomiya replied, “There is not one talent that can ever be mastered if the mind and spirit are detached and unfocused. There are masters who can teach the various arts, and so if a person has natural aptitude, even though the depth or shallowness of his learning may be unknown, what he has been taught will

naturally be transferred to his work and reveal itself in the final product. With the arts of the brush and with Go, however, the native genius of a person mysteriously reveals itself, and an otherwise undistinguished person who doesn't appear to put much effort into training can become a master. Sometimes a child who is superior to his siblings, who enjoys and acquires ability in all the arts, will be born into a noble house. All of the princes and princesses sired by our late father were taught various skills by him directly, each learning in his or her own way. Yet of all of us, you were especially diligent in pursuing your studies, and that has paid off in the talents he bequeathed to you. I remember our father remarking once that your talents were not limited to composing Chinese poetry, but that you also had a gift for both the seven- and the thirteen-string koto, the flute, and the *biwa* lute. Everyone at court has long acknowledged that you have those talents, but I always assumed that painting was a trivial hobby for you—one that you merely dabbled in as the mood took you or the opportunity presented itself. And now, here you are, with a talent that overshadows the work of master painters of the past, showing them to disadvantage." Sochinomiya was rambling on and on, but as he recalled his father, he teared up again—perhaps the wine was making him sentimental.

It was past the twentieth day of the month, and a last-quarter moon rose in the east. Though the moonlight did not shine directly into the western side of the Seiryōden, the sky presented a lovely prospect. Instruments were called for from the Bureau of Books and Drawings, and Tō no Chūjō was asked to play the six-string Japanese koto. Though Genji was known as a virtuoso on this instrument, Tō no Chūjō's skill was unsurpassed. Sochinomiya played a thirteen-string koto, Genji played a seven-string instrument, and the lady-in-waiting Shōshō accompanied them on the *biwa*. Reizei requested certain members of the court who were good at rhythm to mark time. The music was a delight. When dawn broke, the colors of the flowers and the faces of individuals grew faintly visible. Birds began to twitter, and everyone's heart was light as a bright, auspicious day arrived. Fujitsubo presented gifts and stipends, and Sochinomiya received another robe to go with the one he had received earlier as a reward for judging.

For some time thereafter, the court was abuzz over the judgment in favor of Genji's illustrated journal. Genji ordered that the Suma scroll be presented to Fujitsubo; when, out of curiosity, she asked about the other works he had painted before and after the Suma scroll, he told her that he would show each of them to her in due course. Genji watched in joy as Reizei savored the scrolls to his satisfaction. Though the contest comparing illustrations had been a minor event, he had at least been able to do something to support the Umetsubo Consort. This seemed to trouble Tō no Chūjō for a time, for he worried what would happen to

his daughter's standing at the court and to his own political ambitions. However, Reizei's familiar affection for the young lady in the Kokiden seemed as strong as ever, and because there were private indications that His Majesty continued to be deeply devoted to her, Tō no Chūjō felt reassured in the end knowing that she had not lost favor.

When it came to matters such as proper ceremonials, Genji very much wanted to establish precedents that people in coming ages would speak of as having originated in his time. The present reign was an exceptional high point, and remarkable ingenuity was shown even for trivial private entertainments. However, he also knew that this world was evanescent, and he was determined to retire from it once he knew for certain that Emperor Reizei had reached full maturity.

Examples from the past teach us that men who stand out in society and attain a high station in life while still young cannot expect to live long, he thought. I have achieved in this reign a status that has surpassed all my hopes. In midlife I was sunk in the misery of exile, and in recompense for my suffering, I have lived long enough to see this day. But my present glory will only bring future worry. I should withdraw quietly from the world and perform my devotions for the life to come. In doing so, I will extend the number of years I have left in this one.

Musing thus, he resolved to take possession of some peaceful mountain villa and have a meditation hall constructed there. Yet even as he was mulling over details such as the Buddhist statuary and sutras he would need to have prepared, he was finding it difficult to abandon the affairs of this world any time soon, since he was preoccupied with ensuring that the son his late wife had given him and the daughter he had by the lady at Akashi were being properly reared and educated. Thus, it was difficult to surmise Genji's true intentions.

¹ For the sake of simplicity, I have chosen from this point on to refer to the former High Priestess at Ise, the daughter of the lady at Rokujō, as either the Umetsubo Consort, or Umetsubo, taking the appellation from her palace residence. The traditional name for this character is Akikonomu, meaning the lady who “prefers the autumn.” This name comes from a poetic exchange in the *Usugumo* chapter below. Although the association of this character with the season is important, the original text does not use the name Akikonomu but employs terms of identification that stress her status—first as High Priestess, then as imperial consort, and finally as empress.

² The real-life poet Narihira is the literary hero of many of the passages in *Tales of Ise*.

XVIII

Matsukaze

Wind in the Pines

THE CONSTRUCTION of the new annex on the east side of the Nijō villa was completed, and Genji moved Hanachirusato into its west hall, which was connected to the old villa by a gallery containing offices and space for the necessary staff, who would be under her supervision. Genji reserved the east hall of the annex for the Akashi lady and had an unusually large north hall designed with its interior partitioned into numerous apartments. He planned to use those apartments as a place where he could gather together the many women who were dear to him—even those with whom he had conducted only the briefest affair—and who, having exchanged vows to be forever faithful, depended on him for support. The partitioned spaces were delightfully appointed so as to please the individual tastes of each woman. The main hall of the new residence was left unoccupied, but because Genji planned to use it as his own quarters whenever he visited, he had it furnished appropriately.

He had never ceased corresponding with the Akashi lady, and though he continued to insist that she move to the capital, she remained so self-conscious about her status that she wavered, at a loss what to do.

I've heard rumors that he has treated even the most distinguished noblewomen cruelly: not altogether abandoning them, but neglecting to visit all the same, leaving them in a state of limbo that makes their misery even worse. Someone as insignificant as me could scarcely mingle in the company of such highborn ladies, so how would he end up treating me? I'd expose my daughter to the shame of my lowly status as I waited around for that rare occasion when he might come stealing in to see me. How awkward and miserable it will be once I'm the laughingstock of the court.

Though she would torment herself with such musings, she knew that it would

be a pity to raise her daughter in the provinces and not give her the chance to be counted among the great ladies of the capital. And so in the end, with much reluctance, she decided that she could not reject Genji's demand out of hand. Her parents sadly sympathized with her plight, thinking it perfectly natural for her to be torn, and they wracked their brains trying to come up with a solution to her dilemma.

The novitiate then recalled that his wife's maternal grandfather, the late Prince Nakatsukasa, had resided long ago in a villa overlooking the banks of the Ōi River. There had been no heir to take the property following the Prince's death, and the main buildings had gradually fallen into a state of disrepair. He summoned the man who had been serving as a caretaker for the estate all these years to discuss the property.

"I decided years ago to turn away from affairs of the world and retire quietly to a life in this provincial abode. However, just as I near the end of my life, an unexpected turn of events had forced me to once again seek out a residence in the capital. Still, it would be very awkward to suddenly reappear in the blinding light of society, and for my daughter, who's accustomed to a rustic lifestyle, the anxieties over the prospect of returning to the capital are not easily calmed. Thus, I thought that perhaps she might move into Prince Nakatsukasa's old residence. I shall have all the needed furnishings moved there from Akashi, so could you please have the buildings repaired and the grounds fixed up so that it's suitable for occupancy?"

"No one has lived there for years," the caretaker replied, "and the grounds are so terribly overgrown and eerie-looking that I've had to fix up the servants' quarters behind the main hall just to have a place to live. On top of that, the Palace Minister, our lord Genji, commissioned the construction of a meditation hall nearby, and they just started work on it this past spring. So the area around there is really bustling with activity. In fact, they're building several imposing halls and temples, and there are so many people working there that—if it's quiet you're after—that old villa is really not the place for you."

"I don't care about such matters," the novitiate continued. "You see, I have good reason to think that I can count on the assistance of the Palace Minister. Naturally, I shall see to all of the fittings and furnishings in due course. For the time being, I want you to quickly take care of the general repairs and preparations."

"I know it's not my residence, but since there was no one to inherit the property, I have lived in seclusion there and am now very much used to my quiet surroundings. The paddies and fields of the manor estate had fallen into disuse, and so I petitioned the former Senior Assistant Minister for Popular Affairs. He

granted me rights to those lands in exchange for paying the appropriate gifts and taxes, and now I own and cultivate them.”

The caretaker was obviously suspicious of the novitiate, afraid that his crops and income might be confiscated. As he resisted the demands being placed on him, his bearded face showed his annoyance and his nose flushed red.

“I couldn’t care less who has the rights to the fields,” the novitiate told him. “Go on using them just as you have all these years. But I have documents proving my claims to the estate ... I haven’t looked at them in years, ever since I turned my back on that sort of thing, but I’ll check into the details about the rights immediately.”

Based on what the novitiate had intimated, the caretaker sensed that Genji was somehow involved in all this behind the scenes, and he calculated that any resistance on his part might lead to trouble. This implied threat, coupled with the many gifts the novitiate lavished on him, convinced him to hurry off and undertake the repairs.

As it turned out, Genji had no idea that the novitiate was making such plans, and he could not understand the hesitation of the Akashi lady: *If my daughter remains in such an isolated place, he fretted, won’t people at the court gossip about her later on, besmirching her reputation and thinking her a rustic of low breeding?* But then he received a message from the novitiate informing him that repairs had been completed on a certain villa at Ōi—a property the old man had only recently recalled owning. Genji at last understood what was going on: the novitiate had devised a plan to ease his daughter’s transition to the capital. Since the Akashi lady seemed so ill at ease over the prospect of mingling with the nobility, Genji could only admire the foresight her father had shown in trying to alleviate any regrets she might have in making the move.

The one person Genji always turned to for help in arranging his private affairs was Koremitsu, who was now a high-ranking lord himself. Genji sent his trusted aide to check out the situation at the Ōi villa and make sure that everything was ready and that it was an appropriate place for him to visit.

“The surroundings are charming,” Koremitsu reported. “Because it overlooks the river, the place resembles that residence on the shore at Akashi.”

Genji was pleased to hear this report, since such a location would not be a bad spot at all for the Akashi lady. The temple he had commissioned was just to the south of the Daikakuji Temple¹ and its main hall, which faced out onto a waterfall, possessed an elegant appearance that was in no way inferior to the beauty of the Daikakuji itself. The main hall of the Akashi lady’s new residence nearby was plain and simple in design and situated within the shade of an indescribably lovely pine grove on the banks of the river. Overall, the estate,

with its resemblance to a mountain village, created a beautiful impression. Genji saw to it that everything was properly taken care of for her, including the interior fixtures.

With extreme secrecy, Genji sent a few of his most trusted retainers down to Akashi. Realizing that the time had come and that she could no longer postpone the move, the lady felt deep sadness at having to leave behind the shores where she had spent so many years of her life; her heart ached at the thought that her father would now be alone and forlorn. Everything seemed to make her grieve. *Why has it been my fate*, she wondered, *to have to be tormented by all these troubles?* She envied women who had never attracted Genji's attention, which had fallen on her like dew. Her parents were overjoyed at their daughter's good fortune in being escorted to the capital like this—it was, after all, the fulfillment of their aspirations, which they had spent years dreaming of in their sleep and praying for in their waking hours. At the same time, the novitiate was experiencing the unbearable grief of knowing that he would have to suffer through life without his daughter and granddaughter, and he went about all day, from morning to evening, in a listless mood, distracted and muttering the same words over and over: "Once they've left, will I ever be able to see my little Princess again?"

His wife, the nun, was also in utter misery. She had been living apart from her husband for many years now, starting from the time he took religious vows and retreated to his hermitage, and so there was no one to hold her back, no attachment to keep her from accompanying her daughter. Yet it seemed abnormal to be leaving her husband behind, even if their relationship had been superficial—the kind of marriage where the couple sees each other only briefly on rare occasions. She had grown used to being with him, and no matter how eccentric he might be or how strange his tonsure or his behavior, they had exchanged vows with the assumption that their bond would keep them together until their lives had run their course.² That thought made her feel even more lonely, given that she was now to leave behind the place where she had expected to spend her remaining years. The younger ladies-in-waiting, who had been so depressed at having to live out in the provinces, were of course thrilled to be going back to the capital, but even they wept into their sleeves when they realized that, once they left, unlike the waves that always returned after pulling out to sea, they would probably never touch these lovely shores again.

It was autumn, when sensitivity to the poignant passing of time is at its height, and on the morning of the departure a chill wind blew and insects cried out as if they, too, were busily making preparations. While the Akashi lady stared out at the sea, the novitiate, who had arisen in the middle of the night as was his

custom, could be heard sniffling as he went about his devotions. Although it was bad luck for the journey for anyone to cry or to speak unhappily, it was hard to contain emotions. The little girl looked so sweet, so truly lovely, that her grandfather thought her a radiant pearl, a jewel that glows in the night. He had always held her, never letting her stray far from him, and she was close to him, constantly making sure he was with her. Sadly aware that he had to accept his strange destiny as one who had withdrawn from the world, even if it resulted in hateful experiences that he preferred to avoid, he still lost control, wondering how he could ever get by without seeing his granddaughter even for a brief moment.

*Far you travel on this road of parting
To meet the destiny for which I prayed
Still, I cannot hold back these old man's tears*

“This won’t do at all!” he muttered, wiping his eyes in an attempt to hide his tears.

The nun replied:

*We departed the capital as one
But now I make the journey back alone
Will I lose my way as I cross those fields*

It was natural for her to weep. She thought about the vows they had exchanged, how long they had been together, and about how foolish it was to be returning to a world they had abandoned, putting their trust in Genji’s uncertain promises of love for their daughter.

The Akashi lady also responded to him:

*Dare I hope to meet you again in this life
For I have no faith in this uncertain world
In which the span of our years remains unknown*

“At least see me off as far as the capital,” she pleaded insistently, but the novitiate explained that the situation made that impossible, even though his face betrayed the apprehension he felt about the journey ahead.

“When I first turned my back on the world,” he said, “and made up my mind to come to this unknown province, it was all for your sake, since I thought that spending all of my time concentrating on your upbringing would somehow

satisfy my aspirations. Though many things happened while I was Governor that made me realize my own destiny would not be auspicious, at the same time I couldn't tolerate the distasteful prospect of returning to the capital and accepting life as just another mediocre former Governor—someone who wouldn't be able to restore the ragged, tangled garden of his residence to its former glory, who would leave a reputation far and wide as a pathetic fool in both his public role and his private affairs, who would bring shame to the memory of his late father. Feeling that I had no other choice, I resigned myself for good to the life of a novice, taking vows so that people at court would assume I had a reason for leaving the capital and staying in the provinces. But then you grew to womanhood, and as you matured and began to understand your circumstances, I found myself lost in the darkness of a parent's heart, lamenting that you should be hidden away in this pathetic backwater. Keeping you here was as wasteful as wearing brocade at night, and it was in that state of mind that I prayed to the Buddha and the gods, asking with single-minded devotion that you not be pulled down to my lowly status by remaining here, and that you not end up living in the hut of a mountain peasant like me. Then I witnessed the unexpected joy of your relationship with Genji.

"Though I continued to fret and grieve about my lowly status—I wondered if it would hinder you, given his exalted place in the world—I put my faith in the karma of my precious little Princess. Thus it would be shameful for her to spend any more days and months on these shores, and though it is hard for me to keep my emotions in check, knowing I will not see her again, when I consider my little Princess's destiny, I feel that I must give up the world for all time. For if, as my dream foretold, the two of you are meant to radiate a light that will illuminate the whole court, then it must also be part of your karmic destiny for your father, rustic peasant that I have become, to have to endure a troubled heart for a time. There are examples of people who, though born in the heavens, had to leave there for a short time only to return in the end by passing through the fearful realms of Hell, beasts and hungry ghosts. So, with those examples in mind, we must part today forever. Should you hear that I have died, give no thought to holding a funeral or memorial services for me. Do not allow yourself to be moved by that final parting, which none can evade." Words poured from his lips, and he continued rambling on. "Until that evening when I change to the smoke of my pyre, I shall pray fervently for my little Princess in each of my six daily devotions!" By now his face was twisted with grief.

The escort Genji had sent was determined to maintain strict secrecy. They pointed out that it would have been too ostentatious to go in a large procession of many carriages, but that it would also be troublesome—and possibly

dangerous—

to break up the party into smaller groups. So they chose instead to travel discreetly by boat, and, at around eight in the morning, during the Hour of the Dragon, they set sail. The achingly beautiful morning mists over the bay, which a poet of old described,³ obscured the boat as it rowed away. The novitiate was overwhelmed by sadness. Far from achieving an enlightened, detached heart and mind that renounced all worldly things, it seemed as if his very spirit had left his body as he gazed vacantly after the boat.

Because the nun was returning to the capital after living here for so many years, her heart was full, and she wept.

*Rowed out to sea upon a fishing boat
I head back to a place I once gave up
A nun now, focused on that distant shore⁴*

The Akashi lady composed this:

*How many autumns have passed here
Is it true that I'm returning
On this drifting bark of sorrow*

They had a favorable wind behind them and arrived at the Ōi villa on schedule. The party had not wanted to attract attention on the road from Naniwa, so they wore humble travel garb. The villa on the river was attractive, and the grove of pines that encircled the estate reminded them of their residence in Akashi. It felt as though they had not moved at all. Recalling the old days when Prince Nakatsukasa lived in this villa, the nun was deeply moved. The galleries and other additions had been elegantly constructed, and the stream flowing through the garden was charming. Though it did not have a warm, lived-in feel to it yet, since not every detail had been seen to, it was nonetheless a perfectly livable space. Genji had given specific orders to his closest retainers to have a welcoming banquet prepared for the arriving party.

Several days passed while he tried to come up with some excuse to give Murasaki so that he might be able to leave and pay a visit to the villa at Ōi. Although the Akashi lady had come up to the capital, his failure to visit left her despondent, and because she had nothing to occupy her idle time, she grew homesick. To while away the tedious hours, she would play the seven-string koto that he had left her as a memento. Her grief, which was intensified by the loneliness of the season, was intolerable, and so she would go to a room where

there was no one else about and play at her ease. Whenever she did, the sound of the wind in the pines, rustling, hesitant, and sad, would accompany her. One day the nun, who was lying down in a melancholy mood, arose as she heard the mingled sounds.

*Having returned at last, now wearing a nun's robes
The wind in the pines echoing round this villa
Sounds so like the wind in the pines at Akashi*

Her daughter replied:

*I sadly yearn for friends back home, thinking
Who here can understand my rustic speech
Or recognize the halting airs I play*

She spent day after lonely day like this, and Genji felt uneasy about the situation. He would have gone to visit her without being all that concerned that someone might spot him had it not been for the fact that he had not yet clearly apprised his beloved Murasaki of all that was taking place at the Ōi villa; as usual, he was worried that she might hear gossip about it from someone else. So at last he finally broached the topic.

“I have business to attend to regarding a villa I’m building at Katsura, and ... well, you see, I’ve put it off longer than I intended. I also agreed to visit someone who lives near Katsura; they’ve been waiting for me and I feel a little guilty about not going to see them. On top of all that, I have to visit the meditation hall at Sagano to take care of the decoration of the statue to Buddha there, and so I expect I’ll be gone for two or three days.”

Upon hearing that Genji had suddenly started building a villa at Katsura, Murasaki was not at all pleased, suspecting that this project was somehow related to the Akashi lady.

“And I suppose,” she answered with a disgruntled expression, “that like Wang Chih you’ll be gone long enough to need a replacement for the handle of your ax?⁵ I can hardly wait ...”

“There you go again, worrying yourself over nothing,” Genji assured her. “Everyone acknowledges how much I’ve changed my ways—everyone except you.” He went on in this fashion, cajoling her, trying to cheer her up, until the sun was high.

He traveled to the Ōi villa, taking every precaution to ensure secrecy, including choosing only men familiar with the situation to serve as his escort and

outrunners. He arrived at twilight. Even when he dressed down in hunting robes, he still looked incomparably handsome. Now, however, dressed in stunning formal court attire—which he had chosen expressly for this visit to the Akashi lady—he had about him a dazzling aura, a radiance like nothing else in the world that seemed to dispel the darkness in her heart, which had been so troubled over the future facing her little Princess. At once charmed and deeply moved at the first sight of his daughter, Genji's feelings were anything but shallow. He now bitterly resented all the time that she had been kept apart from him. Courtiers had raised a fuss about the son his late wife had given to him, always going on about how adorable the boy looked, but back then those sycophants considered his son nothing more than a means to curry favor with Genji, who at the time had been in a position of power. In the case of his little daughter, he thought her precious appearance was an obvious indication that she would grow to be a superior woman. He was utterly captivated by the effulgent sweetness of her innocent laughter. The nurse he had dispatched to Akashi had been gaunt and haggard at the time, but she had matured and was more graceful-looking. She spoke to him in familiar terms, telling him all that had happened over the months, and Genji felt a twinge of pity for her, since she had to spend all those days near the salt-burning huts on the shore.

Genji spoke to the Akashi lady, saying, “This residence is still quite a ways off, making it difficult for someone in my position to visit very often. You really must move to the place I’ve prepared for you next to my villa in Nijo.”

The lady would have none of it.

“I’d rather spend more time here,” she replied, “since I remain unaccustomed to life in the capital.” They spent the night exchanging intimate vows until dawn broke.

Genji ordered the caretaker and the new members of the staff to finish outfitting and repairing the residence. Because he had to go to the Katsura villa, workers from Genji’s nearby manors had gathered there already. They went to Ōi to meet him, and he put them to work fixing up the gardens where the plants had been trampled or knocked over.

“Some of the large rocks have fallen or been removed, but if the grounds are carefully tended the scene could be rather delightful,” Genji remarked. “Still, there’s no need to put too much effort into this residence. You won’t be spending all that much time here, and in any case, I have painful memories of the grief that comes when you have to leave a place you’ve grown attached to.”

He looked remarkably lustrous to the Akashi lady as he conjured up memories of the past, which he spoke about warmly amidst tears and laughter. The lady’s mother, the old nun, peeked out from behind her curtains to catch a glimpse of

the couple and broke into a smile. She forgot about her age and felt her concerns dissipate.

The nun gazed happily upon Genji's magnificent figure. He was dressed casually, without his outer cloak, and was giving orders to repair the stream flowing beneath the passageway between the main quarters and the east hall. He suddenly noticed some implements used to hold water for Buddhist rituals and asked the Akashi lady, "Is your mother here? I'm not dressed properly at all!" He had his cloak brought out and, after putting it on, moved over to the nun's curtains and spoke to her in a gentle, relaxed tone.

"It moves me to think my daughter has been raised without flaws thanks to the great efforts of your religious devotions. It was no shallow act of will for you to have left behind the abode where you achieved enlightenment to return to this uncertain world. How your husband must be suffering, fretting over various matters as he wonders how you're getting along here."

"I returned unwillingly to a world I once abandoned," the nun replied, "and my heart is in turmoil. Yet the consideration you show by imagining how I feel is a sign that I've not lived this long life in vain." She wept as she continued. "Knowing that the little pine seedling was growing up in the shade of that rough, craggy shoreline caused me great stress and pain ... and though I am still troubled, uncertain as to how she will be able to thrive given the shallow roots of her lineage, I also rejoice now that her future is assured."

From the sound of her voice and her movements, Genji took her to be a refined woman; they conversed about the past, about how the villa looked when her grandfather, Prince Nakatsukasa, had resided here. The sound of the water in the stream, which had just been cleared, rose as if pleading to be included in their conversation.

*Long ago she was used to living here
But now she feels so lost that the pure stream
Sounds as if it were master of the house*

Her voice trailed off in a manner that struck Genji as perfectly natural, courtly and elegant.

He replied:

*The pure stream has likely not forgotten
All that came before ... it may see in you
Something of the old master of the house*

“Ah, how lovely ...” The fragrant radiance of his figure standing there, looking so pensive, struck her as a wonder.

Genji went to the meditation hall in the temple at Sagano, where he made arrangements to have readings of the scriptures for Fugen and services of meditation on Amida and Sakyamuni performed on the fourteenth, fifteenth and final days of each month, respectively. He also commissioned other services that needed to be performed and ordered both decorations for the hall and implements to be used in the worship of the Buddha. He returned to Ōi while the moon was still bright.

Recalling that night long ago when Genji had played the koto for her, the Akashi lady could not let this moment pass. She brought out the seven-string koto he had given her as a memento. The atmosphere was redolent with deep emotions, and he could not resist playing the instrument. The tuning had not been changed since he gave it to her, and while he performed his mind traveled back to events of that evening, which he seemed to be reliving.

*Did you keep the tuning of this koto
As constant as the vow you made to me
Knowing that my heart as well was constant*

She replied:

*My sobs mingling with music and with rustling pines
I waited, trusting in your words and this koto⁶
Mementos promising me your love would not change*

He thought her response a worthy one, and in his eyes she seemed more accomplished than expected, given her lineage. Her figure and bearing had matured remarkably; he knew now that it would be impossible for him ever to abandon her. He also knew he would never tire of watching over their little daughter.

What's done is done. It would be a terrible waste were she to grow up hidden away in her mother's residence, he thought. If I take her to Nijō and see to her care and upbringing to my complete satisfaction, then perhaps later she can escape the criticism that she is the daughter of a lowborn mother.

Of course, it made him feel bad when he imagined how the Akashi lady might react to his plans for their daughter. Gazing at her, tears came to his eyes, and he was unable to broach the subject. His daughter was only three years old, and so she was still a little shy around him at first, but she gradually warmed up,

chattering and laughing. The more comfortable she grew in his presence, the more her lambent beauty amazed him. It must have been gratifying for her mother to observe Genji holding the little girl in his arms. It seemed that father and daughter were bound by a special shared destiny.

He had to return to the capital the following day. Having overslept a little, he should have left immediately, but a large number of people had gathered at the Katsura villa, and there were many high-ranking nobles at Ōi as well. As he dressed and got ready, Genji grumbled, "This is terribly awkward! I never expected anyone to find me in a hideaway like this."

He stepped outside, drawn by all the tasks he had to do. Even though it was painful for him to leave, he had to feign indifference so that no one would see how concerned he was for such a low-ranking woman. As he stood by the door, the nurse came out holding his daughter. He stroked the little girl's head and, with a look of deep paternal affection, said, "I know it may seem sudden for me to say so, having just met my daughter, but it will be very difficult not being able to see her. What should I do? This place is so far away."

"Because I have no clear sense of your attitude or how you will treat us, I am more worried now than I was during those years when I thought about you hopelessly from afar," the nurse told him. When the little girl stretched out her arms, reaching for her father as he was about to leave, Genji knelt down on one knee and said, "It's so strange that I should be fated to always be tormented by my concerns. Even a short time away from you will be unbearable. What has become of your mother? Why hasn't she come out here with you to share the bitterness of our parting? It would feel less strange to me, a comfort, really, if she would."

The nurse smiled, then went in to convey his sentiments to her lady, who was lying prostrate, distraught and confused, unable to rouse herself quickly. Genji thought she was being overly dramatic, acting like some exceptionally distinguished, highborn lady. Because even her attendants were embarrassed by her actions, she reluctantly made her way out. The profile of her face, half hidden by the curtain, was exceptionally elegant and noble in character. Her lithe, graceful appearance was certainly not lacking in those qualities one might expect to see in a princess. Sweeping aside one of the curtain panels, Genji spoke tenderly to her. All the while he was looking back at her, and though she tried to keep her emotions in check, in the end she went to see him off. His looks were magnificent beyond description. He had been tall and painfully thin when she first knew him at Akashi, but he had filled out since then and was a little better proportioned. In her mind he now possessed greater dignity and emanated a glorious aura that seemingly covered him right down to the cinched cuffs of his

trousers—but, then again, perhaps she couldn't help seeing him with biased eyes.

One of Genji's close retainers—the former Lesser Captain who, despite being adversely affected by Genji's exile, had stayed loyal through the bad times—had that very year been promoted to the fifth rank and was now a Chamberlain in the Right Gate Guard. Compared to the period of exile, he was in excellent spirits these days. When Genji stepped out, he came up to take his lord's sword. As he did so, he noticed a certain lady-in-waiting and remarked, "I have not forgotten all that happened long ago, but I have been preoccupied with important matters and have been unable to call on you. And of course there was no way for me to write to you, even on those moments when I awoke at dawn and recalled the wind blowing off the bay at Akashi."

He seemed to be full of himself, putting on airs, and so the lady replied rather archly, "This mountain villa, enshrouded in an eightfold wreath of clouds, is no less isolated than our former residence in that place where boats disappear among the islands.⁷ But even though the pines here are not the same companions of old,⁸ *how relieved I am* to hear there is someone who has not forgotten me."

Not quite the response I was hoping for, the Chamberlain thought, surprised and deflated. *And I was rather fond of her at that.* He left with a curt "Well, perhaps another time ..." and went back to his lord's side.

Genji strode in regal solemnity to his carriage, his outrunners clearing the way for him. He permitted a Captain in the Chamberlain's office and a Commander from the War Ministry to ride in the rear of his carriage. With a look of extreme irritation, he remarked, "What a damnable nuisance that this humble hideaway should be discovered like this."

"We very much regretted not being able to spend the evening with you, especially when there was such a beautiful moon out," the Captain replied, "so we made our way here this morning, cutting through the fog. The brocade of autumn foliage is not yet at its peak, but the colors of the fields are spectacular. A certain Prince has been preoccupied with his falconry and his hunting party has been held up—I wonder what has happened with them?"

Today was the day Genji had to go to the Katsura villa. The household staff there was noisily bustling about, preparing a banquet to welcome the sudden appearance of their lord. Hearing the cries of the cormorant fishermen there, he was naturally reminded of the raucous, incomprehensible speech of the fishermen back at Suma. The party of noblemen who had spent the night in the fields soon arrived, bearing as mementos of their hunt a paltry clutch of small game fowls to which they had attached branches of bush clover. Many rounds of rice wine were imbibed at the banquet, making it unsafe to cross the river, and so

the company spent the rest of the day in drunken revelry. Each man composed and exchanged verses in Chinese, and when the moon rose and was shining brightly, they began to play music in concert, imparting a lively, stylish atmosphere to the scene. The only stringed instruments were a seven-string koto and a *biwa* lute; the flutes were played with consummate skill in a key that perfectly matched the mood of the season, while the soughing of the breeze off the river provided a delightful accompaniment.

All the while the moon rose higher, its pure light clearly illuminating everything around the villa. Late that night, four or five noblemen arrived and joined the party. They had been in attendance at the palace, where musical diversions were being enjoyed as well, when the young Emperor Reizei stated, “Today marks the end of our six-day period of abstinence, so Genji should have been in service here. What has happened to him?” Hearing that his Palace Minister was staying at Katsura, Reizei dispatched the men with a letter. The messenger was a Controller in the Chamberlain’s office.

*I hear you stay across the river near the moon
That shines on everything with its clear, pure light
It seems the katsura tree is calm and serene⁹*

“I envy you,” Reizei added.

Genji expressed his regrets for not attending the palace. The messengers enjoyed the music at the villa—enhanced by the sublime beauty of the setting—even more than the music at the palace. The revelry became increasingly intoxicating.

Because he had no gifts prepared for the party of messengers, Genji sent a message over to Ōi: “Do you have something appropriate, not too ostentatious, that I may use?” The attendants there presented what they had on hand, sending the messenger back with two chests filled with women’s garments. Because the Controller had to hurry back to the palace, Genji draped a set of robes over his left shoulder, and composed the following:

*In name only is this place near the moon
It is nothing but a rustic village
Where mist covers all from morning to night*

His response implied that he was hoping for the radiant light of an imperial visit, and he took the opportunity to murmur a snatch of verse: “That grows in the midst of the heavens.”¹⁰ He thought back to that time when he viewed the moon

over Awaji Island. When he recalled those words of Mitsune, “the special atmosphere of the setting,”¹¹ the thought of all that had happened since then made him weep drunken tears. He composed another verse:

*Home at last, completing a journey like this moon
So clear and bright that it seems near enough to grasp ...
Is this the moon I watched in awe at Awaji*

The Captain who rode with him in the carriage composed a response:

*The moonlight once obscured for a time
By the clouds of an uncertain world
Now shines clear and pure and is at peace*

The Major Controller of the Left, an older, familiar figure who had closely served Genji’s late father during his reign, composed yet another response:

*Having left His realm above the clouds
In which valley does your father dwell
Hidden in shade like the midnight moon*

There were many other poems composed in this mood, expressing all sorts of emotions, but it would be too much to record them all here.

The quiet conversations he held with his intimate circle began to ramble, but Genji’s appearance still made all who were there want to gaze on him and listen to his words for a thousand years—long enough indeed for one’s ax handle to rot away. He, however, felt that he could not tarry but had to hurry home. He laid robes on the left shoulder of each person in the party in accordance with his rank, and as they all left, moving in and out of the breaks in the mist, the various hues of the clothing mingled in splendid harmony with the colors of the flowers in the garden. Some attendants who served the Inner Palace Guard were waiting there. They had a reputation as fine court musicians, and in order to relieve the tedium they were performing a rowdy version of the *saibara* called “My Pony”¹² —an appropriate choice of song, since they were to travel by horse. The colors of the robes that the noblemen took off and presented to these attendants resembled the brocadelike foliage of autumn scattered by the wind. The shouts and bustle accompanying Genji’s departure reverberated so loudly that the sound could be heard as far away as the villa at Oi. The Akashi lady, sitting in the loneliness Genji had left behind, stared out despondently. For his part, he felt

anxious, since he hadn't had time to send a letter to her.

Upon his return to Nijō, he rested for a while and then told Murasaki about all that was happening at Ōi.

"I'm very sorry that I spent more time there than I told you I would. Some of my retainers, who are fond of elegant diversions, found me, and though I was reluctant to stay on with them, I really had no choice ... and so I came back late. I'm feeling quite ill this morning." He went back to his quarters. She was pouting and annoyed as usual, but he pretended to take no notice of her mood. "It's utterly inappropriate for you to go about comparing yourself to a woman whose status is no match for yours," he admonished her. "Just remember what you said to me once ... *I am who I am*."

Later that day, as the sun was setting and he was preparing to leave for the palace, he furtively dashed off a letter and had it delivered to the Akashi lady. With a sidelong glance, Murasaki could see that he was writing at some length. Her ladies-in-waiting were greatly displeased with him when he secretly whispered his instructions to the messenger.

He was expected to be in attendance at the palace all that night, but he withdrew late and went home to soothe Murasaki's feelings. When he arrived, the reply from the Akashi lady was waiting for him. He read it, making no effort to hide anything from Murasaki. The letter contained nothing especially provocative, so when he finished reading he told her, "Please dispose of this. I've reached an age and a position in life where I simply cannot leave such things lying scattered about for just anyone to see." He leaned against an armrest. Thinking about the Akashi lady, yearning sadly for her in his heart, he stared intently at the oil lamp and fell silent.

The letter remained opened and spread out before her, but Murasaki made no effort to look at it. Genji smiled at her and said, "It must be vexing to have to sneak glances at it from the side while still pretending you don't want to look." Their chamber seemed to be suffused with his radiant charm. He moved over to Murasaki. "The truth is, when I saw my darling little girl, I realized that the karmic bond between us could not be shallow. And yet, despite that realization, I know that there are many hindrances to raising her openly in court society as my own child. It has been all too much for me to come up with a way to handle this. Please consider the situation from my point of view, and let's try to make arrangements for her that are in accord with your own wishes. How should I deal with this? Would you be willing to raise her as your own daughter? She's exactly the same age as the Leech Child was when the gods set it adrift.¹³ The little girl is innocent, she's committed no sin, and so I cannot put her out of my thoughts. I'd like to keep her hidden away while she is still a child, but—and I

hope you don't think my suggestion untoward—when it's time for the ceremony where she dons her first trousers, I would like you to have the honor of being the parent who ties them on for her."

Murasaki gave him a faint smile.

"What I resent is having to pretend not to notice the coldness you display when you suspect me, with no justification, of harboring thoughts that have never crossed my mind. I'm certain that I will treasure her ... she is, after all, an innocent child after my own heart. At her age she must be absolutely adorable." It was her nature to adore little children, and now she thought: *If only I really could have her, to hold and care for ...*

Genji was still torn. *What should I do? Should I go and fetch the girl?*

Given his circumstances, it was very hard for him to visit the villa at Ōi. Apparently he had promised the Akashi lady that he would see her when he traveled to the meditation hall at Sagano twice a month—taking advantage of the opportunity provided by the services he had commissioned. This arrangement was certainly better than what the celestial lovers who met only once a year on Tanabata have to look forward to, and the Akashi lady felt that it was more than she deserved. Still, how unhappy she must have been.

¹ The Daikakuji still exists in Saga, which is part of present-day Kyoto.

² *Kokinshū* 965 (Taira Sadafun): "Would that I not be beset by obsessive thoughts about the sorrows of this world ... at least not while waiting for my life to run its course."

³ *Kokinshū* 409 (Anonymous): "I think longingly of the boat that disappears amidst the islands and morning fog in the dim light of dawn over the bay at Akashi." This poem has a traditional attribution to Kakinomoto Hitomaro.

⁴ "Distant shore" refers both to paradise and to the shore at Akashi.

⁵ Murasaki is alluding to a Chinese legend about a young woodcutter, Wang Chih, who encounters two immortals playing Go deep in a mountain forest. The immortals give him some dried fruit to keep him from getting hungry while he watches their game. Wang Chih is entranced by the immortals and by the effects of the fruit, and when he finally comes back to his senses he finds the immortals have disappeared, his beard has grown enormously long, and his ax handle has rotted away. Returning to his village, Wang Chih discovers that he has been gone for seven generations. One of the earliest literary references to this legend is *Kokinshū* 991 (Ki no Tomonori): "Nothing of my old village looks the way it once did ... I yearn to go back to the place where my ax handle rotted to dust."

⁶ The poem plays on the word *koto*, referring both to "words" and to the musical instrument.

⁷ The woman is alluding to the poem *Kokinshū* 409 cited above.

⁸ *Kokinshū* 909 (Fujiwara Okikaze): "Who can I call my friend ... even the ageless pines of Takasago are not the same companions of old."

⁹ The place name, Katsura, is also the name of a tree that is native to China and Japan (one of the common names for the tree in English is katsura). According to legend, the katsura tree also grew on the moon. Reizei's poem identifies Genji with both the moon and the tree.

¹⁰ *Kokinshū* 968 (Ise; composed at Katsura): “Because my village is named for the tree that grows in the midst of the heavens, it seems I must rely upon the moon’s light alone.”

¹¹ The reference here is to a scene in the *Akashi* chapter; the poem cited is *Shinkokinshū* 1515 (Ôshikōchi no Mitsune).

¹² “That pony there is mine / She begs hay of me / So I bring her hay / I bring her water / bring her hay / and care for her.”

¹³ The Leech Child was the first child born of the mythic creators of Japan: Izanagi and Izanami. In some accounts, when the Leech Child failed to grow and stand on its own, it was cast adrift at the age of three.

XIX

Usugumo

A Thin Veil of Clouds

NOW THAT it was winter, the riverside residence at Ōi seemed lonelier, and the Akashi lady's days passed from morning to night in such dreary succession that she came to feel as if her spirit were drifting off into the skies.

"You cannot go on like this," Genji pressed her. "Make up your mind to come and live in the annex next to my villa." Despite his encouragement, however, she remained uncertain, and her heart and mind were in turmoil as she wondered anxiously what to do.

*Once I move there, he will neglect me more than he does now. When that happens, how will I be able to express my resentment?*¹

"If you can't decide, then what about the little Princess?" Genji was speaking in a solemn tone of voice. "This current arrangement simply will not do for her. It is shameful that she remains here given what I have planned for her future. I told my lady at Nijō about the girl, and she is most anxious to see her. Once they have grown accustomed to being together, I plan to hold an unprecedented ceremony for the donning of her first trousers." His words confirmed what the Akashi lady had suspected all along—that he planned to take her daughter away to his villa. She was now more upset than ever.

It was terribly hard for her to let go of her child. Hasn't he considered what will happen? Even if he has such a distinguished lady adopt her, people will inevitably find out about my miserable status and the gossip swirling around will be hard to manage.

Genji understood that the lady's hesitation was a natural reaction, and so he sought to reassure her that Murasaki was a woman of upstanding character.

"Why do you persist in your doubts—are you concerned that she will think of her only as a stepdaughter and mistreat the girl? My wife has no children of her

own after all our years together, and she is lonely. That's one reason why she went out of her way to treat the Umetsubo Consort as if she were her own daughter, even though the two of them are only a year apart in age. Given her splendid disposition, she would certainly take even greater care of our little Princess. It is impossible not to adore the girl, and so she would never neglect her or treat her carelessly."

The Akashi lady pondered the situation.

I heard vague rumors about him long ago that made me wonder what kind of superior woman would be able to make him settle down. True, his fickle heart seems to have calmed a bit and he shows no signs of his former amorous inclinations ... that must be some indication that a strong bond from a previous life connects him and his lady. She must certainly be the most extraordinary of all his wives. Someone as insignificant as I can never compare with her, so if I were to just brazenly move to the new residence she would certainly be shocked and displeased, no matter how kindhearted she is. Whatever happens to me really doesn't matter all that much, but apparently the future destiny of my daughter depends in the end on what his wife feels. In that case, I ought to do just as Genji suggests and give her up while she is still young and too innocent to understand what's happening ... but how I shall worry once I let her go! How can I possibly get by day after day without her here to comfort me in my idleness? And once I do let her go, what reason would he have then to ever call on me again? Tormented by all these troubled thoughts, her misery knew no bounds.

The nun, a woman of compassionate understanding, tried to encourage her daughter.

"It does you no good to fret about things. Of course, it will be a terrible hardship not being able to see the little Princess as you might like, but you have to assume that this is best for her in the long run. After all, the Minister's reasons for asking you to give her up are hardly trifling. Trust in him and send the girl off to his villa. Remember that the rank of imperial prince or princess depends upon the mother's rank. The Minister himself may have no equal among the noblemen at the palace, but I've heard that he was made a commoner and now serves His Majesty because his own mother, the concubine who resided in the Kiritsubo, was considered inferior—her father being a mere Major Counselor. Of course, he *is* the son of an Emperor, so it wouldn't do for people like us to compare our situation with his. Still, people tend to look down on a child who is not born of the principal wife, even if the mother comes from the house of a prince or minister. What's more, the father won't treat that child as equal in status to those born of his principal wife, even if his principal wife comes from a

family of inferior rank. When you take all this into consideration, the position our little Princess faces is far more precarious, for if one of Genji's distinguished wives should give birth, your daughter would be judged as inferior and disappear from consideration. A lady who has been raised with special attention by her father in a manner appropriate to his rank will have the kind of training that eventually wins her respect as someone of worth. When it comes time for our little Princess to put on her first trousers, you will achieve no glory or honor for her by holding the ceremony deep in these remote mountains, no matter how much you try to make the occasion a memorable one. So just let him take care of things and observe how he deals with her at his villa."

The Akashi lady consulted sagacious diviners and turned to people of fine judgment to help her decide, and because they all told her she should send her child to Genji, her resolve not to let her go weakened. Genji also thought his daughter should be with him, but at the same time he felt sorry for the girl's mother as he imagined how she would feel, and so he could not bring himself to force her to yield. He finally asked her, "So how should we handle the ceremony of first trousers?" She replied, "I am convinced now that it would not be in the best interest of her future prospects to remain with someone as utterly weak and useless as I ... and yet, doesn't she risk becoming a laughingstock by going to your residence?"

Deeply touched, Genji was moved to pity by her words. He had a diviner chosen to determine an auspicious day to move the child to the Nijō villa and then privately gave instructions to have the necessary preparations made. Knowing that her daughter was leaving, the Akashi lady was terribly unhappy, but she comforted herself with the thought that it was all for the best.

After Genji left, the lady spoke tearfully with her daughter's nurse.

"You'll be leaving me as well. I've grown accustomed to taking comfort from our conversations whenever I'm depressed or bored; without you here for support my life will be even more miserable."

"Our relationship was meant to be, was it not?" the nurse responded. "I never anticipated that my lord would send me to you in the first place, but I will not forget your kindness over the years, and since I don't want our relationship to end, I shall always keep you in my heart. Though I am sure we will meet again when you move to the new residence, it makes me uneasy to have to go unexpectedly into service like this and be separated from you for a time." And so they passed many a day in this tearful fashion until the twelfth month came around.

Her loneliness deepened as snow and sleet fell. *How strange my fate*, she grieved, *to have to experience so much sorrow*. She would sit and look at her

daughter, stroking her hair more often than usual. One morning, when falling snow darkened the sky, she was preoccupied with thoughts of all that had happened and all that was to come, and though she did not as a rule go out to the edge of the veranda, this day was different. While she stared at the ice forming at the edge of the garden pond, her attendants watched her sitting there. She was dressed in layers of soft white silk, and to her ladies-in-waiting the image she projected as she gazed out lost in reverie—the shape of her head, her long hair, her profile from the back—made her seem every bit a peerless noblewoman.

The lady brushed away tears and sighed pitifully. “How much more anxious will I feel about you on days such as this!”

*Even after deeply drifting snows
Have blocked these mountain paths, do not cease
To wend your way here or send me notes*

Upon hearing this, the nurse broke down and composed the following to console her lady:

*Were I to go and seek Mount Yoshino
Where paths are always covered deep in snow
My heart and notes will find their way to you²*

The snows melted a little and Genji came calling. The Akashi lady was as always waiting in anticipation, but she knew the purpose of his visit this time was to take her daughter with him, and she blamed herself for this heartbreak. *He seems to be leaving the decision up to me. If I refuse to let her go, surely he wouldn't take her by force, would he? This is not what I wanted.* Then she reconsidered, resolving to go through with it, pressured by the feeling that she would look capricious if she changed her mind now. Staring at the little girl sitting in front of her looking exceptionally sweet, she was convinced her daughter was destined for greatness. By the spring, her hair would have grown to shoulder length—like a nun’s hairstyle—and would sway attractively. Of course, her face and eyes would be pretty as well.

Genji was in great distress as he imagined the darkness that would descend over his lady’s heart whenever she might think of her daughter as someone else’s child, and so he spent the night there explaining over and over the reasons he had for taking the girl. At last she responded, saying, “Please, no more of this ... I shall be happy so long as you raise her to be a noblewoman of distinction in spite of my own lowly status.” He could tell that she was no longer able to

maintain her composure, and he was filled with sorrow and compassion when she broke down and cried.

The Akashi lady took the little Princess in her arms and brought her out to where the carriages had been pulled up. Innocent and unaware of what was happening, the girl hurried to climb in the carriage. Her childish babbling was adorable as she tugged on her mother's sleeve. "Let's get in!" This was too much for her mother.

*Its future lies in the far off distance
This pine seedling being taken from me
When will I see it spread its splendid shade*

Shedding tears, she could say no more.

Genji found her anguish perfectly understandable.

*Because the seedling's roots have grown so deep
It will bring a thousand years of fortune
To the twin-trunked pine of Takekuma³*

"Please don't be anxious," he said, trying to comfort her. She tried to be strong, as he urged, but it was difficult to bear up under these circumstances.

The nurse and a refined, well-bred woman named Shōshō got into the carriage, bringing with them the ceremonial dagger that Genji had earlier sent as a talisman to protect his daughter and an *amagatsu* doll⁴ used to guard the girl from evil influences. Young ladies-in-waiting of good standing and page girls boarded an accompanying carriage to see the party off as far as the Nijō villa. As they made their way along the road, Genji was assailed by pangs of guilt, wondering if he hadn't committed a sin by making the lady he left behind suffer.

The party arrived after dark, and as soon as the carriages were pulled inside the grounds, the provincial attendants accompanying the Akashi Princess felt awkward and overwhelmed by the spectacular appearance of the villa. In spite of their uneasiness, they were brought into Murasaki's quarters in the west hall and shown into a chamber facing west that had been specially readied with small furnishings for the little girl. The atmosphere was utterly charming. The nurse's room was at the north end of the gallery off this chamber.

The little girl had fallen asleep during the trip. When Genji picked her up to carry her inside, she did not cry or whimper. Sweets and fruits were brought in, but as the child gradually woke up, she began to look around for her mother. When she couldn't find her anywhere, her pouting face looked adorable. Since

she was on the verge of tears, the nurse was called in to comfort her. Genji was concerned about the Akashi lady, imagining how much worse the tedium of living at Ōi would be for her now; but even though he felt sorry for her, he could now see his daughter all the time, day or night, and raise her just as he wished. He was satisfied that things were going according to plan, though he experienced a sense of bitter regret that such a flawless little girl—albeit one with a more respectable lineage—had not been born to Murasaki. The child cried for a while, searching here and there for people she was used to, but for the most part she showed a delightfully carefree disposition. The little Princess was soon quite at ease in her new home. For her part, Murasaki felt as if she had been granted a most precious treasure, and she spent all her time holding the child or playing with her. The nurse naturally grew close to Murasaki as well, since she was in constant service, and eventually another exceptional attendant was added to the staff as wet nurse.

Genji did not go out of his way to prepare for the ceremony of first trousers, but the event was special all the same. The furnishings and decorations were delightful—having been scaled down to suit a small child, they looked as if they had been made for the doll festival. Because so many people were always coming and going in and out of the villa at Nijō, the guests who attended the ceremony were not all that conspicuous when they arrived. The little Akashi Princess, with the cords holding up her trousers drawn neatly over the front of her robe, struck everyone as perfectly exquisite.

At the Ōi villa the Akashi lady desperately missed her daughter and lamented the terrible mistake she had made in giving her up. The nun tried to console her, assuring her it was all for the best, but she too was overcome by tearful emotions—though she was happy to hear that her granddaughter was being treated so well. What could they possibly do for the girl now that she was at Nijō? Nothing, perhaps, except to prepare robes of rare and wonderful hues and send them off to the Akashi Princess's nurse and attendants.

Genji continued to feel sorry for the lady. He imagined her sitting there waiting impatiently for him, fearfully convincing herself that he would have even less incentive to visit her now that he had taken their daughter, and so he secretly called on her before the end of the year. Tormented by the thought that the villa must have seemed lonelier and more deserted to her than ever before—she was, after all, separated from the little one who had once occupied her time and taken her mind off her isolation—he was constantly sending letters and messages. Murasaki was no longer all that resentful or jealous, having forgiven Genji's transgression for the sake of his lovely child.

The New Year arrived. Under bright, clear skies, Genji, who had nothing to

trouble him, was looking quite magnificent as people gathered amid the newly refurbished fixtures of his estate. On the seventh of the first month, during all the celebrations of the day, a steady stream of older visitors arrived to express good wishes and joyful gratitude to the Palace Minister for their promotions. Younger guests, who were in a cheerful mood for no specific reason, appeared to be enjoying themselves. People of lower ranks also showed up one after another at around that time, looking on the outside as though they were satisfied with their lot in life, even though perhaps inwardly many were troubled at heart.

Hanachirusato, who was now in charge of the staff of the annex on the east side of the Nijō villa, was kindhearted by nature, and so her situation was ideal. Her attendants and page girls dressed and behaved with propriety, and she never let her guard down while maintaining the dignity of the household. It was wonderful for her to have Genji so near. Even though he might pay her a sudden visit during his leisure time, he seemed to have never gone out of his way to spend the night with her. She was generous of spirit and not given to jealousy, and so she resigned herself to the type of relationship she had with Genji, thinking it befitting of her station in life. Calm and faithful to a most gratifying degree, there was no discernible difference between the financial support Genji provided her and the support he gave to Murasaki. No one could disparage her or treat her with disrespect, and so the attendants served her with the same deference they showed Murasaki. The staff of the household offices always worked diligently so that nothing was ever out of order and the atmosphere of the residence was as pleasant as the main villa.

Genji continued to fret about the tedium the Akashi lady had to endure at the Ōi villa, and once he finished with the public and private responsibilities that kept him busy during this time of year, he went to call on her. He gave more attention than usual to his appearance on this occasion; he wore scented robes of indescribable beauty beneath a cloak in the cherry-blossom style, white lined with crimson. When he dropped by Murasaki's apartments to say goodbye he looked more resplendent than the evening sun that was lighting up every corner of the chambers there. Murasaki had a strange, foreboding feeling as she saw him off. His little daughter clung endearingly to the cinched cuffs of his trousers, and because it would not do for her to step completely out from behind the blinds, he stood still, thinking how much she meant to him. He soothed her, saying, "I'll return on the morrow."⁵ Murasaki was waiting at the doorway to the corridor. She had composed a verse, which her attendant Chūjō recited to Genji:

*If there were no one on that distant shore
To hold his boat, then I would wait to see*

My husband come back to me tomorrow

Chūjō spoke in such a lovely, intimate manner that Genji flashed a lustrous smile and replied:

*I shall go to meet her and come back tomorrow
And surely the one on that distant shore will feel
Much worse than had I never gone to visit her*

The little Princess had no idea what was being talked about, but she scampered about playing, looking so sweet to Murasaki that she felt remarkably magnanimous and forgiving, and her unpleasant feelings about the woman on the distant shore dissipated. Staring at the girl, she thought, *How the lady must worry about her daughter. If I were in her place I would miss her terribly.* Loosening the front of her robes, Murasaki offered her own pretty breasts for the child to suckle, and the two of them together made an exceptional tableau. The ladies-in-waiting who witnessed it whispered among themselves.

“Why can’t she have a child of her own?”

“What a pity ...”

The Akashi lady was living in a quietly dignified and prudent manner at the Ōi villa. The style of her residence was unusual, though certainly elegant, and when Genji arrived and looked at her, he felt that in both looks and comportment she had matured ideally and was in no way discernibly inferior to even the grandest ladies at court.

With her appearance and character, he thought, she could fit into court society and would be thought of as any other daughter of a provincial Governor. It’s not unheard of for a highborn nobleman to take such a woman as a wife. Then again, if people heard about her peculiar, eccentric father ... well, that’s a problem, though it must be granted that he did come from good stock, his father having been a minister and all. But still ...

The time he spent with her was so short and the visit left him feeling so dissatisfied that he felt troubled and restless as he reluctantly prepared to leave. “Am I crossing a floating bridge in my dreams?”⁶ He added nothing more to this lament, but instead pulled a thirteen-string koto over in front of him, recalling as he always did the sound of the instrument echoing late in the night at Akashi. He insisted that she accompany him on the *biwa*, and as they played a little in concert he was amazed that she should have mastered so many instruments. He told her all about what was happening with her little girl.

Even though the Ōi villa was isolated, sometimes he would spend the night

there, and on those occasions light fare would be served—sweets, fruits, steamed rice. Using his visits to the nearby temple at Sagano or to the Katsura estate as a pretext, he would call on his Akashi lady; and though he was not driven by obsessive passion for her, he was never unkind or indifferent, and there was nothing in his behavior that would make her feel awkward or ashamed. Judging by their interactions, he thought of her as special and was quite considerate, and she, knowing how Genji felt about her, never acted in a way that gave him cause to think that she had an inflated opinion of her station in life. Moreover, she did nothing that was vulgar or beneath her or that was contrary to Genji's wishes, and so it was very pleasant for him to be with her. She learned that he was not as intimate with even the most extraordinary and distinguished noblewomen as he was with her—that he treated them instead with refined, cool propriety.

If I move to his villa and have to live in close proximity with his other women, won't they come to despise me once they get to know who I am? I feel more honored and blessed that he takes the trouble to come here on visits like this, no matter how infrequent. She couldn't help having such thoughts.

Before she left Akashi, her father had told her that they would be parting forever. For all that, he remained eager to learn everything he could about Genji's intentions and about how his daughter was faring. Pretending he wasn't really all that concerned, he would dispatch messengers who then reported all manner of things to him—some that caused his heart to ache, others that brought him a sense of pride and joy.

While all this was taking place, the Chancellor passed away. He was a man of such importance in the world that the whole court mourned his death. The state had been in turmoil during that period of his life when, as Minister of the Left, he had withdrawn from public affairs; many were apprehensive now and deeply grieved. Genji in particular had good reason to mourn, and he considered his loss most unfortunate. He had, it must be remembered, ceded many of his responsibilities as Palace Minister to the Chancellor—a move that had given him more time to himself. He felt isolated and constrained by the pressure of additional responsibilities.

Emperor Reizei was now grown up, mature beyond his years, and so there was no reason to be concerned about the future administration of the state. All the same, there was no one who could be considered an appropriate choice to serve as Regent to the young Emperor. Reizei turned the question over in his mind: *To whom may I turn over the reins of government so that I may fulfill my desire to live a quiet, peaceful life?* He believed that the current situation was unsatisfactory and untenable. In the meantime His Majesty looked after every detail of the funeral and memorial rites, doing even more than the sons and

grandsons of the late Chancellor.

The whole world was in an uproar that year; many portentous signs concerning the affairs of state appeared, and many unsettling phenomena were observed—the sun, the moon and the stars all emitted a strange radiance in the heavens, and clouds formed eerie patterns in the sky. Everyone was alarmed, and learned men from all fields of knowledge sent reports to the palace of uncanny and unprecedented omens. Genji alone understood the meaning of all these things, and his heart was deeply troubled, since he knew he was the cause.

Fujitsubo had fallen ill at the beginning of the spring that year, and when her condition worsened during the third month, Emperor Reizei honored her with an imperial visit. He had been so young and innocent at the time his putative father passed away that he had had no deep sense of loss, but now he was distraught over his mother's illness, and it made Fujitsubo sad to see him in such a state.

"I am thirty-seven⁷ this year," she said, her voice soft and weak, "and you know this is an unlucky age for women—one I cannot avoid—but since I am not in all that much distress, I feel reluctant to arrange for any special devotions or prayers apart from what I usually perform, lest people get the wrong idea and think I'm flaunting my own virtue by suggesting I have prior knowledge, like some holy priest, of my impending death. I've been thinking I should go to the palace and speak with you at my ease about certain things that happened in the past, and there have been a few moments of late when I really did feel well enough to go ... but unfortunately the time has slipped by, and I regret that I was not able to unburden myself as I wished."

She was thirty-seven—an inauspicious age—yet to His Majesty's bitter sorrow she still looked youthful, in the very prime of her life. He was extremely worried. *This is a dangerous period for her, and she has been ill for some time. Yet she refuses to allow any special rites or prayers that might ensure a long life, despite the concerns I've expressed.* He had been taken by surprise, having only recently learned of her condition, and immediately commissioned all manner of rites for her benefit. An Emperor's time is of course restricted, and Reizei had to leave his mother all too soon to return to the palace, his heart burdened by innumerable sorrows.

Genji was also concerned, thinking that Fujitsubo had been lax in taking steps to protect herself. She had dismissed her condition at first as nothing more than the usual ailments, but now she was in great distress and unable to speak clearly. Thinking back over all that had happened in her life, she knew in her heart that hers had been a noble destiny, that she had enjoyed far greater glory and honor than most. Yet she also realized that it had been her fate to suffer extraordinary anxieties and torments that were far beyond the experience of others. Indeed, it

was excruciating for her to see that her son had never, not even in a dream, come to have the slightest inkling of the truth about his father. She would surely carry this one secret anguish with her into the next life, and it would be an attachment that would hinder her salvation.

Genji was grief-stricken at the thought of two such noble personages passing away in succession. The secret sorrow that he carried for Fujitsubo was boundless, and he had every prayer and ritual offered up for her. It would be unbearably sad were she to die before he could speak with her one last time about his feelings, which he had set aside all these years, and so he went to her. Sitting just outside her curtains, he asked her ladies-in-waiting about her condition, and those who served her most intimately answered in detail.

“She has been ill for many months,” one of the attendants said, “but she tirelessly practiced her devotions until her exhaustion caught up with her and her condition worsened. Now she refuses to touch her food, not even a slice of mandarin orange. We have lost hope.” The women were all weeping.

Fujitsubo then spoke to him.

“I’ve been aware of the many things that you’ve done over the years to support my son in accordance with your father’s last wishes, and I had thought that at some point I would be able to let you know how grateful I’ve been for all your consideration, but now, I sadly regret ...”

He could barely make out her words, her voice was so faint, and he looked truly pathetic as he broke down in tears, unable to reply. Knowing that the women’s eyes were all on him, he tried to regain his composure. *Why must I be so weak-willed?*

Life does not follow one’s wishes,⁸ and he understood there was no way to keep from death a figure he had known since childhood, a figure that the court would come to regret once she was gone and they had recognized her true worth anew. Needless to say, his grief and anguish knew no limits.

“I’ve been of little use,” he replied at last. “From the beginning I tried as best I could to care for and support your son, but with the passing of the Chancellor, it is clear to me that the world is a fleeting, uncertain place. Now you are gravely ill, and my heart is in utter chaos—I feel as though I myself have little time left to live.”

While he was speaking, Fujitsubo quietly passed away like a flame flickering and dying out. He was overwhelmed by a sadness beyond the power of words to describe.

Among those who were considered the very embodiment of nobility at the court, Fujitsubo was exceptional for the benevolence she exhibited and the good works she performed for society. Though it is natural for those born of great

houses to take advantage of their power and privilege and thereby bring trouble to others, she never once caused such problems and even forbade her own staff from doing things that might cause pain to the world. During the reigns of the wise sages of antiquity, the nobility were encouraged to be generous, but in making gifts or donations they often did so in a conspicuously lavish, self-aggrandizing manner. Fujitsubo's charitable works and religious patronage were not like that at all. She gave everything she could afford from the estate left to her by Genji's father, from the income she earned from sinecures and stipends based on her rank at court, and from her manors; because she did all this with pure sincerity, even the most otherworldly of holy men who benefited from her generosity mourned her passing.

When the funeral rites were carried out, every voice at the court echoed with sorrow. The high-ranking nobles and officials in attendance were all dressed in the same dark gray color, so that spring itself lost its luster. Staring out at the cherry tree in the garden at his villa, Genji recalled the banquet his father had given long ago to celebrate the blossoms at the palace. He murmured a line of verse to himself: "For this year only ..." ⁹ He feared that people might censure him if they saw him grieving excessively, so he hid away in the meditation pavilion at his residence, where he spent the day crying. Facing the bright setting sun as he contemplated Amida's Pure Land in the west, he could clearly make out the top branches of the trees along the crest of the mountains in the distance. A thin layer of dull gray clouds drifted across the skies just above those branches. Since Fujitsubo's death, nothing had caught his eye or drawn his interest, but he found the scene before him now sublimely moving.

*The hue of the thin veil of clouds spreading
Across peaks aglow in the setting sun
Complements the sleeves of one in mourning*

With no one around to hear his verse, his words were spoken in vain.

Once the memorial services were finished, the situation at the court calmed down and Emperor Reizei felt lonely. Now, a certain cleric had served at the palace conducting prayers and ceremonies over successive reigns beginning from the time Fujitsubo's mother had been a consort. Fujitsubo herself considered him a valued confidant. Reizei also placed great trust in this wise and holy man, and had him carry out many solemn rites. He was about seventy and had gone into retreat, thinking he would now focus his devotions on preparing for the next world as his life drew to a close. However, when Fujitsubo fell ill, he came out to conduct prayers for her and was later summoned to the palace,

where his services were in constant demand. At that time Genji urged the old cleric to stay on as he had in the past in order to help protect the young Emperor, and the man agreed. “It will be hard for me to serve His Majesty at night, but I am humbled by your request and will stay in attendance in gratitude for the kindness shown to me in the old days.”

Then one night, in the stillness just before dawn, this cleric was talking with Emperor Reizei about various matters at court. Coughing and wheezing repeatedly as old men will, he took advantage of the opportunity provided by the withdrawal of some of the attendants during the change of staff—a moment when no one was in close service to His Majesty—to bring up a subject he had never before been able to discuss.

“Your Majesty,” he began, “there is something I need to tell you, but it is an extremely sensitive subject for me to broach—it gives me pause for all sorts of reasons, and I fear that in bringing it up I will be giving grave offense to you—yet I believe it would be an even more serious offense not to tell you. Knowing what I know, I fear the wrath of Heaven were I to do nothing, for if my life ends with this matter still weighing on me, I will have been no use to you, and the Buddha will consider my heart defiled.”

Emperor Reizei was puzzled. *What is he going on about? Is there some lingering regret that still ties him to this world? Priests are supposed to be holy men, but there are a warped few whose unnatural envy and hatred lead them astray.* “Ever since I was a child,” he responded, “I have always felt close to you, as if nothing could come between us. So it hurts me now to learn that you have kept a secret from me.”

“Forgive me, Your Majesty,” the cleric replied. “I serve you by teaching the most secret of esoteric practices, holding nothing back, even though the Buddha commanded that they be protected and kept from the uninitiated. So why would I keep anything hidden from you in the recesses of my heart? What I have to tell you is a vital matter that spans past and future, and were even a word of this to leak out it would throw everything into disorder and be devastating for the late Emperor, for your mother, and for the Palace Minister who is now in charge of affairs of state. For someone in my position, aged priest that I am, what regrets could I possibly have in revealing this secret, even if by doing so I bring misfortune on myself? I am telling Your Majesty about this now because I received a revelation from the Buddha. My dearest Prince, from the moment you were conceived your late mother fell into deep despair and grief, and under the circumstances she had reason to ask me to perform prayers and rites. The details of those circumstances are not the sort of thing a priest would be expected to understand, and so I did not fully comprehend her motives. Sometime later,

when the Minister was unjustly accused of a transgression against the state and went into exile, your mother grew even more desperate and frightened and asked me to perform additional prayers. When the Minister heard that she had commissioned these, he made the same request of me, and so it came about that I conducted various prayers for them right up to the moment when Your Majesty ascended the throne. And this is what they asked me to pray about ...”

As soon as Reizei heard the old cleric explain the circumstances that had so upset his mother, he was overcome by a confusing welter of emotions—shock, disbelief, fear, sorrow. He said nothing for a while, which made the priest feel nervous, worried that His Majesty had been discomfited by the revelation. As the priest slowly began to withdraw from the imperial presence, Reizei stopped him and called him back.

“Had I died not knowing about this, it would surely have been a hindrance to my salvation in the world to come, and yet you kept this matter secret. I suppose I should be grateful to you now for finally telling me, but instead I feel uneasy ... as if you’re someone with whom I need to be on guard ... Is there anyone else who knows this secret and might reveal it to the world?”

“Truly, Your Majesty, other than myself and a certain lady-in-waiting, a woman named Ōmyōbu, no one else knows anything about what happened. Just the two of us ... and because she is a woman who could never speak with you about such a thing, the burden I bear is awesome and terrifying. The ominous signs that have appeared frequently in the heavens indicate that there is unrest in the world. While you were still a child and not expected to have a deep grasp of such matters, nothing of import occurred, but now that you are an adult and have reached an age where you have the judgment to be able to understand all that goes on, Heaven is indicating its displeasure at your illegitimacy. Frightened at what the consequences might be if you did not know what transgression these omens were pointing to, I have unburdened myself of matters that I had tried to erase from my heart and mind.” The old man was now weeping as he spoke, and when dawn broke he withdrew from the palace.

Emperor Reizei’s mind was a chaotic jumble of thoughts. It had been like a dream, listening to such a fearful story. Various emotions tormented him—concern for the late Emperor, sorrow and shame that Genji should be serving the court as a mere commoner—and he did not emerge from his sleeping quarters even after the sun was high in the sky. When Genji learned about Reizei’s behavior, he was startled and went to look in on him. When he arrived, His Majesty found it difficult to control his emotions. Genji merely assumed that, because he was still in mourning for his mother, his tears had not had time to dry.

Later that very day Reizei was informed that the late Emperor's brother, the father of Princess Asagao who had served as the Minister of Ceremonials, had also passed away. He lamented that it was yet another sign of disorder in his realm. Given the strange, troubled times they were in, Genji, as Palace Minister, could not withdraw from the court and return to his home, but had to remain instead in proximity to His Majesty. Taking the opportunity provided by Genji's presence, Reizei spoke with him privately.

"Has my time run its course? I feel alone, somehow—a strange sensation I've never before known. Bad omens continue, and everything seems unsettled and restless. I was reluctant to speak of such matters with my late mother out of consideration for her feelings, but now I want to abdicate and spend the rest of my life in peace."

"That would not do at all, Your Majesty," Genji replied. "The world may be unsettled, but that doesn't necessarily have anything to do with how affairs of state are being conducted, properly or improperly. During a time of wise governance things do not always go right, and in China there was chaos and impropriety even during the reign of the Sage Kings. Of course, such things have occurred in our land as well. In any case, both the Chancellor and the Minister of Ceremonials were old and so there is nothing unusual about their deaths. Their time had come, and so you should not lament their passing excessively."

Genji laid out numerous precedents in making his case to His Majesty—however, since I am a woman, it would be impudent of me to record in detail their discussions of state affairs, would it not?

Dressed in their black mourning robes, which were plainer than their usual court dress, the two of them looked exactly alike, with nothing to distinguish them from each other. Emperor Reizei had been aware of his resemblance to Genji for years, having observed himself in the mirror, but now that he had learned the secret of his birth from the old cleric, he closely scrutinized Genji's face again and was even more greatly moved. *If only I could drop some sort of hint to ask him about this*, he thought. However, bringing up such a topic would certainly make Genji feel awkward, and so his youthful sensibility made him hesitate out of embarrassment. Unable to broach the subject abruptly, he spoke to Genji about everyday matters with more warmth and intimacy than he usually displayed. To the eyes of someone as perspicacious as Genji, the sudden deference and change in attitude shown by His Majesty seemed odd, though it never crossed Genji's mind that Reizei had learned his secret.

Reizei wanted to ask Ōmyōbu about the details of the affair, but he decided against it. *I don't want Ōmyōbu to find out that I've discovered my mother's secret. I'll simply drop some vague hints to the Minister instead and ask if he*

might know of any examples in the past in which an imperial consort gave birth to an illegitimate son who then ascended the throne.

Unfortunately, a chance to carry through with his plan did not present itself, and so His Majesty turned increasingly to Japanese and Chinese sources, poring over various documents until he discovered numerous examples in which the imperial succession had been thrown into confusion in China—some made public, others kept secret. He could not find anything remotely like this in Japan, but then again, if there had been such an instance that had been kept secret as in his case, how would knowledge of it ever have been passed down? There were, however, instances in which a commoner who had been granted the Minamoto name rose first to the post of Counselor or Minister, next acquired the title of Prince, and then subsequently ascended the throne.¹⁰ When he discovered these cases, Reizei considered various options he could take, including stepping aside and yielding the throne to Genji on the grounds that he had the wisdom and ability to govern the realm.

Reizei had privately decided beforehand that Genji must assume the post of Chancellor at the Autumn Ceremonial for Court Promotions, and when he informed him of this decision, he took that moment to disclose as well that he was thinking about abdicating in favor of Genji. Blindsided, Genji was aghast and urged Reizei not to take such precipitous action.

“It was our father’s intention,” he reminded Reizei, “that I not be in the line of succession, even though among all his sons he favored me. Why would I now go against his wishes and strive for a station that is beyond my reach? I believe that I should remain nothing more than a servant of the state, as he wanted from the beginning, and when I am a little older I shall go into retreat and quietly practice my devotions.”

His advice was exactly the same as before, and it left Emperor Reizei feeling bitterly disappointed. Though he had already decided that Genji should be Chancellor, Genji had reasons for wanting to put off the appointment for a while. That autumn he accepted promotion to the lower first rank, which gave him the privilege of arriving and leaving the palace in an ox-drawn carriage, but this still left His Majesty feeling dissatisfied and ashamed that Genji was not yet Chancellor; and so he stated his reasons why Genji should be named a prince of the blood.

Listening to Reizei’s argument, several thoughts went through Genji’s mind: *No one at the court would support such a move. The Acting Counselor, Tō no Chūjō, has just been promoted to Major Counselor and has assumed duties as Major Captain of the Right. Once my old friend has risen another rank, I shall cede everything to him, and then at last I shall be able to retire and live a quiet*

life.

Genji was perplexed by His Majesty's stated desire to abdicate. As he pondered the matter, he felt pity for Fujitsubo, and as he observed how tormented Reizei was, he began to suspect that someone had revealed the secret of the young Emperor's birth. Ōmyōbu had moved into service with the Mistress of the Imperial Wardrobe and now occupied a chamber in the palace. Genji went to visit her and asked if there hadn't been some occasion when Fujitsubo had inadvertently let slip a hint about their affair. Ōmyōbu flatly denied it. "She never said a word about it, my lord. She was terrified that His Majesty might somehow find out the truth, and yet she was also troubled at the thought that he might later suffer because of this transgression." Upon hearing this, Genji was overcome with endless yearning for Fujitsubo, who had exercised such extraordinary discretion.

The former High Priestess at Ise was now firmly established as the Umetsubo Consort, and she had been a great help to the young Emperor just as Fujitsubo and Genji had hoped she would be. Reizei considered her one of his favorites, and indeed, in comportment and appearance, she possessed ideal grace. Genji took care to support her so that she would be treated as a woman worthy of great deference.

During the autumn, the Umetsubo Consort withdrew from the palace and went to stay at the Nijō villa. Genji had the main hall readied for her so that it would look even more splendid than usual, and in this respect, as an adoptive father, he behaved properly. A gentle autumn rain was quietly falling, and the garden plants in front of the main hall, displaying a riot of fall colors, were thickly covered in dewdrops. As Genji made his way through them to call on his adopted daughter, the dew dampened his robes and stirred memories of things past. Because he was continuing to mourn the recent deaths that had so unsettled the court, he was dressed in a cloak of dark gray and carried with him a rosary, which he had tucked away out of consideration for Umetsubo's position. He had taken special care with his appearance and was looking exceptionally vital and elegant as he went straight in behind her blinds. A single curtain separated them, and he spoke directly to her, using his prerogative as her father to forego an intermediary.

"The leaves on all the garden plants seem to be untying their cords and disrobing. In such a terrible year as this, it's touching to see that at least the grasses continue to display their colors in recognition of the season."

Bathed in the faint glow of dusk, he looked spectacular as he leaned against a pillar and spoke to her about things that had happened long ago—especially the day he had found it so hard to leave that shrine in the fields. The memory filled

him with deep emotion. *Did Umetsubo just say “when she disappeared”?*¹¹ ... he couldn't quite make out the words, but there were indications from behind the curtain that she was gently weeping. He found that quite alluring. Her subtle movements sounded soft and lovely, and he now regretted that he had never had the chance to look at her. The incorrigible passion that stirred in his breast was truly inappropriate.

“In the past I was always tormented by my amorous nature, which caused grief even during those times of my life when I had no reason to be troubled. Many people have suffered because of things I should never have done, but I brought especially painful regrets to two women who grew desperate and were finally estranged from me. One of those women was your mother. She would obsess so much over perceived slights that she ended in a dark place ... that will be a source of sorrow for me for the rest of my life. I had hoped it might console her to see how I looked after and supported you, but it is still depressing to think that the smoke from her pyre has not yet cleared away.”

He chose not to speak of the other woman but continued rambling on.

“More recently, when I was sunk in exile without rank or status, I would imagine all the things I would do once I returned to the capital, and little by little I am now managing to carry them out. Take the lady I installed to oversee the annex ... I think of her as my lady of the villa of scattering orange blossoms. I once felt sorry for her because she was in dire straits, but now she is comfortably settled and her mind at ease. She is by nature easygoing and not given to grudges, and the two of us understand each other clearly and maintain a pleasant, casual relationship. Still, having returned to the capital in the manner I did—after suffering so much—the joys of serving the court don't touch my heart all that deeply. You see, because it's difficult for me to control my romantic urges, it has been extremely hard for me to support you as I have—you do realize that, don't you? My patient endurance will have all been in vain if you don't tell me you are touched by my feelings.”

She was put off, frightened by his advance, and did not reply.

“So that's how it is. How cruel of you,” he said, then changed the subject. “At the moment I would like to live as quietly as possible, withdraw from the world, practice religious devotions to my heart's content, and prepare for the next life so that I leave behind no lingering regrets. Unfortunately, I have yet to do anything that would give me something to remember from this life. There is a certain child, a girl of no significance or rank ... will I have to wait till she grows up and leaves me such a memory before I withdraw from the world? Please forgive me if I am being presumptuous, but may I ask you to help the girl after I am gone, so that the glory and honor of my house will spread through the

world?"

She answered him, after a pause, whispering a single word, which he could barely make out, that suggested an open, generous attitude on her part. The atmosphere created was intimate and familiar, and the two of them sat talking quietly until darkness fell.

"My hopes for the glory and honor of my house are one thing, but what I really long for is the relief from cares that comes when one can appreciate the beauty of seasonal changes throughout the year—the spring blossoms, the fall foliage, the various patterns of the skies. People have long debated which is superior, the forest in spring or the autumn fields at their peak, yet there has never been a clear-cut reason that would move the heart to choose one over the other. Apparently they say in China that nothing can compare with the brocade of spring flowers. But in the poetry of our land, the poignant beauty of autumn seems to be favored. Whenever I view each season in its turn, my eyes are drawn to its specific charms, and I cannot make a distinction between the colors of different seasons or the songs of birds heard at specific times of the year. I have considered creating a garden even in this narrow, enclosed space here that demonstrates a sensitivity to the differing beauties of the various seasons, as far as I understand them—planting the trees of spring, transplanting the grasses of autumn, bringing in insects whose chirruping goes to waste in the wild where no one hears them. Were I to build such a garden and show it to you, which would you choose—spring or autumn?"

Umetsubo found it difficult to respond, but it would have been impolite to say nothing at all, so she replied, "If someone like you cannot choose between them, then how am I to make a judgment? However, were I to choose, in truth I prefer the autumn, when the dusk makes one feel, as the poet puts it, 'very strange.'¹² The autumn brings to mind my relationship with my mother, who passed away like the evanescent dew of that season."

Genji found the tentativeness of her reply, the way her voice trailed off, utterly irresistible, and he could not restrain himself.

Together we share that poignant sorrow

Secretly the breeze of an autumn dusk

Seeps to the very core of my being

"So often have I found it hard to endure."

How was she to respond to that? She pretended that she didn't quite grasp what he had said, but he used her evasiveness as a pretext to reproach her bitterly for her coldness toward him, apparently no longer able to suppress his desires.

Had he gone a little farther just then, he would surely have committed an outrage against her, but when she naturally recoiled from his unpleasant display, he checked himself, aware that his own inclinations were immature and shocking. The profound elegance of his demeanor when he sighed in lament was repulsive to her, and he could sense that she was quietly retreating from him little by little, withdrawing to the interior of her chambers. So he too decided to withdraw, leaving her with these words: “It appears that you have taken a cruel dislike of me and want to distance yourself. A compassionate woman would never do such a thing. Very well, then ... but do not hate me from now on—that would be too painful to bear.” The lingering scent of his perfumed robes, which had permeated the space, was offensive to her.

As her ladies-in-waiting lowered the lattice shutters, they commented among themselves.

“The fragrance of his lordship’s robes still clings to the cushion he sat on ... ineffably alluring.”

“How can one man bring together in himself all elements of beauty and grace?”

“It’s as if he makes plum blossoms flower on a branch of willow.¹³ He’s so disturbingly handsome, it makes me afraid.”

Genji went back to the west hall, but he did not go into Murasaki’s chambers right away. Instead he stared off, lost in his hurt, before lying down near the edge of the veranda. He ordered some lanterns hung from the eaves a little distance away, then summoned some female attendants, who were to remain in close service, and began talking with them. He realized that his disposition had not changed, that it was still his nature to be tormented by overwhelming amorous impulses. *My proclivities are no longer appropriate for a man of my rank and station. I have certainly committed much deeper sins than what I did tonight, but my mistakes in the past were youthful indiscretions that the Buddha and the gods have surely forgiven by now.* Nonetheless, he recognized the need to be more prudent in his affairs, given his hopes for the future.

Umetsubo was filled with shame and remorse at having responded to Genji by pretending that she understood the poignant sorrows of autumn. A vague unpleasantness stayed with her, and she began to feel ill. Genji, in contrast, was nonchalant about the matter, showing the impudence of an older man by acting as if nothing had happened and behaving in an even more fatherly manner toward her.

“I was quite moved to learn the Umetsubo Consort prefers the dusk in autumn,” he remarked to Murasaki. “Your own preference for the dawn in spring is also perfectly reasonable. I would love to sponsor some delightful

entertainments where we bring together the flowers and grasses representative of each season. Alas, I am so busy with public and private responsibilities that I cannot undertake such things, but I would still like to make it happen one way or another. It bothers me to think it might be lonely here for you."

He was constantly worried about the Akashi lady as well, wondering how she was getting along. His new rank and position placed greater constraints on his time and movements, and it was hard for him to go see her.

By all appearances, he thought, she seems to have concluded that our relationship is meaningless and depressing, but why must she think such things? I know she's anxious about moving here and leading a more normal life, but for someone of her status such an attitude is unreasonable. He pitied her all the same, and would call on her whenever he made his regular visits to the meditation hall in Sagano.

She had grown accustomed to life at the Ōi villa, but because the location was isolated, even the most trivial thing would stir feelings of sadness. One can imagine, then, how much worse it was whenever Genji visited—she knew the bond between them, which was the source of her pain, was anything but shallow, and yet she seemed so brokenhearted by her circumstances that he found it impossible to console her.

The light from bonfires set by the cormorant anglers along the riverbank to lure fish flickered between the gaps in the thick growth of trees around the villa and mingled charmingly with the flashes of the fireflies over the garden stream. The setting was breathtaking.

"If you were not already accustomed to living in a place like this, which so resembles Akashi, you would certainly consider such a scene a wonder," Genji said.

The lady replied with a verse:

*Fishing boats afloat on the waves at Akashi
Drawn to the fires on that shore ... I too am adrift
Drawn to the sad memories lit by these bonfires*

"These fires and my suffering are indistinguishable from those I knew when I was at Akashi."

His response expressed his own complaint to her in turn:

*My feelings are profound like the light of bonfires
Reflected in the depths of the waters ... while yours
Merely shimmer, scattered on the rippling surface*

“Who first taught you the world was a place of woe?”¹⁴

Everything seemed quiet and peaceful at that moment in his life, and, attracted to the elevated pursuit of his religious devotions, he stayed with the lady for several days longer than usual. Did he perhaps intend to divert her a little from her melancholy mood?

¹ The Akashi lady’s thoughts allude to two poems. (1) *Gosenshū* 705 (Anonymous): A fickle man tells a woman who is waiting for him in a temporary dwelling that her residence is inconvenient and he cannot visit her as he wishes. She moves to a dwelling closer to him, but when he still does not visit her, she composes this poem: “Though I moved nearer and waited, you do not appear ... how often I suffer your neglect.” (2) *Shūishū* 985 (Anonymous): “If even after expressing my resentment I should suffer his neglect, would it not have been better to have wept aloud.”

² *Kokinshū* 1049 (Fujiwara no Tokihira): “Though you may hide away in the depths of Mount Yoshino, which seems as far off as China, I do not want to be separated from you ...”

³ Because the pine of Takekuma, which grew in the northern province of Mutsu, had two trunks growing together, it was a symbol for those serving far from the capital of marital fidelity and good fortune. Though the poem praises the Akashi lady for raising the child, the pine of Takekuma refers to Genji and Murasaki.

⁴ This type of doll is mentioned in rituals performed by Genji in the *Suma* chapter.

⁵ Genji is reciting a line from a *saibara* titled “The Cherry-Blossom Maiden.” The song is a dialogue. *Husband*: “Hold the ferry for me, cherry-blossom maiden. I have many paddies on that isle and must go and tend them. I’ll return on the morrow, I promise.” *Maiden*: “You say you will return on the morrow, but a man with a wife on that distant shore will not return, will not return on the morrow—that is the truth.”

⁶ The source of this line has not been determined, but an early commentary cites this poem: “Are relationships in this world a floating bridge crossed in a dream that setting out to cross them brings such worry and woe?”

⁷ Certain ages in a person’s life were considered unlucky and required special steps (such as ritual purification) to avoid misfortune or ward off evil influences. These ages—thirteen, twenty-five, thirty-seven, forty-nine, sixty-one—are called *yakudoshi* (year of danger/calamity), and originally marked the beginning of a new zodiac cycle for a person (i.e., they occurred in the year of an individual’s zodiac sign, which is determined by the year of birth—keeping in mind that people were counted as one year old at birth). Over time considerable regional and historical variation in determining which years are unlucky arose in Japan; some years came to be considered *yakudoshi* only for women and others only for men. For women, ages nineteen, thirty-three, and thirty-seven were considered unlucky; for men, twenty-five, forty-two, and sixty-one were commonly thought of as *yakudoshi*. Belief in *yakudoshi* has persisted to the present day.

⁸ *Kokinshū* 387 (Shirome—composed at a farewell gathering for Minamoto Sane, who was traveling to a hot spring): “If life was such that it would always follow our wishes, then would we ever suffer the sadness of parting?”

⁹ *Kokinshū* 832 (Kamotsuke Mineo): “If the cherry trees on the plains of Fukakusa have any feelings at all, for this year only let them put forth blossoms of mourning gray.”

¹⁰ A later commentary on *Genji monogatari* titled *Kakaishō* (ca.1367) lists four emperors who followed this path to the throne: Kōnin (r. 770–81), Kammu (r. 781–806), Kōkō (r. 884–87), and Uda (r. 887–97).

¹¹ *Shūishū* 761 (Anonymous): “Was the one I loved just like the dew on these leaves of grass ... when she disappeared, my sleeves began to grow damp.”

¹² *Kokinshū* 546 (Anonymous): “Though I cannot help but yearn for you no matter what season, how very

strange I feel at dusk in the autumn!” The traditional name for the Umetsubo Consort is Akikonomu, the lady who “prefers the autumn.” However, for most of the narrative (until the *E-awase* chapter) Umetsubo is referred to in the text as either the daughter of the lady at Rokujō or the Ise High Priestess. Because the reason for the name Akikonomu is explained so late in the story, and because I believe it is important to stress her status as an imperial consort, I have decided to use the appellation Umetsubo to identify her.

13 *Goshūishū* 82 (Nakahara no Munetoki): “How I long to infuse cherry blossoms with the fragrance of the plum, then make those blossoms flower on the branch of a willow!”

14 *Kokinrokujō* 1726 (Sosei): “Who first taught you that this sad world, so like foam on the surface of water, is a place of woe?”

XX

Asagao

Bellflowers 1

PRINCESS ASAGAO stepped down as the Kamo Priestess when her father Prince Shikibu died and she had to put on mourning robes. It was Genji's nature never to waver in his devotion to a woman once he had developed feelings for her, and so he sent frequent messages of concern and condolence to the bereaved Princess. She, however, had not forgotten all of the complications his attentions had caused her, and as a result her replies to him were anything but encouraging—an attitude he found most frustrating.

It was already the ninth month when he heard that she had moved to her late father's estate at Momozono just north of Ichijō. Prince Shikibu's younger sister, the Fifth Princess, was also residing there at the time, and so Genji decided to pay his respects—though of course his ulterior motive was to see her niece. Genji's father had held both Prince Shikibu and the Fifth Princess in especially high regard, and because Genji always felt close to them he had never stopped visiting. Asagao now occupied the west hall of the Momozono estate, while her aunt, the Fifth Princess, resided in the east hall. Although Prince Shikibu had only just recently passed away, the villa was already looking a bit dilapidated and had acquired a touchingly quiet, melancholy atmosphere.

The Fifth Princess received him, and while they were talking he could tell from her habit of constantly coughing and clearing her throat that she had apparently aged quite a bit. Even though she was the sister of Princess Ōmiya, wife of the late Chancellor, the two women were very different in their bearing and appearance—Princess Ōmiya had escaped the ravages of old age, while the Fifth Princess, in contrast, had a thick and coarse voice, which was a clear indication of the differing circumstances of their respective lives.

"After your father passed away," she told him, "everything struck me as sad

and depressing, and as I grew older I became increasingly prone to tears. Now that my brother has left me behind as well, I feel uncertain, unsure if I still exist in this world or not ... but since you have come to visit me, I must set aside my grief."

Genji was appalled by how much she had aged, but he remained deferential.

"After my father died," he remarked, "the world was no longer the same. I was met with baseless accusations of crimes and had to wander lost in unfamiliar provinces. Eventually I was restored to my position at the court, but I have since been so caught up in a flurry of official duties that I have had little time to myself and, I'm sad to say, have had to let years go by without being able to come here and talk over old times."

"Truly, the older I get," she replied, her voice quavering, "the more shocking incidents I witness in this uncertain world. While I myself have remained much the same as I was, I have had reasons to regret my long life. Still, it would have been even more regrettable had I not lived long enough to witness all that has happened in recent years and to experience the joy of your return to glory. You are more splendidly handsome than ever! The first time I laid eyes on you when you were just a boy, I was startled to see that a radiant light such as you had appeared in this world. And every time I saw you after that, I was amazed ... even afraid that your looks might not augur well for you. I have had so many tell me how much His Majesty looks like you ... but, even if he does, I would guess he is not your equal."

She chattered on and on in this manner, and Genji was amused, thinking it really wasn't proper to praise someone by comparing him with the Emperor directly to his face.

"After all these years," he continued, "I'm afraid that I've declined considerably from what I was in the old days, having once been a provincial rustic suffering all manner of hardships. Is there anyone, even in courts of yore, who can compare in grace and beauty to His Majesty? I gaze at him in reverence and must say that your comments are off the mark."

"If I could look at you now," the Fifth Princess said, "it would surely bring additional years to an already long life. Your visit today made me forget old age ... I feel as though the cares of this world have all passed from me." She began to snivel, but continued to talk. "I envy Princess Ōmiya's good fortune, for she has been able to have a closer relationship with you through the boy born to your late wife. Prince Shikibu, before he died, often lamented that he did not enjoy the same good fortune, since you never married his daughter."

He was intrigued by what she had just said.

"How fortunate would I feel had I been allowed to serve the Prince as his son-

in-law ... but then again, both he and his daughter kept their distance from me.” There was a touch of bitterness in his voice.

Looking toward the hall where Asagao resided, Genji took special note of the elegance of the withered plants in the garden. Moved by the desire to see her figure gazing pensively from her chambers onto this scene, he found it hard to keep his feelings in check. “It would be unkind to let this opportunity pass, so I really should call on the Princess while I am here.” He immediately took his leave and, moving along the veranda, went over to her hall. Darkness was gathering, and the setting was perfect—the dimly lit, shadowy forms he could see through the thin gray blinds and black curtains were enchanting, while the delicate fragrance of incense wafting on the breeze was refined.

It would have been improper to keep Genji waiting on the veranda, and so he was shown into the outer chamber on the south side of the Princess’s quarters. The lady-in-waiting who served as her intermediary spoke with him and in turn conveyed his messages to Asagao.

“Sitting before your blinds like this makes me feel like a youth again,” he said, revealing his dissatisfaction at being kept outside. “Having remained devoted to you through all the years you served the deities at Kamo, I was hoping to be granted permission to at least sit inside your curtains.”

“Those years I served as Priestess,” she replied, “all seem like a dream to me. Having awakened from that dream, it now seems so fleeting that I feel confused and find it difficult to decide what to do. Please give me time to consider your years of devotion calmly before granting you permission to enter.”

Genji was reminded once again how truly ephemeral the world was.

*In secrecy I suffered cruel neglect
Waiting so many years for the gods you served
To bestow their blessings and let me see you*

“What taboo will you invoke now, I wonder, as your excuse to turn me away? After suffering all manner of afflictions in this world, my sorrows have accumulated ... I should like to share with you some small portion of them.”

He spoke with intensity. His interest in her was more refined than in the past, and he himself was older and more mature. Nonetheless, his amorous inclinations still seemed inappropriate to a man of his status, and so she replied with a verse:

*The gods would censure me for breaking vows
I swore to them were I merely to ask
About the worldly sorrows you suffered*

About the worldly sorrows you suffer

Genji responded with irresistible charm.

“Ahh, your rejection is painful ... after all, the sins I committed while you were serving as Priestess have all been swept away by sacred winds.”

The intermediary replied, somewhat flippantly, by saying, “And how, my lord, have the gods judged your purification?”²

Asagao was genuinely mortified when she heard this. She was by nature reticent and thus not used to courtly manners and the ways of love. With the passing years she had become increasingly introverted and withdrawn, and her attendants looked on in dismay at her inability to banter with his lordship. Genji sighed deeply, then stood up.

“Apparently you think I came here out of amorous motives. The older I get, the more indignities I have to endure. You have treated me with such unprecedented aloofness that people will surely say that my devotion to you has been all for naught.” He departed, with the typical gushing praise following in his wake.

The late autumn sky was a delight and, as the leaves rustled in the trees, Princess Asagao conjured in her mind touching moments from their past—an occasion here, an occasion there, some charming, some sadly moving—and she recalled with deep feeling the kindness and gentle character that he had shown to her.

Genji had left in an irritable mood, and his mind was so preoccupied that he couldn’t go to sleep. He had the lattice shutters raised early in the morning and stared out at the mist-shrouded garden. There among the withered plants, vines of bellflower were twining along the ground, the open faces of their blooms peeking out modestly. He had an attendant pick some of unusually dazzling hue and sent them to Princess Asagao.

“Your brusque treatment of me,” he wrote, “made me feel awkward. I resent how you must have watched me, with mocking eyes, as I slouched away in retreat. Even so ...”

*Can the unforgettable bellflower
I glimpsed once, its face open to the dew
Now be past the glory of its full bloom*

“I assumed you would at least take pity on me for all the years I pined in vain for you. Yet how cold you are ...”

The mature stylishness of his letter, pregnant with meaning, demanded a reply. “Otherwise,” her women insisted as they brought in her inkstone, “it

might make him think you have no sense of propriety.”

*As autumn fades bellflowers climb
The wattle fence obscured by mist
Meekly showing their withered hues*

“You fittingly compare me to my namesake, for like the bellflower I am drenched in dew ...”

She wrote nothing more, and her letter had little in the way of charm or appeal. So why did he keep staring at it, and find it hard to put aside? Apparently he was enchanted by the soft color of her fluid brushstrokes on the bluish-gray paper.

When it comes to recording exchanges of this sort, I try to take account of both the rank and the style of writing of the people involved. Even so, try as I may to convey the words exactly as I heard them—including those that were perfectly innocent at the time—people sometimes wonder if things really happened the way in which I depict them, and their doubts make me aware that while I have written this tale with an air of confidence, there may be many places where my account is suspect.

Genji sensed it would be inappropriate to send a response right away—that he would look like a callow youth trying to resurrect their past. However, in his mind she still seemed to be hinting—just as she did in the old days—that she was not altogether averse to his attentions, and so it was too frustrating for him to let their relationship lapse. Because he did not want to give up on her just yet, he reverted to his youthful ways and professed his love with heartfelt sincerity.

After Genji returned to his villa, he avoided Murasaki and went instead to the east hall, where he summoned Princess Asagao’s intermediary and spoke with her. Among the Princess’s attendants, those women who were easily susceptible to the seductions of a man—even a man whose station at the court was not all that distinguished—tended to sing Genji’s praises to an excessive degree. For her part, Asagao, who had kept him at arm’s length when they were young, was not inclined to seek a deeper relationship now that they were both of an age and status when pursuing such an affair was no longer proper. Her reluctance caused her to worry about carrying on even the most casual correspondence with him, since trivial seasonal exchanges with the appropriate flowers or grasses attached might stir up gossip. Thus, when she showed no sign of opening up to him, Genji found her at once remarkable and irritating—a woman different from all the others he had known, one whose temperament had remained unchanged over the years.

As it turned out, gossip about the two of them spread through the court anyway.

"I've heard he's pursuing Princess Asagao," said one courtier.

"Yes, and it seems her aunt, the Fifth Princess, condones the affair," remarked another.

"They're a perfectly matched couple."

Word of all this eventually reached Murasaki, and for a time she brushed it aside based on her experience with Genji's forthright handling of his affair with the Akashi lady. *Despite the rumors, I cannot believe he would keep such a thing from me if it were really true.* All the same, she immediately began keeping an eye on him and was disturbed to see how uncharacteristically distracted he seemed.

He dismisses as a joke any suggestion that his feelings for her are serious, she thought. And it's true that we're both granddaughters of an Emperor ... but she has special standing and has been considered a distinguished figure for many years. If his affections shift toward her, I shall be in a hopeless situation. I know that he has strayed from time to time, but I have had no serious rival for years, and now I'm to be pushed aside by another ... She sighed, but kept her tormented feelings to herself.

He hasn't given any indication that he will cut ties with me, but then again, my situation has always been precarious. I have no one to support me, nothing but his affection that keeps him with me. Perhaps we have been so intimate for such a long time that he's grown accustomed to having me near and now takes me for granted.

Beset by these conflicting thoughts, her heart was in turmoil. She endeared herself to him whenever she complained about some peccadillo—after all, she could forgive that sort of affair—but this time, when she was genuinely hurt, she gave no hint at all about her true feelings. Often she would observe him as he sat near the edge of the veranda gazing out, lost in his thoughts, or take note that he was spending more time at the palace or writing letters—presumably to *that woman*—with the result that she began to feel estranged from him. *It seems the rumors are true. He should at least give me some indication of how he feels.*

During the period of mourning for Fujitsubo, all of the religious festivals at the palace were suspended and Genji, who had more idle time on his hands, found himself increasingly bored. One evening he set out for the Momozono estate, ostensibly to visit the Fifth Princess. Light snow was falling, and the glow at twilight was lovely. He had richly scented his soft, familiar robes and spent the whole day grooming himself. Indeed, he was so spectacular-looking one can only imagine how enticing he must have looked to a woman more easily seduced

than Asagao.

This time he announced his departure to Murasaki. "I am going to call on the Fifth Princess. I understand that she's been ill," he said, kneeling down before her. Murasaki did not even glance at him, pretending instead to be preoccupied with her little daughter, the Akashi Princess. Nonetheless, he could tell from her profile that something was not right.

"You've been strangely out of sorts recently," he said, "but I've done nothing wrong. I've been spending time away from you, it's true, but that's because I feel you've grown used to seeing me in these worn robes, smoky from the salt-making fires of Suma, and that you are now taking me for granted. Why do you persist in these groundless suspicions?"

"Truly much anguish arises when one is taken for granted," she replied curtly, lying down with her back to him. It bothered him to be leaving her in this state, but since he had already sent a message to the Fifth Princess announcing his plan to visit, he had no choice.

Murasaki lay there turning the situation over in her mind. *Such things happen between a husband and wife, but I have been too careless and trusting.* He was wearing gray mourning robes, but the color combination of the various layers suited him, and as she watched his retreating figure, which gave off an elegant glow in the light reflecting off the snow, she could not bear to think that they might really be growing distant with one another.

He selected only his most trusted retainers for his escort. "I've reached the age in life when, apart from attending the palace, I find going on an excursion a bother." He was speaking so that both his men and the ladies-in-waiting there could hear him. "For years the Fifth Princess has been leading a lonely existence at the Momozono estate, but I left her in the care of Prince Shikibu. Now she naturally feels she has only me to rely on for support, and so I really must treat her with compassion ..."

The women, however, were not taken in by this show, and they whispered among themselves.

"I wonder about that ..."

"It looks like he's back to his old amorous ways: the flaw in the jewel."

"Nothing good can come of such recklessness."

It would have been beneath him to enter the Momozono estate by the north gate, where most ordinary people went in and out, and so he sent a member of his escort to announce his arrival and ask for permission to enter through the more dignified west gate. Because it was getting late, his note surprised the Fifth Princess, who had come to the conclusion that he would not be coming today. She ordered the west gate opened at once, and the guard scurried out, shivering

in the cold air. Unfortunately, the man was unable to open the gate right away, and from the bumping and rattling that could be heard from the other side, he was apparently the only one tugging at it.

“The lock is all rusted up and won’t budge,” he groused.

Genji was moved—after all, Prince Shikibu had died just that summer, and here the gate was already rusted shut.

Such is the way of the world, he reflected. Thirty years in a lifetime can pass so quickly, it all seems to have happened yesterday and today. Seeing these things right in front of me, my heart is drawn to the hues of the trees and grasses, and I find it impossible to abandon the things of this transient world.

*Before one knows it, an abode is covered
By a tangle of weeds ... a snow-covered fence
Falls to ruin around this ancient villa*

At last the gate was opened after considerable pushing and pulling from both sides, and Genji entered.

He discussed the usual topics with the Fifth Princess in her quarters, and she began to ramble on about events from the past. Though she spoke at length, nothing she said captured his interest, and he was becoming drowsy. She was yawning as well. “I get sleepy when evening arrives and find it hard to hold a conversation,” she said, and almost immediately afterward he could hear something behind her curtain ... was she snoring? Delighted to be free from this tedious conversation, he stood up to take his leave. But when he did, he heard someone else enter the room coughing and clearing her throat like a woman of extremely advanced age.

“Pardon me, my lord,” she said, “I had hoped you had been informed that I live here ... but sadly for me, I am no longer counted by you as among the living. His Majesty, your late father, once teased me by calling me Dame Granny.”

At the mention of that name Genji remembered the woman—Naishi. He once heard that she had taken vows and was practicing devotions as a disciple in the Fifth Princess’s household, but he had no idea she was still alive. It struck him as amazing.

“How delighted I am to hear your voice ... everything from the time of my father’s reign has receded to the distant past, and it makes me sad to recall events from those days. Pity me as an orphaned wayfarer who has collapsed on the slopes.”³

She sensed he had moved back inside toward the curtain, and as memories flooded back to her, she began to behave in a forward, coquettish manner,

reliving her past as if she were a young woman again. Her voice conjured in Genji's mind an image of a puckered mouth and sunken cheeks, and though her words were slurred and hard to understand, he gathered she was still flirtatious and playful.

"Must I now speak words of comfort to you as well ...,"⁴ she said, expressing an inappropriate sentiment.

At first he couldn't help but smile at the thought that she now considered him an old man ... but the more he thought about it, the more he was moved by her circumstances: *The consorts and concubines who were once her rivals when she was in her prime are either all dead or reduced to insignificance and cast adrift. How brief Fujitsubo's life had been! Life is so brief, so full of hardships ... and yet here is this woman of frivolous character living on, quietly passing her days practicing religious devotions. Truly, the world is an uncertain place.*

Genji looked so pensive that Naishi mistakenly assumed his heart must have been stirred by memories of love. In a youthful mood, she composed a verse:

*Though many years have passed I can never forget
Those promises we made and those words He uttered
Thinking of me as the mother of his mother*⁵

Her words had an unpleasantly weird tone.

*Once you have been reborn in the next world
Wait and see if there are any children
Who have forgotten parents in this world*

"The vows we made are trustworthy. We should talk at leisure soon," he said as he left for Princess Asagao's quarters.

Though most of the lattice blinds on the rooms facing west had been lowered, one or two had been left open so there would be no suggestion that Asagao was trying to avoid him. The moon was out, its light reflecting off the thin layer of snow covering the ground. An unusually lovely evening, even when compared to evenings in the spring or autumn. Genji was amused as he recalled having heard somewhere that things capable of producing a sense of chill, uncanny beauty included winter nights like this and the lodgings of an old woman—to be sure, old Naishi's coquettish preening had produced an unsettled feeling in him.

He spoke earnestly to Asagao this particular night.

"Please talk to me directly, without an intermediary, and tell me that you find my interest in you distasteful. If you do, I shall take that to mean I should give

you up." He pressed his case ardently, but her heart remained unmoved.

In the old days when both of us were young, she thought, the world would have overlooked any youthful transgressions that we might have committed ... but I resisted Genji's overtures, even though my own father hoped to give me to him as one of his wives. I knew about his other troubled relationships and believed that any affair between us would have been inappropriate and shameful. Now, after many years have passed and I'm no longer in my prime, an affair would be just as inappropriate, and so it would be awkward for me to say anything to him directly. Genji found her unyielding attitude shockingly cruel.

To say she would not be moved did not mean she was trying to make him feel uncomfortable or unwelcome, but her continued insistence on using an intermediary was annoying to him. It was quite late, the wind was picking up and blowing more fiercely, and he was feeling genuinely forlorn. Delicately brushing tears from his eyes, he composed the following:

*Has it learned nothing at all from experience
This yearning heart that, having once felt your coldness
Must suffer once again your cruel rejection*

"It is rather the fault of my own heart ..." ⁶ he added.

Her attendants whispered among themselves, as they always did.

"It's just as he says ... what a pity!"

Asagao replied to Genji, saying, "I simply cannot rid myself of old habits."

*How could I show you a different face
I could never change my feelings for you
As I have heard other women have done*

Words were useless now, and it would have seemed petulant had he simply expressed his deep resentment and departed. So instead he pleaded with her. "You must never let anyone know how foolishly I have behaved ... absolutely no one must find out. Would it be presumptuous of me to invoke the Isara River now?" ⁷ He was whispering urgently to the intermediary—and what did Asagao's women make of that?

"Well, this is certainly shameful," one declared.

"How could she treat him so coldly?"

"He doesn't strike one as the type of man who would just casually force himself on her."

"I feel sorry for him."

Though Princess Asagao was certainly aware that he was a man of outstanding character, at once charming and sensitive, she had other things to consider.

If by my demeanor I were to give even the slightest suggestion that I sympathize with him, then I would be no different from all those other lovers of his who gush about how wonderful he is. That would surely expose my feelings as shallow, especially in the face of his daunting magnificence, which is enough to make one feel small anyway. It wouldn't do at all for me to show any kindness that might encourage him to think I have feelings for him. I'll just continue to correspond with him, in a casual manner of course, since not replying would give him cause to worry that I am unsteady ... but I'll also continue to use an intermediary. I must now concentrate on my devotions to Buddha to atone for those years when I sinfully neglected them as Priestess at Kamo. Were I suddenly to begin an affair with Genji or make a show of breaking completely with him, either way it would look contrived and people would gossip about us.

She knew full well the tendency of people at the court to engage in malicious rumormongering, and so she was no longer open or unguarded with her attendants, but rather acted with extreme prudence, giving almost all of her attention to her religious practices.

Princess Asagao had many half brothers, but she was not close to any of them, since they were not born to her mother. Thus, when a lord as splendid as Genji considerately deigned to visit the Momozono estate, which was usually deserted and lonely, and showed such complete devotion, all of the ladies-in-waiting there held out hopes that he would take her as his wife and look after their household.

True, he was not madly in love with her, but her cold indifference frustrated him all the same, and he was loath to simply give up in defeat. After all, in terms of looks, sensibility and reputation he was very much the ideal man, and now that he was more mature, having experienced hardship, he had a deeper understanding of the world and a better grasp of human nature. He was also more prudent, having become aware of the court's critical view of his fickle, amorous temperament. Yet, for all that, he still felt restless and uneasy: *If things go on in this fruitless manner, I'll be a laughingstock. What should I do?*

Meanwhile, as he spent more nights away from his Nijō villa, Murasaki couldn't help but think about how difficult such foolish games were.⁸ She tried to bear up, but how could there not have been moments when she cried?

"You seem strangely not at all yourself ... I have no idea why," he said, running his fingers through her hair. He was moved to deep sympathy. The sight of this loving couple sitting together made one long to have the scene captured in

a painting. “Emperor Reizei has been very lonely following the death of his mother, and it’s distressing to see him like that. And now that he no longer has the services of the late Chancellor, I have to spend more time at the palace tending to duties that no one else can handle. You are not used to my being away so much of late, and so it’s perfectly reasonable for you to dwell on my absence and feel melancholy. But you really must put your mind at ease, even when I have to be away. You seem to have matured, yet you often find it hard to understand the situation of others ... though I must say, I’ve always found the way you look when you pout and petulantly doubt my true feelings to be sweetly endearing.”

He brushed back the strands of hair, wet with tears, which were clinging to her forehead, but she turned further away from him and would not reply.

“You’re acting like a child ... who taught you such behavior?” He found it tedious that such trivial matters should drive them apart, especially when life was so short, and he gazed off, distracted by other concerns.

“Oh, I see ... is it possible you have misinterpreted those little messages I’ve been sending the daughter of the late Prince Shikibu? If that’s the case, then you are seriously mistaken. You’ll see for yourself soon enough. She has always had an icy, distant personality, and so whenever she is feeling lonely or bored I simply try to shake her out of her lethargy, upsetting her routine with notes that seem like love letters. She has so much time on her hands that once in a while she’ll send a reply ... but none of this is serious, so I thought it best not to trouble you about each and every one of my concerns, as I’m doing now. Please reconsider and recognize that you have nothing to worry about.” He spent the rest of the day reassuring her.

Snow had piled up in the garden, and as it continued to flurry in the twilight, the transformation of the pines and the bamboo was a marvel. Genji’s features seemed more radiant than usual.

“The cherry blossoms and the autumn foliage at their peak no doubt stir the human heart in their respective seasons,” he said, “but the sky of a winter night, when a full, clear moon illuminates the snow, is more profoundly moving than either, even though there is an eerie lack of color. It transports my thoughts to things beyond this world ... it provides a moment when one can appreciate beauty and sadness to the full. Those who would claim that an evening like this is an example of something coldly forbidding have a shallow understanding of beauty.”⁹

He had the blinds rolled up, and moonlight streamed into every corner of the chamber, bathing it in a uniformly whitish glow. The poor withered plants in the garden were sagging beneath the weight of the snow, the burbling of the garden

stream sounded as if it were sobbing in grief, and the ice on the pond was indescribably desolate. Genji sent the page girls out into the garden to roll snowballs. The adorable figures and haircuts of the youngest girls glistened in the moonlight. The older page girls, who were more accustomed to such things, casually wore *akome* robes of various colors over their white robes and loosely tied sashes.¹⁰ The ends of their long black hair trailed out well beyond the hem of their robes and stood out vividly against the white snow. The atmosphere was charming as the smallest girls ran about joyfully, dropping their fans and playing freely, without the normal constraint of having to hide their faces. They tried to roll ever larger snowballs, but when the snowballs became too big to move, the girls seemed to have no idea what to do. Another group of page girls came out and sat down on the east end of the veranda, laughing in amused irritation at the folly of their peers.

“I recall that one year some children made a snow mountain in the garden of His Majesty’s mother,” Genji remarked, “and though it is a common enough diversion, somehow she could make even the most trivial event seem unique. It’s a shame that she has passed away, for no matter what the occasion, things will just not be the same without her presence. She always kept a proper distance from me. Though I never had the chance to observe her all that closely when she was living at the palace, she never gave me cause to worry, but was considerate and supportive. I felt I could trust her and sought her advice on certain matters at various times ... and though she never flaunted her talent for deftly handling matters right down to the last detail, she was always helpful to me and took care of even the most trivial request exactly and properly. Will there ever be anyone like her again? She possessed a quiet grace, and no one could match the depth of her refinement and good breeding. There is you, of course ... she may have been incomparable, but you are not all that different since you, my little *murasaki*, share the same imperial colors as your aunt.¹¹ Even so, your prickly, jealous personality, which emerges whenever something upsets you, is exasperating. The former Priestess at Kamo—the woman you seem so worried about now—has a very different personality. Whenever I feel bored and I’m by myself, I go to talk with her, though our conversations touch on nothing of real substance. Her estate is, after all, the only place left other than my own where I have responsibilities.”

“The former Principal Handmaid for Emperor Suzaku,” Muraski offered, “is also a woman of superior brilliance and sophistication. She is discreet and not at all shallow or flighty, and yet how strange it is that her affair with you should have led to such dire consequences.”

“Yes, that’s true,” Genji replied. “She would have to be considered a paragon

of aristocratic beauty. When I think of her, I'm filled with remorse. It seems that a young man of fickle and amorous disposition comes to regret many things as he grows older. When I think about my own missteps, I feel that my life has been distinctly calmer than most." The subject of Oborozukiyo brought him to tears.

"The Akashi lady," he continued, "the one you dismiss as unworthy of consideration compared to other women, has in fact a degree of refined discernment that goes a little beyond what you would expect of someone of her status. Of course, it's precisely because she cannot be considered an equal to these other noblewomen that I have ignored her tendency to get above herself. I have never yet met any woman whose station in life meant she had absolutely nothing to recommend her. Truly superior women are hard to find in this world, are they not? The lady I put in charge of the annex passes her days in quiet melancholy, but she is as dear to me as ever ... you see, even though we are no longer intimate, there is more to it than that. Once I began seeing her, I came to realize that she was by nature steady and reliable, and so we have continued our relationship in the same manner ever since. It touches me profoundly to know that we will never abandon one another." After speaking of Hanachirusato, Genji shared with Murasaki other stories, past and present, late into the night.

The moon was glowing brilliantly and the stillness of the night was entrancing. Murasaki composed a verse:

*The water in the pond no longer flows
Frozen between the rocks while the clear moon
Courses unimpeded across the sky*

Looking out at the garden with her head slightly tilted to one side, she was remarkably beautiful. Suddenly, as he was gazing at her hair and her face, he saw in her the image of Fujitsubo, the woman he had desired for so many years. Murasaki was so lovely that his affections, which recently had been a little divided, now settled on her alone. At that moment they heard the call of a mandarin duck, and that symbol of marital fidelity prompted Genji's reply:

*The melancholy cry of a mandarin duck
Adds further poignancy to this night when yearnings
For all that we shared in the past pile up like snow*

Genji went into their sleeping quarters and tried to rest. Still thinking about Fujitsubo, he was not quite asleep, not quite dreaming when he saw a faint vision

of her. She had an angry countenance.

“You swore you would never reveal our secret,” she said, “but you have not kept the matter hidden and I have been shamed. I am suffering now in expiation for my sins, and I resent you for being their cause.”

Just as he was about to reply, he had the sensation of being assaulted. Murasaki called out to him, “What’s wrong? Why are you acting like this?” Genji was startled. He felt empty and his heart was beating furiously. As soon as he got his emotions under control, he realized that he had been crying; and even after he regained his senses, tears continued to soak his robes. Murasaki, wondering what had happened, was lying beside him, not moving a muscle. He murmured:

*My heart troubled, I awaken
From fitful sleep ... how short my dream
On this cold, lonely winter night*

Feeling depressed and vaguely discontented, Genji rose early and commissioned sutra readings at various temples—though he did not specify for whom he wanted these services. *It is natural for Fujitsubo to resent having to suffer in the afterlife. She assiduously practiced her devotions and tried every means possible to lighten the burden of her sins ... but that one illicit affair with me has prevented her from sloughing off the defilements of this world.* Pondering the reasons for why things happen, he was terribly distraught and grew even more pensive. *She is alone in a world where there is no one she knows ... if only I could go to comfort her somehow and place the burden of her sins on myself!* Were he to go out of his way to have special services performed for her, he would surely risk public censure. Then another terrifying thought occurred to him ... might Emperor Reizei be troubled by the specter of doubt about his birth? Genji at once conjured up an image of Amida Buddha in his mind and meditated, invoking the Holy Name. *Please grant to Fujitsubo and me rebirth on the same lotus in the paradise of your Pure Land.*

*Yearning to follow my lost love, I search and search
Trusting my heart to guide me ... yet I wander lost
And cannot find her at the river of three fords¹²*

Such, it has been reported, were his thoughts and feelings ... deplorable, were they not?

¹ Asagao literally means “morning faces” and is often translated as “morning glory.” However, in this case, *asagao* most likely refers to a different, similar-looking flower called *kikyō*, which is a type of bellflower. The reason I am making this distinction is that morning glory eventually acquired a poetic association with the summer, and this chapter takes place in late autumn and early winter. While it is possible that the flowers that give this chapter its title are morning glory that have somehow survived past their season, since *kikyō*, which were used in gardens in Japan as early as the tenth century, are associated with the autumn (as one of the seven flowers or grasses of that season), bellflower strikes me as the more appropriate translation. This chapter provides the traditional name for Princess Asagao, but because she was introduced so early in the narrative, I chose to use this name throughout, noting in passing Genji’s association of her with bellflowers.

² *Kokinshū* 501 [also *Tales of Ise*, section 65] (Anonymous): “Alas, the gods do not accept the offerings I made at the purification stream and will not answer my prayer to be cleansed of my love for you.”

³ *Shūishū* 135 (Shōtoku Taishi): “Have pity on the poor orphaned wayfarer who lies collapsed, starving on the slopes of Mount Kataoka.”

⁴ Probably a poetic allusion, but the source has not been definitively identified. The point is that she is sympathizing with him for having grown old.

⁵ *Shūishū* 545 (Anonymous): “Might you have called on me had you thought of me as the mother of your mother ... you are certainly not the child of my child.”

⁶ *Nakatuskasa shū* 249: “Because my yearning for you is the fault of my own heart, I suffer and have nowhere to turn to find consolation.”

⁷ *Kokinshū* 1108 (Anonymous—attributed to an emperor who is addressing a lover of low rank in Ōmi): “Do not give my identity away, but instead if asked think of the Isaya River at Mount Toko in Inugami and reply, ‘Isa ... I do not know.’” Genji gives a different name for the river. His forwardness may be due to the nature of his request or to his allusion to a poem that may have been composed by an emperor.

⁸ *Kokinshū* 1025(Anonymous): “When I try to stay away and not meet you just to see what will happen, my yearning is so great that I can no longer bear this foolish game.” This poem is alluded to in the *Akashi* chapter as well.

⁹ The text may be alluding to the opinions of Murasaki Shikibu’s literary and political rival Sei Shōnagon, the author of *The Pillow Book*.

¹⁰ *Akome* were usually worn by men and women as a middle layer robe, but because of their length they could be worn as an outer robe by children. The text does not mention the color of the robes under the *akome*, but it was common for attendants, including page girls, to wear white robes when on night service. For the sake of comfort, should the attendant on night service want to lie down to rest, the sashes (*obi*) for these robes were kept loose.

¹¹ Genji is alluding again to *Kokinshū* 867 (Anonymous): “Because of this one purple gromwell, I look on all the grasses in Musashino with tender feelings.” This poem was first cited in the *Wakamurasaki* chapter.

¹² Souls of the dead had to cross the river of three fords to get over to the next world. The depth of the particular ford a soul had to cross—shallow, medium, or deep—was determined by the gravity of sins committed during that person’s lifetime.

XXI

Otome

Maidens of the Dance

THE NEW Year arrived, the first anniversary of Fujitsubo's death came and went, and with it mourning robes were exchanged for robes of everyday colors. Then, with the change to summer wardrobes at the start of the fourth month, the spirit of the court revived. By the time of the Kamo Festival the skies looked pleasant and balmy, and the world once more seemed cheerful to everyone—everyone, that is, except Princess Asagao, who remained lost in sad thoughts as she continued to mourn her father. As participants in the festival adorned their caps with leaves of katsura and wild ginger, the breeze rustling through the katsura trees brought back warm, nostalgic memories to the Princess's younger ladies-in-waiting.

A message from Genji arrived inquiring after Asagao: "How serene you must feel on this day of purification. Were you aware that ..."

*The lustration at the Kamo River
Returns this day like waves at the rapids
As you cleanse yourself of those mourning robes*

His letter was written on purple paper folded vertically in a formal, official manner so as not to give the impression of amorous intent. He had attached it to wisteria blooms.

This particular day called forth deep emotions for the Princess, and so she sent this reply:

*It seems only yesterday I donned robes of gray
Truly today, this time of purification
The world has changed again, and I must take them off*

She added the words, "All things must pass." That was all there was to her note.

As usual, Genji could not stop poring over the letter. At the time she changed out of her mourning robes, Genji generously sent gifts truly fit for an aristocratic woman. He had them delivered to her intermediary's quarters—so many that there was hardly room for them all. Princess Asagao, worried how this might look to others, indicated how embarrassed she was, and her intermediary was at a loss over how to handle the situation. Had Lord Genji sent some flirtatious letter with the gifts, they could have simply sent them all back to him. But he had been sending letters and gifts to her on public occasions for years ... and his letter today was so proper, how could they possibly refuse to keep them?

Genji could not very well let the day pass without also writing in similar fashion to the Fifth Princess, and his gesture touched her deeply.

"It seems like yesterday when our lord Genji was a boy, and now here he is, all grown up, a splendid man showing such consideration to me. He really is extraordinarily good-looking ... and he has matured so much in temperament that he is far superior to other gentlemen." The young ladies-in-waiting giggled at her extravagant praise.

Whenever the Fifth Princess met with her niece, she would always prod her in her old-fashioned way. "Lord Genji," she would say, "seems to have had his heart fixed on you for a long time. No, no, now ... there's no use pretending that his interest in you is something recent. Your father was always lamenting that once Genji had married into the house of the late Chancellor, he never had the chance to look after him as a son-in-law. He was constantly going on to me about how much your willful rejection of Genji and your position as the Priestess at Kamo had thwarted his plans, and he complained about it many times. In spite of all that, I never said anything to Genji to encourage his interest in you ... not while that first wife of his was still alive, since I had to show respect to her mother, Princess Ōmiya. I couldn't very well ignore her unassailable position; but now that his wife is gone, why, in truth, would there be anything wrong in fulfilling your father's dreams for you? When you think about it, it seems that the passion he felt for you in the old days has returned, and ... well, that must mean your relationship with him was preordained."

Princess Asagao found her aunt's encouragement most unwelcome.

"Since Father passed away feeling I had willfully thwarted his dreams for me, wouldn't it be altogether unbecoming were I now to yield to such a relationship?"

Shamed by her niece's demeanor, the Fifth Princess gave up pressing Princess Asagao to do as her father had wished. Still, because all the attendants at the Momozono estate—women of both high and low status—were in sympathy with

Genji, Asagao worried about the direction her relationship with him might take. For his part, Genji was doing everything in his power to demonstrate his feelings for her, waiting for the moment when she would begin to behave with more open, gentle feelings toward him. In any case, he certainly did not want to hurt her by being aggressive, as she feared he would.

Genji was busy planning for the coming-of-age ceremony for his son. At first he considered holding the event at his Nijō villa, but he knew that the boy's grandmother, Princess Ōmiya, would naturally want to witness such a splendid occasion, and so, feeling sorry for her, he decided in the end to hold the ceremony at the Sanjō residence. The boy's maternal uncles were all high-ranking officials at the court—including, of course, Tō no Chūjō, who was now Major Captain of the Right—and they had the trust of Emperor Reizei. As members of the Sanjō household, they now vied with each other to see who could be of greatest service to Genji's son; indeed, the whole court was clamoring over the ceremony, bustling about in preparation.

Genji originally considered raising his son to the fourth rank when he came of age. Everyone at court expected him to do so, but in the end he gave up the idea. To willfully take advantage of his power and promote his son while the boy was still so young would have been not just unseemly, but much too common. Thus, when Genji's son returned to the imperial quarters in the Seiryōden following the ceremony and entered the gallery on the south side wearing a light blue-green robe signifying his promotion to the sixth rank, Princess Ōmiya was shocked and disappointed. She quite naturally felt sorry for her grandson, and when she met Genji and pressed him about the matter, he explained his decision at some length:

"For the time being, I think it best not to rush him into taking on adult responsibilities, not while he's still so young. My reasons are as follows. Because I believe that the next two or three years would simply be wasted were he to go into service at the palace, my intention all along has been for him to follow the course of study at the academy in the Ministry of Ceremonials.¹ When he has finished his studies, then naturally I would expect him to assume a normal position in the bureaucracy and serve His Majesty. I myself grew up in the inner circles of the palace, and as a result I learned nothing of the world outside. I was constantly serving my father, from morning to night, and ended up studying only a few trivial texts ... of course, I was fortunate to have been educated directly by my father, who graciously saw to my training, but I never acquired a broad grasp of any subject. I may have read the Chinese classics and learned to play the koto and flute, but there remain many aspects of these subjects I have yet to master. It is a rare occurrence indeed when a clever child is able to overcome the handicap

of a father who is not well schooled; as it is, the transmission of knowledge from generation to generation is always tenuous.

“I’m concerned about the future, about the education of my son’s descendants, and that is why I made this decision to send him to the academy. As the scion of an aristocratic house, he expects any rank and position he desires and assumes that it is his birthright to flourish at the court. It may seem to him that the effort required to complete his studies is a nuisance and that it is beneath him. But if he were to grow fond of diversions and rise through the ranks just as he pleased without doing anything to merit his promotions, then those who follow him and are drawn to his power will privately look down on him. Oh, they may flatter and cajole him, currying favor by doing the things that he wants, making him feel like a distinguished nobleman ... but when there is a shift in power with the coming of a new reign and those who once supported him step aside, his prestige and position will crumble, he will be disparaged, and he will end with nowhere to turn to for support. With the wisdom of the Chinese classics as a foundation, my son will be recognized as a man of value to a court infused with the spirit of Yamato² and thus have more certain prospects for promotion. He may feel irritable and impatient for a while, but if he has prepared himself and is qualified to take on the heavy responsibilities of governance, then I’m sure he will have nothing to worry about, even after I’m gone ... and that is why I want him to study at the academy. My plans for him may not seem to you to be in the boy’s best interests right now. However, since I’m the one who is raising him and providing support in this manner, I doubt he will suffer the scorn and derision of others, even if he does have to experience the rigorous life of a poor student.”

Princess Ōmiya sighed.

“Of course, as his father you must give these things careful consideration. Yet the boy’s uncles, including Tō no Chūjō, all agree that your plans are unprecedented ... and questionable. The young man himself must feel terrible—after all, his cousins have each received a promotion to the fifth rank and been recognized as men of parts even though they are socially inferior from his perspective. I feel sorry for him, knowing how bitter it must feel to be wearing that blue-green robe.”

Genji laughed.

“He must be grown up if he already holds a grudge against me. He’s not showing much judgment, but then again he is young and immature.” He found his son’s attitude charmingly admirable. “Once he has completed his course of study and has a better grasp of how the world works, his resentment will fade of its own accord.”

The matriculation ceremony, when Genji’s son would receive his two-

character sobriquet in the Chinese style, was held in the annex of the Nijō villa. The east hall was readied for the event, and since it was an unusual ceremony, many high-ranking officials and noblemen were eager to attend and vied with one another to be included in the gathering. The scholars from the academy who were to conduct the matriculation must have been awestruck and nervous.

“Do not feel constrained,” Genji ordered them, “but treat my son as strictly as you would anyone else and carry on in accordance with your customs.”

With that command, they did their best to disguise their nervousness and appear cool and calm. The noblemen in attendance had never seen anything like the spectacle the scholars presented—the peculiar method by which they lined up to take their seats, the obviously unashamed figures that they cut in the ill-fitting robes they had borrowed for the occasion, their solemn, stiffly officious faces and manner of speech. The younger officials could not restrain themselves and laughed derisively. Genji had purposely chosen older, more mature officials—men who wouldn’t laugh at the proceedings—to be in charge of pouring the wine for the scholars. Unfortunately, these men were not accustomed to the protocol required for such a ceremony and banquet, and so, despite the earnest efforts of even the Major Captain of the Right and the Minister of Public Affairs, they found themselves being upbraided severely by the scholars for the manner in which they served.

“Really, gentlemen, this will not do at all ... not proper form at all. Is it possible that you actually serve at the palace and yet remain ignorant of the distinguished scholars you are dealing with? It is truly preposterous, I say!”

Decorous restraint was no longer possible, and the noblemen attending all burst out laughing. Whereupon one of the scholars scolded them as if they were schoolboys. “Quiet down, I say! You are all much too rambunctious! This is unheard of. I shall have to send you off.” The whole affair was quite amusing.

Those who had never witnessed anything like this were amazed and fascinated by the ceremony, while those officials and noblemen who had attended the academy smiled knowingly. They were all struck with boundless admiration at Genji’s preference for the path of learning and for his decision to send his son off to study. They could not express themselves, however, because the scholars would stifle even the slightest comment, sternly rebuking any insolence or breach of etiquette. Yet as the night wore on, in the harsh, clear light of the lamps, the scolding faces of the scholars seemed to take on a strange appearance—at once comical, pathetic and unrefined. The matriculation ceremony was truly a strange occasion.

Genji was observing the proceedings from behind a blind. “Being as inept and untutored in such matters as I am, you should be harshly reproving me instead.”

When he then learned that there were too few seats to accommodate the number of students who had arrived and that some of them were going home, he had seats prepared in the fishing pavilion overlooking the garden pond and provided them with a special feast and gifts.

When the ceremonial conferral of sobriquets was completed, Genji summoned scholars of letters and others deeply versed in Chinese studies and had them compose poetry in Chinese. All the high-ranking officials and noblemen who also happened to be skilled in Chinese were invited to stay behind and join the party. The scholars composed poems of eight-line stanzas consisting of four rhyming couplets with five characters to each line. All the amateurs there, including Genji, composed poems in an easier form—four-line stanzas of two rhyming couplets with lines alternating between five and seven characters. The scholars of letters set the topics in the form of a five-character line. The summer night was short, and so it was well after daybreak when the poems were read out. The lector was the Middle Controller of the Left, a most learned and noble-looking man, whose sonorous voice possessed a solemn, awe-inspiring quality that made his recitations quite elegant. He was said to be a man of impeccable reputation.

As for the verses, they variously praised Genji's son. Here, the poets sang, was a young man who, because he was born into a house of such high distinction, could have chosen simply to bask in his own glorious position at the court. Yet he had shown admirable willpower by emulating the legendary examples of those poor young Chinese scholars who, unable to purchase oil for their lamps, found ways to continue their studies: one by befriending fireflies and using their light to read on summer nights; another by using the moonlight reflected off snowy boughs to read on winter nights. Each of the verses strove to make elaborate allusions to ancient sources, and every line was so finely executed that the poems were all highly praised. Indeed, people at the court considered them so exceptional that they wanted to send them to China. Of course, out of all the poems composed that day, Genji's was singled out as a superior work not only for the rhetorical skill it displayed but also for the way it so movingly expressed a father's love. As the poem was being recited, tears welled up in everyone's eyes. However, I have chosen not to record it here. Women are supposed to know nothing of Chinese verse, and so, were I to write it down, I would leave myself open to the criticism that I am being presumptuous by taking on the airs of a scholar.

Immediately after the ceremony, Genji formally sent his son to the academy, where he had the young man give the proper gifts and emoluments to his teachers. He then had his son move into rooms specially prepared in the wing of

the annex under the charge of Hanachirusato and there begin his course of studies in earnest. He entrusted his son to a deeply learned tutor and permitted him only infrequent visits to Princess Ōmiya at the Sanjō residence. Genji knew that the boy's grandmother spoiled him terribly and kept constant watch over him as if he were still a small child. If he were around her too much, he would never learn anything, and so Genji kept his son shut away in a quiet place, allowing him trips to Sanjō a mere three times a month.

Bored and restless, the young man hated being stuck in his rooms. *How cruel of my own father! Why do I have to endure this hardship ... even if I don't study, it isn't like I won't rise to high status and become a man of value at court, is it?* Despite such bitter thoughts, he was on the whole a young man of a serious nature, and because there was nothing frivolous about him he was able to set aside his complaints and focus on his work, determined to finish quickly the important texts assigned to him and then enter a government office and make his way at court. With such determination driving him, he finished reading classical Chinese works such as *Records of the Grand Historian* in only four to five months.

Since the young man had progressed so far, Genji wanted him to sit for the academy examination. He arranged for a trial test and invited several learned officials—Tō no Chūjō, the Major Controller of the Left, the Senior Assistant Minister of Ceremonials, the Middle Controller of the Left, and others—to observe. He also summoned the Head Clerk from the Central Affairs Ministry to administer the examination. Difficult scrolls from *Records of the Grand Historian* were selected, and Genji's son had to read out passages from them that would almost certainly be used by the Master of Examinations at the academy. The young man read and interpreted them clearly and flawlessly, not missing a line; because there were no correction marks on the passages—the boy had received startlingly high marks—it was obvious that he had mastered the materials, a realization that brought tears of joy to all present. Tō no Chūjō was moved most of all. “If only his grandfather were here to see him ...”

Genji too found it hard to hide his emotions: “I have always dismissed the reaction of other fathers on occasions like this as foolish, but as a child grows to manhood, his father in turn declines into dotage ... I know I'm not at that stage yet, but even so, that is how the world works.”

The boy's tutor, observing his lordship brushing tears from his eyes, was overjoyed and honored. Tō no Chūjō had been careful to keep the man's winecup full throughout the trial examination, and so the tutor was quite tipsy, and his flushed face was noticeably gaunt. He was such a quirky figure that he had not been as properly appreciated at court as his learning merited, and so he

lived in utter poverty without a patron to support him. In spite of his eccentricities, he had certain qualities that caught Genji's attention and convinced him to bring the man in to tutor his son. Having received such gracious favor, which went far beyond anything a man of his station could ever have expected, his fortunes and livelihood suddenly changed for the better. Thanks to his young pupil, it appeared he would enjoy even greater acclaim in the future.

On the day Genji's son went to take his formal examinations, a tremendous gathering of carriages bringing high-ranking officials arrived outside the gate of the academy—so many, in fact, that it seemed as though every carriage in the capital must have been there. Amidst all the pageantry, Genji's son, who was carefully groomed and splendidly attired, looked so grand and handsome that, truth be told, he seemed out of place compared to his poverty-stricken peers. Even though he was younger by a year than most students when they enter the academy, was he not entirely justified, given his appearance and status, in feeling disgruntled at having to sit in the same lowly position he had occupied at the matriculation ceremony³ and to mingle with men of dubious lineage? On this occasion as well, the scholars loudly scolded their charges; it was very unpleasant, but Genji's son read smoothly, without the least hesitation, in spite of all that was going on around him. It was an age when the academy was flourishing, recalling the reputation it had in ancient times, and because everyone, regardless of social status, vied with each other to follow the path of learning, the court witnessed an increase over time in the number of learned people who possessed skill and judgment. Genji's son easily passed all of the examinations, beginning with the curriculum in letters, and his fervent dedication to his studies served as an encouragement to scholars and students alike to excel. Guests frequently gathered at Genji's villa to compose poetry in Chinese, and the presence of scholars and other men of literary talents was a source of pride. It was indeed an age recognized for having men of learning and talent in all fields.

While all of this was happening, the time arrived when Emperor Reizei would have to select his Empress.

"The Umetsubo Consort," Genji proposed, "is the ideal choice ... after all, the Imperial Mother, Fujitsubo, personally requested that she be brought in to look after her son."

Despite his recommendation, the prospect of having consecutive empresses who were not of the house of Fujiwara would not likely sit well with many courtiers. Supporters of the consorts in both the Umetsubo and the Kokiden fretted about the fact that Tō no Chūjō's daughter arrived at the palace before

any of Emperor Reizei's other women—though their respective reasons for feeling concerned were quite different.

Murasaki's father, Prince Hyōbu, was now the Minister of Ceremonials, and his reputation as a trusted adviser had grown during Emperor Reizei's reign so that it was now more glorious than ever. He had finally managed to secure a place for his second daughter at the palace in keeping with his expectations for her. She too was serving as an imperial consort, the same as the women in the Umetsubo and the Kokiden, and as a Princess who was the niece of the His Majesty's mother, Fujitsubo, she was of course close to Reizei. Now that Fujitsubo was gone, it seemed fitting for Prince Hyōbu's daughter to take her place and look after the Emperor's interests. In this way, each woman and her supporters had respective claims that they could make as they competed with one another; but in the end, the Umetsubo Consort was named Empress. That she should have met with such good fortune, which was much more glorious than anything her unfortunate mother, the lady at Rokujō, had ever experienced, was startling to everyone at the court.

Genji rose to the position of Chancellor, and Tō no Chūjō was promoted to Palace Minister. Genji then ceded all day-to-day responsibilities for administering affairs of state to his old friend. Tō no Chūjō was a man of serious and honest disposition, bright and lively in bearing, wise and clever in his deliberations. He had been diligent as a student, and even though Genji always bested him in a game of rhyme-guessing, he was very adept at handling public matters. He had more than ten sons by various women, and as his boys reached manhood they went into service at the palace, one after another—all in all, his was a glorious house not at all inferior to Genji's.

Tō no Chūjō had two daughters as well: the current Kokiden Consort and another girl called Kumoinokari.⁴ The mother of his second daughter was an imperial princess and thus a woman of distinguished lineage who eventually became the principal wife of the Azechi Major Counselor.⁵ The couple had many children of their own, and Tō no Chūjō thought it would be wrong to have Kumoinokari move in with her half siblings as a stepdaughter. Accordingly, he took the girl away from her mother and had her raised by Princess Ōmiya at the Sanjō residence. Although he never showed this daughter the favor he accorded the Kokiden Consort, the girl was nonetheless extremely attractive in both personality and looks.

Genji's son, of course, had been raised in the same household as Kumoinokari, but after they both turned ten they had to live in separate quarters. Tō no Chūjō warned his daughter about her relationship with the young man. "The two of you may be close, but you are not to become intimate with any

boy.” Separating the two, however, did nothing to keep the boy’s childish heart from longing for her. She was always on his mind whatever the season—whether the spring of cherry blossoms or the autumn of maple foliage—or whenever he longed to play dolls with her. Because his feelings were obvious, she reciprocated his strong attachment; now that they were both past the age of ten, she clearly showed her feelings without shame. Their nurses, as well as the other ladies-in waiting, could not help but notice:

“Oh dear, dear ... they are still just children, after all ...”

“That may be, but they’ve been together for so long ... how could his lordship suddenly keep them apart like this? It seems like a cruel punishment.”

Kumoinokari continued to behave like an innocent child ... but was it possible that the boy, in spite of his childish appearance, had already crossed the line sexually with her? It did seem that their separation was causing him considerable distress. The love letters they exchanged, though written in immature hands, gave hints of how skillful their calligraphy would be in the future. In her innocent carelessness, however, there were times when she left these letters scattered about so that her attendants vaguely gathered what was going on between the boy and the girl. Even so, they said nothing about the affair and pretended not to know.

With the great banquets celebrating the promotions of Genji and Tō no Chūjō out of the way, and with no pressing events coming up, the court entered a quiet period. One evening, as a chill autumn rain fell and the sound of the wind rustling through the reeds seemed especially melancholy, Tō no Chūjō visited his mother and summoned Kumoinokari to play the koto for him. Princess Ōmiya was a skilled performer on all instruments, and she had passed the secrets of her abilities on to her granddaughter.

“When it comes to playing the *biwa* lute,” Tō no Chūjō remarked, “a woman does not look very graceful, even if the tone of the instrument is bewitching. These days, there is hardly anyone who has been properly trained in it ... let’s see ... there’s that Prince, what’s-his-name ... and that Minamoto somebody-or-other.” He was trying to count them up. “The lady that Genji keeps hidden away in the hills at Ōi villa? I hear she’s gifted. She follows a long line of masters that started with Emperor Daigo, but that lineage is dying out. So how is it that a woman who lived for so many years in the uncouth provinces should be able to play so well? Genji has told me on numerous occasions how much he cares about her ... oh well, in any case, music is different from the other arts, and the best way to master it is to play in concert with many skilled performers as often as possible and in a wide variety of modes. It is rare for a person to master an instrument on her own.”

He encouraged his mother to play, and though she demurred at first, saying, “I’m afraid I’ve lost the knack for setting the bridge,” in the end she agreed, and played beautifully. She would play a little, stop to talk, then play some more.

“That woman at Ōi has been extraordinarily lucky,” she remarked, “yet she is also a person of marvelous virtue, is she not? She finally gave him the daughter he never had—even at his age—and yet she had the strength of character to allow Genji’s magnificent wife to raise the little girl, who otherwise would never fulfill her destiny.”

“A woman’s true worth lies in her disposition more than anything else,” Tō no Chūjō agreed, and then he began to speak about specific people. “My daughter, the Kokiden Consort, has no flaws to speak of, and I believe her upbringing and maturity are inferior to no one. Yet it was her destiny to be pushed aside by a woman no one expected to even be at the palace. I’ve come to the conclusion that the world is an unpredictable place and can only hope that things will turn out as I have planned for her younger sister here. The Crown Prince will soon have his coming-of-age ceremony, and with that in mind, I’ve been secretly making plans to have him take Kumoinokari as his wife … though no doubt she will have to face a rival, the future Empress born of the fortunate lady at Ōi you mentioned. Once that little Princess appears at the palace, no one will be able to compete with her.”

Hearing her son sigh, Princess Ōmiya replied, “Why must things turn out that way? Your late father, the Chancellor, was convinced that our house would produce a woman destined to be Empress, and he did everything in his power to promote the interests of your older daughter at the palace … had he lived, she would never have been passed over …” On this matter, at least, Princess Ōmiya was deeply resentful of Genji.

Kumoinokari was still young, and so there was no curtain between her and her father. She looked so sweetly childlike to him as she played the koto, and the styling of her hair around her forehead had a fresh elegance the way it draped from her temples across her breast. Her face was charming as she shyly flashed sidelong glances while she played, and the movements of her left hand as she pressed down on the strings had an ethereal feel, as if she were some intricately fashioned doll. Princess Ōmiya was also watching her, feeling the ache of boundless love for the girl. After accompanying her grandmother a little on a simple song she used to bring the tuning into the same mode, Kumoinokari pushed the instrument away.

Tō no Chūjō pulled over a six-string Japanese koto and tuned it to the stylish *richi* mode. He played in an intimate, informal manner, like a virtuoso—very enchanting. As if enticed by the music, leaves from the treetops in the garden

fluttered down until none remained, and the older women in attendance gathered here and there behind the curtains, their heads tilted together as they listened. He murmured a line from an ancient Chinese poem: “The autumn leaves wait for the softest breeze, though its power is ever so slight.”⁶ He then added, “Though the six-string koto does not have the range of the seven-string instrument, how strangely moving it is this evening! Won’t you play a little more?” Together, mother and son played a Tang period piece, “Song of the Autumn Wind,” and because he sang the melody in such a wonderfully pleasing voice, Princess Ōmiya once again felt an aching affection, seeing how lovely everyone looked, especially her son, who was now Palace Minister. Just then, as if to add even more to the moment, Genji’s son arrived.

“Please come over here.” Tō no Chūjō called to him and had him sit just outside Kumoinokari’s curtain. “I hardly ever see you these days, my boy. Why do you concentrate so intently on your studies? Your father must be aware of how tedious and useless it is to study beyond what is expected of one’s natural abilities ... and while I’m sure he thinks there’s some benefit to be gained by making you train like this, it bothers me to see you locked away as you are.” He handed the young man a flute, then continued. “Now and then you really need to do something different. Even the notes of a flute transmit the wisdom of the ancients.”

Genji’s son played in a youthful, charming style, and Tō no Chūjō, enchanted by the performance, stopped playing the koto for a moment and began to gently beat time with a pair of wooden clappers and to sing a line from a *saibara*: “Robes dyed with the flowers of the bush clover ...”⁷ Tō no Chūjō went on to chat about various subjects. “Your father is always drawn to musical diversions such as this ... and now he has managed to get out from under the burdens of affairs of state. How I wish I could pass *my* days in this tedious world following where my heart leads me ...” He passed the winecup and, since it was growing dark, had the oil lamps lit. He also had steamed rice gruel, fruits, nuts and other delectables served to everyone present before sending Kumoinokari off to another room. Thinking it best to keep her away from Genji’s son by all means, he did not want the boy to even hear his daughter playing the koto. The older women who had been in intimate service to Princess Ōmiya for many years observed his actions and whispered among themselves, “Sadly, their relationship must come to nothing.”

Tō no Chūjō got up and excused himself, pretending that he was preparing to depart—though his real purpose in leaving was a secret rendezvous he had arranged with one of the ladies in Princess Ōmiya’s quarters. However, while he was leaving as inconspicuously as possible, he happened to overhear some of his

mother's older attendants whispering. He thought this was rather suspicious, and so he eavesdropped on their conversation. Apparently they were gossiping about him, winking and tugging at each other's sleeves.

"He's always so confident that he's on top of everything ... but that's a father for you. Always the last one to know."

"It's only natural that something seems to be going on between the youngsters."

"They say there's no one who knows a child like the father,⁸ but that is obviously nonsense."

So that's how it is, he thought. But, then again, should I be surprised? Still, even if their relationship is not unexpected, it was careless of me all the same to assume that just because they're children they wouldn't do anything. Nothing ever seems to go according to plan.

The situation was now perfectly clear to him, but he decided to leave quietly. Soon the sound of one of his men clearing his throat to warn the staff that their lord was departing could be heard.

"Our lordship is only now departing?" asked one of the gossips.

"Where could he have been hiding?"

"Imagine a man of his age and status still indulging in such dalliances ..."

The women now regretted their idle chatter, which must have been overheard.

"When his perfume came wafting in, I thought for sure it was the young lord."

"What if he heard us criticizing him? How terrifying that would be! He is by nature rather difficult to deal with ..."

While out on the road, Tō no Chūjō mulled over what he had heard.

This isn't the absolute worst thing that could have happened, but people at court will definitely gossip, judging the match to be not all that distinguished. It was bad enough that Genji should have so aggressively pushed aside the Kokiden Consort ... but I at least had hopes of gaining the upper hand if I could send Kumoinokari into service at the palace. This is so despicable and annoying!

Now, as in the old days, he continued to maintain a generally close relationship with Genji, but as he considered the results of their rivalry for power, which played out in these matters concerning their daughters, he fell into a foul mood and passed a sleepless night.

My mother must have noticed what was going on, but because she pampers them as her favorite grandchildren, she apparently let them do as they please.

Conjuring in his mind an image of those ladies-in-waiting who had been gossiping, he felt shocked and angry by their manner, and, thus irritated, found it a little hard to control his manly inclinations to confront the situation head-on.

Two days later, he returned to the Sanjō residence. Princess Ōmiya was quite happy, since it always gave her a sense of satisfaction when he visited frequently. She had trimmed her bangs and the hair around her ears in the style of a nun and had donned a gorgeous short formal outer robe. Even though it was her own son she was preparing to meet, he was a person whose status now demanded deference, and so she did not greet him directly but spoke from behind a curtain.

He was still in a bad mood.

"It's awkward for me to call on you here, because I lose confidence wondering how your ladies-in-waiting view me. Though I am not of especially exalted status, I thought that for as long as I'm alive I would always be able to visit you and that nothing would ever disturb us or drive us apart. Now, however, a certain matter concerning my careless daughter has come to my attention and given me cause to feel aggrieved. Perhaps I shouldn't feel this way, but, then again, I find it hard to maintain my composure." He wiped tears from his eyes.

Princess Ōmiya's powdered face blanched and her eyes widened in surprise.

"What could I have possibly done at this stage of my life to make you feel estranged from me?"

He felt sorry for her, in spite of his grievances, but he plowed ahead anyway.

"From the time she was an infant, I was hardly ever able to look after Kumoinokari myself, and so I entrusted her to your care. While I've been preoccupied with the distress of seeing all my plans for the Kokiden Consort come to naught at the palace, I thought that at least I could count on you to raise my younger daughter to womanhood ... but now something untoward has happened, and I am quite angry about it. Genji's son may very well be an accomplished scholar the like of which has never been seen before under the heavens, but ... well, they *are cousins* after all, and as such most courtiers will lightly dismiss their relationship as a match of no consequence whatsoever ... that would be most unfortunate, especially for the boy. He would have looked much more appealing had he been welcomed into a completely unrelated house in the more contemporary manner—a house that emanated a splendidly fresh atmosphere. Instead, we have a marriage between cousins who have been on intimate terms all their lives ... well, it just doesn't look normal ... and Genji certainly won't be pleased either when he hears about this. Even if their relationship were appropriate, I would still have wanted you to let me know something of what was going on and to have handled the situation differently, papering things over to make the match look a little more elegantly appealing. I am quite put out that you have shirked your responsibility and let the youngsters

do as they please.”

His mother had never imagined even in her dreams that something was going on, and so she was in a state of shock.

“I can understand why you are speaking to me like this, to be sure, but I knew absolutely nothing about what was in their hearts. It is truly regrettable, as you say, and I more than anyone have cause to grieve ... but I resent your blaming me for their behavior. From the moment I began looking after Kumoinokari, I have taken special care, striving in ways unknown to anyone else and certainly in ways that you might not have noticed, to bring her up as a woman of superior breeding. Perhaps I was lost in the darkness of a parent’s heart and thus blinded by my love for them, but it never once crossed my mind to encourage them to rush ahead into a relationship while they are still so young. But tell me ... just where did you hear such things? To put your faith in scurrilous gossip and think the worst, and then come here and accuse me, is cruel. There is nothing to all of this, and you are defiling the reputation of your own daughter.”

“Nothing to it? No basis for my suspicions? Well, the women who seem to be serving you were making light of the situation and laughing about it in secret ... I, for one, find this appalling and disturbing.”

He stood up and withdrew. The attendants who were aware of what was happening felt terribly sorry for their mistress and for the young lovers. As for those women who had been gossiping that night, they were beside themselves, remorseful over having talked so freely about such intimate matters.

Kumoinokari was in her quarters, innocently unaware of what was taking place elsewhere at the residence, and so when her father peeked in on her, he was sadly touched by her adorable appearance. “She’s young, it is true, but I’ve been the greater fool, harboring grand ambitions for her all the while oblivious to her indiscretions.”

His words implied a sharp rebuke of her nurses, who had no ready response, though one of them did offer a defense: “It seems that in the romances of old there are examples of this sort of youthful affair, including one in which the precious daughter of an Emperor goes astray ... but in those cases, the affair was enabled by an attendant who knew the feelings of the young couple and, after finding an opportune moment, arranged for them to meet. In this instance, the two of them were brought up together from the time they were children, and for years they always acted so childish and innocent that we relaxed our vigilance, assuming that we did not need to keep them apart or treat them any more strictly than Princess Ōmiya did. Apparently, it was decided about two years ago that the two should be raised separately, since we all know that some young people tend to be drawn to that sort of thing and engage in amorous behavior in secret.

Even so, his young lordship never outwardly displayed such outrageous desires, and so it never occurred to any of us that he would do such a thing.” The women each sighed in turn.

“Enough, already … let’s just keep this quiet for the time being,” said Tō no Chūjō. “It’s not the kind of thing that we can keep secret for long, but take care all the same and deny that anything has happened. For now, I’ll plan on having my daughter come to my villa. I am very upset with my mother’s attitude … though I’ll concede that probably none of you ever thought that this affair was for the best.”

Although the attendants pitied all concerned, they were also happily relieved that their lord had been so understanding.

“We would never have approved of such an affair,” one of the nurses assured him. “After all, if word of this ever got back to the girl’s stepfather, the Azechi Major Counselor, just imagine his reaction. He might find the young man admirable, but he would not likely consider her marriage to a commoner an especially attractive prospect.”

Kumoinokari was so naive that none of her father’s preaching had any effect, for she simply did not comprehend what was wrong. With tears in his eyes, he privately discussed his daughter’s situation with the most experienced ladies-in-waiting, trying to figure out if there wasn’t some way he could salvage her status so that she would not end up completely wasted. He reserved his most bitter recriminations for his mother alone.

Princess Ōmiya felt truly sorry for both children, but perhaps because she had always pampered her grandson, she found his love for Kumoinokari sweetly endearing. She had a rather different opinion about her own son’s cold dismissal of the relationship as being altogether out of the question.

Why does he consider it wrong? she asked herself. From the beginning, Kumoinokari was never all that special to him … he certainly never gave a thought to her upbringing but left it to me. And I raised her so carefully that he was prompted to pursue his dream of presenting her to the Crown Prince … and now his hopes that she might be an Empress are ruined. But so what, if it’s her destiny to marry a commoner? Could she have ever found anyone superior to the boy? Is there anyone who can match him in looks and character? Come to think of it, he could easily marry a woman whose status is far superior to Kumoinokari’s.

Was it perhaps because she so favored her grandson that she resented Tō no Chūjō? Had her son been able to glean what was in her heart, he would have been even more incensed.

Genji’s son, who was unaware of all the turmoil, returned to the Sanjō

residence. So many people had been around the night before that he had not been able to confide in Kumoinokari all of the feelings he had for her, and so he was in a more melancholy mood than usual when he arrived at dusk. Normally, Princess Ōmiya would have broken into a smile of joy the moment she saw him, but this time her expression was stern as she took the opportunity provided by his visit to lecture him: “I am sick at heart because I have incurred the wrath of my son on account of you. You have, so it seems, lost your heart to someone and are pursuing a relationship no one approves of. It pains me that you should be causing others such anxiety, and though I did not want to bring up his complaints to you, I thought you might not know how he feels.”

Hearing this, the young gentleman knew at once what she was referring to—it must have been obvious that Kumoinokari was constantly on his mind—and he blushed.

“I’m not sure I know what you mean. Ever since I was shut away in my secluded quarters to pursue my studies, I’ve had very few chances to mingle with others, and so I cannot imagine what I might have done to make the Palace Minister so angry with me.” Seeing how mortified he looked, his grandmother ached with pity for him.

“All right,” she replied, switching the conversation to other topics, “but you must be more careful from now on.”

The realization that it would be increasingly difficult to exchange letters and messages with his beloved left him deeply depressed. Princess Ōmiya had offered him some food, but he went to lie down without eating a bite, pretending he was going to sleep. His restless heart kept him awake, and when everyone around him had settled in for the night, he got up and tried to pull open the inner sliding door that partitioned his rooms from Kumoinokari’s quarters. The door had never been locked before, but this night it wouldn’t budge at all, and he could detect no sign of anyone on the other side. He felt terribly forlorn as he leaned against the panel of the sliding door.

Just then, Kumoinokari was awakened by the sound of rustling bamboo taking the wind into its waiting embrace and by the faint cries of wild geese wending their way through distant skies. Was it the confusion she felt in her innocent heart that prompted her to whisper, “Are those geese in the cloudy skies⁹ as melancholy as I?”

Sensing signs of her presence and catching the sound of her youthful, enchanting words, the young gentleman anxiously whispered to the daughter of one of the nurses, “Kojijū? Are you in there? Open the door.” There was no response. Kumoinokari, embarrassed that he had overheard her whispering, instinctively pulled her bed robes over her face—though it must be said there

was something a little affected about her actions, since it was hardly the case that she knew nothing at all about the ways of love. In any case, her nurses and attendants were lying close by, and since it would have been risky for either of them to move around, they did not make a sound. The young man composed a verse:

*The wind in the reeds adds a mournful sound
To the cries of wild geese crossing the sky
Calling to their companions in the night*

How those cries pierce to the very core of my being! he thought. Returning to his rooms near his grandmother's quarters, he had to suppress his urge to sigh lest she was awake and heard him. He lay there, not moving a muscle.

The following day, as he went back to his rooms in the annex of his father's Nijō villa, he couldn't help feeling ashamed. He wrote a letter, but he had no way to contact Kojijū and have her deliver it for him, and since he couldn't very well just go to Kumoinokari's rooms, he felt his heart breaking. For her part, the young woman was embarrassed only that her father and the others had raised such a fuss; she gave no deep consideration about what might become of her in the future or how people might regard her, but merely looked on in her charmingly innocent way as her nurses discussed her situation. Though she felt no estrangement whatsoever from her lover and didn't think it was anything to be bothered about, the ladies-in-waiting who were responsible for her were so upset by her careless attitude that they no longer allowed her to exchange even a word with the young man. Had he been more experienced, he might have found a way around these obstacles, an opening through which he could communicate with her, but he was too young to manage that, and so he could only bitterly lament their separation.

Having left in a rage, Tō no Chūjō did not come back to the Sanjō residence. He was quite put out with his mother but said nothing to his principal wife, the mother of the Kokiden Consort, about what had happened, nor did he give her any indication that something was amiss. Still, he clearly looked out of sorts about something. "The ceremony for the ascension of the Umetsubo Consort to Empress was grand and dignified, but our daughter is now depressed, worried about the prospects for her relationship with Emperor Reizei. It hurts me to see her in such a state, and I wonder if we shouldn't have her take temporary leave of the palace and rest quietly here for a while. The Emperor may have chosen the Umetsubo Consort, but he continues to call on our daughter, and she has to be in constant service to him, day and night. Apparently her attendants are all

complaining about how difficult things are for them and how they never have a moment of peace.”

After speaking to his wife about this, he had their daughter suddenly withdraw from the palace. It had not been easy for him to get His Majesty to agree to let her go, but Tō no Chūjō was so insistent about the matter, his dissatisfaction clearly evident, that Reizei finally relented and gave in to his Palace Minister’s request.

“I know you may find it tedious here at home,” Tō no Chūjō told his daughter, “but if you send for Kumoinokari, the two of you can amuse yourselves by playing music together. I have entrusted the girl to the care of my mother, and though I am comfortable with that arrangement, there is a mischievous young man who comes and goes there, and while it may be natural for her to grow close to him, it would also be inappropriate behavior for someone her age.” With that, he decided to bring his second daughter to his residence as well.

Princess Ōmiya was deeply hurt by his decision. “I was lonely and desperate after my only daughter passed away, and so it brought me great joy when I was asked to raise this child. I thought of her as someone I could look after for the rest of my life, and every day, from morning to night, she provided comfort to me in the face of the indignities of old age. How bitterly disappointing that you’ve chosen to take her from me ...”

Respectful of his mother’s feelings, Tō no Chūjō replied, “I’ve expressed to you in plain terms the reasons for the discontent in my heart. What have I said or done to make you think that I am in any way estranged from you? My older daughter’s service at the palace and her relationship with His Majesty have not gone as she wished, and so she has recently withdrawn to my residence. It pains me to see her so bored and unhappy, so I merely thought it might cheer her up to have Kumoinokari come and play music with her ... she will be there only a short time. It is absolutely not my intent to disparage all you have done to raise her to womanhood.”

He was not the kind of man who, having made a decision, was easily dissuaded from proceeding with his plans, and so his mother—vexed and unhappy though she was—resigned herself to the inevitable. “The human heart is a cruel, selfish thing ... my own grandchildren, even with their innocent hearts, failed to be trustworthy and hatefully kept things from me.” She began to cry. “Of course, they’re just children, so I suppose it can’t be helped ... but you, the grand *Palace Minister*, with your profound knowledge of everything ... you revile me as if it is all my fault and decide to take Kumoinokari away. Well, you’ll see ... you won’t be able to protect her any more securely at your place than I did here.”

Just at that moment, Genji's son arrived. Over the last few days, he had paid more visits to the Sanjō residence than he was permitted, hoping that there might be some slight, careless lapse that would give him an opportunity to meet Kumoinokari. But upon seeing the Palace Minister's carriage, he felt a pang of guilt and stealthily made his way to his own rooms. Tō no Chūjō's sons—the Lesser Captain of the Left, the Lesser Counselor, the Assistant Commander of the Military Guards, the gentleman-in-waiting, the Master, and others—were all milling about, since none of them were permitted inside the blinds. The Commander of the Left Gate Guard and the Acting Middle Counselor—sons of the late Chancellor by other wives—had continued to obey faithfully their father's last instructions by regularly visiting their stepmother and treating her with special kindness. Their sons had also accompanied them, but none of Princess Ōmiya's many grandsons seemed to possess—in her eyes at least—the lambent charm of Genji's son. She had lavished her affections on the young man, favoring him above all the others, and now she had only Kumoinokari to treasure and pamper; because she so wanted to keep the girl at her side, never to let her go, it made her feel terribly lonely knowing that her granddaughter was about to be taken away.

"I must be off to the palace now," Tō no Chūjō announced. "I shall return toward evening for the girl." He departed, but along the way he mulled over the situation again.

It won't make a bit of difference, no matter what I say, so perhaps I should take a more gentle tack and let the two of them do as they want. But then, because he was still agitated, his anger flared and he resisted the urge to forgive. After the young man has risen in rank and achieved a little more dignified status, I can recognize him as an adult, as a man of parts. Only then, after I determine just how serious or frivolous his intentions are, will I permit the match to take place ... and even then, only if the marriage is carried out formally as a new relationship. Of course, I can sternly warn them as much as I like, but so long as they are living together at Sanjō, behaving in their childishly irresponsible way, a scandal is sure to erupt. And my mother won't say or do a thing to keep them under control. It was this kind of thinking that led him to the idea of using the Consort's boredom as a pretext to move Kumoinokari to his own residence—after he had consulted his wife and mother, of course, and secured their agreement.

Princess Ōmiya sent a note to Kumoinokari: "Your father is angry with me and plans to take you to his residence. You know how I feel about you, so please come to see me before you leave."

Kumoinokari changed into lovely robes, which made her look altogether

delightful, and went to her grandmother's quarters. She was fourteen; with her childish glow, she did not yet have a womanly look about her, but she did possess a graceful beauty.

"I have never let you out of my sight before," her grandmother told her, "but kept you near me mornings and nights to comfort me in my loneliness. How terribly I shall miss you once you have gone. I don't have many years left, and it makes me sad to think that I won't be here to see you fulfill your future destiny. Knowing that I am to be abandoned, it makes me sadder still to think of where you're being taken." She wept. Kumoinokari, feeling ashamed before her grandmother, never raised her head, but could only cry as well.

Saishō, the nurse who had cared for Genji's son, entered, came over to Kumoinokari, and began to whisper to her, "All of the attendants here have depended on you as much as we ever did on my young lord, and we think it's deplorable that you're being forced to leave this way. If your father ever considers marrying you off to some other house, never yield your feelings!"

Kumoinokari was now mortified, but she said nothing. Instead, her grandmother chided the nurse. "Come now, it won't do at all for you to give her such ideas. It is difficult to know what the future may hold in store for two people."

"But my lady, the Palace Minister seems to look down on the young lord as someone unworthy of his recognition," Saishō persisted. "He may be at the sixth rank, but he is actually superior to other young men. Just ask anyone." She was indignant and so spoke rather bluntly.

Genji's son was concealed behind a screen observing all of this. He would do this whenever he longed to see Kumoinokari, and he would always be upset if he were caught and given a scolding. On those occasions, however, when the scolding was over, that was the end of it. Now, as he watched her, he felt so desperate that he had to wipe his tears, which gave him away. It hurt Saishō to see him looking so pathetic, and she consulted briefly with Princess Ōmiya. They agreed to take advantage of all the confusion created by women coming and going in preparation for Kumoinokari's departure to allow the young lovers to meet.

Their hearts beating fast, the two of them felt shy in each other's presence. Unable to say anything, they could only cry until, at last, the young gentleman spoke up:

"The Palace Minister is so unforgiving and rigid that under these circumstances I really ought to abandon my love for you. And yet ... if I did that, you would surely be disconsolate and yearn after me, would you not? Why did you keep your distance these past few days when we might have had some slight

chance of meeting?" He seemed so childishly earnest and miserable.

"I too longed to meet you," she reassured him.

"When you're gone, will you think lovingly of me?"

Her slight nod was sweetly innocent.

Oil lamps were lit, and the extravagant shouts of Tō no Chūjō's outrunners indicated that he had returned from the palace. His arrival caught the attendants by surprise and sent them into a tizzy. "Oh my, my," they muttered, "he's come back." Kumoinokari was trembling with fright, but the young gentleman did not care what the consequences might be if the Palace Minister caught him there, for he was so determined to have her for himself that he would not let her leave his side. One of her nurses came looking for her and was most distressed when she surveyed the scene. *This is utterly outrageous*, she thought. *Princess Ōmiya could not possibly be ignorant about what was going on*. Whispering in a voice that was barely audible, she scolded the young lady.

"Well, I never! Your behavior is deplorable. Your father is going to be upset, and he will of course vent his anger on us. And what will the Major Counselor have to say about this ... he is your stepfather, you know. I don't care how magnificent you may think the young gentleman is ... is it really your destiny to marry a commoner who has started out at the sixth rank?" The nurse was uttering her complaints just beyond the folding screen that concealed them.

Genji's son was stung and began to feel resentful. *How dare she insult me by dismissing my rank!* He was shocked, and felt his passion cool a little.

"Just listen to her," he said.

*Is it right to dismiss these light-hued sleeves
Now dyed deep crimson by my tears of blood
As nothing but a mark of low status*

"She has shamed me."

Kumoinokari replied:

*I have come to know from our painful destiny
How varied are the hues of sorrow ... how is it
That the robes we shared have taken on those colors*

She just finished her poem when her father entered. She had no choice but to leave.

Feeling he had been abandoned, the young gentleman, his chest constricted by misery and resentment, went to his room to lie down. When he heard the Palace

Minister's three carriages secretly hurrying away, his heart grew so agitated that he could not bring himself to go to his grandmother's quarters when she sent a messenger for him. He remained motionless and pretended to be asleep instead. He could not stop his tears and spent the whole night sighing and grieving until dawn. Embarrassed at the thought that someone might see his eyes, which were red and swollen, and worried that his grandmother would certainly summon him, he set off very early through the white frost of dawn to return to his rooms in the east annex at his father's Nijō villa, which he believed would be a more congenial place to be right now. On his way back, he reflected despondently on his sorrows, which he had brought upon himself. The sky was still dark and thickly overcast.

*These tears of mine further darken
Dark skies at dawn, when frost and ice
Settle so cruelly on me*

Genji was to present a young woman to be a maiden of the dance at the upcoming Gosechi Festival.¹⁰ Although there wasn't all that much to do to prepare for the event, as the festival days neared his staff was busy hurrying to get everything ready, including the robes to be worn by the page girls. He had the robes for the women who would accompany the dancer on the night of *Toyo no Akari*, the Feast of the Glowing Harvest, prepared in the east annex. Everything else was taken care of at the main Nijō villa, and the Umetsubo Empress personally provided exquisite robes for Genji's page girls and servants. Everyone had been disappointed last year when the Gosechi Festival had to be canceled, and the pent-up anticipation inspired many of the nobility, who felt the need to make this year's event more spectacular than usual. Those houses that were presenting a maiden of the dance were especially competitive, and the way they exerted every possible effort to outdo the others caused a sensation at the court. The two maidens from noble houses were to be presented by the Azechi Major Counselor and by Tō no Chūjō's younger brother, the Commander of the Left Gate Guard. Genji's old retainer, Yoshikiyo, who was now Governor of Ōmi and Middle Controller of the Left, was to present the fourth maiden. This year Emperor Reizei decreed that the Gosechi dancers were to stay at the palace and enter his service, and so each of the houses presenting a maiden took this decree as an opportunity to present their own daughters.

Genji, who had no daughter of his own, selected the daughter of Koremitsu, who was now Governor of Settsu and Master in the Offices of the Left Capital overseeing the eastern half of the imperial city. Genji did so after hearing that

Koremitsu's daughter was an exceptional beauty. Koremitsu was uncomfortable with his lord's choice and wanted to keep his daughter hidden away until someone pointed out to him that the Major Counselor was presenting his own daughter—even though the young lady was born to a secondary wife—and that in any case there was nothing shameful in sending a daughter to the palace. Wavering under the pressure, Koremitsu eventually relented, deciding that, all things being equal, it was probably best for his daughter's future to serve at the palace. He had her practice the Gosechi dance assiduously at his own residence and took the most rigorous care in selecting the women who would be accompanying her. In the middle of the eleventh month on the opening day of the festival, the Day of the Ox, he sent her off to the Nijō villa.

Genji also took a hand in the preparations, selecting the most outstanding of the page girls and servants who worked in the quarters of both Murasaki and Hanachirusato to accompany the dancer. Although the chance to go to the palace elicited different reactions from each girl, depending on her respective status, they all felt that it would be a great honor to be chosen. Genji decided to have them appear before him to practice the ceremony that would take place at the Seiryōden, where they would be formally presented to His Majesty. It was very difficult to decide how to rank the girls, since they were all superb in looks and dress, and he felt he could not leave any of them out. He laughed and remarked, "It looks like I'll have to send two maidens of the dance just to accommodate everyone ..." In the end, he made his selections based on how gracefully each girl moved and how demure she appeared.

While all this was taking place, our young gentleman continued to mope. He would lie around, lost in thought, his heart filled with sorrow, refusing to touch his food and unable to apply himself to his studies. Hoping it might bring some relief to his tormented heart, he would go out on secret perambulations, taking care to avoid the gaze of others. In looks and style he was splendidly handsome, and his air of calm refinement made him extremely desirable to the younger ladies-in-waiting. For some reason—probably the experience he had gained from his own amorous proclivities—Genji did not allow his son anywhere near Murasaki's quarters, not even the space in front of her blinds. Since he was kept at such a remove, the young gentleman was not familiar at all with Murasaki's attendants. This particular day, however, her attendants were apparently distracted by the bustle and excitement surrounding the arrival of the Gosechi dancer, and so he was able to sneak into the west hall of the Nijō villa.

The maiden of the dance had been carefully escorted from her carriage and was now waiting temporarily behind some folding screens set up in the corner of the gallery just inside the hinged double doors. The young gentleman quietly

moved closer and peeked inside. The young lady was lying there, apparently exhausted. She was about the same age as Kumoinokari—a little taller, perhaps, and maybe a bit more gorgeous in appearance ... it seemed to him that she might even be more attractive, but the room was dark, and he could not make out any details. Her overall appearance did put him in mind of his beloved, and though this did not mean he was capriciously transferring his feelings of love to the maiden of the dance, he was unusually excited. He rustled the hems of his robes to alert her to his presence, and the young lady, in her innocence, thought it suspicious.

*You who serve the Toyooka goddess¹¹
Forget not that I have stretched around you
A sacred rope to claim you as my own*

“You who are inside the sacred enclosure,”¹² he added. His words caught her off guard, and though his precocious voice was appealing, the young woman had no idea where he was, and found the eerie atmosphere a little frightening. Just then, her attendants came in, scurried over next to her, and said that they had to adjust her makeup. They raised such a fuss that the young gentleman withdrew in disappointment.

He had been so irritated by the shameful blue-green robe signifying his lowly status that he had not been showing up at the palace recently. However, he was bored and depressed, and because courtiers could wear an outer cloak of any color that pleased them at the Gosechi Festival, he decided he would attend. He still had a pure, boyish look about him, but he was mature for his age and went about teasing the attendants and putting on grand airs. Everyone from the Emperor Reizei on down took note of him, treating him with unusual consideration, as though he were a rare treasure in the world.

At the ceremony where the maidens of the dance were presented to His Majesty, all of the young women had been made up with extreme care, and each one had her own special appeal. The dancers presented by Genji and the Azechi Major Counselor received especially lavish praise for their surpassing poise and appearance, but in the end, between the two of them—and they were both truly lovely—the air of innocent sweetness projected by Koremitsu’s daughter gave her a beauty unmatched by the others. Fresh, radiant, and modern, her stylish elegance made it hard for those who saw her to believe that she could actually be the child of a Governor—and so, in light of her background, it seems that she received even greater acclaim.

The maidens of the dance this year were all a little older than usual, which

made this Gosechi Festival genuinely unique. Genji was in attendance, and as he looked at the dancers he was reminded of the figure of the maiden—his own lady of the Gosechi dance—who had captured his affection so many years ago. The memory prompted him to write a letter to her on the evening of the Day of the Dragon—the final day of the festival when ceremonial dancing would be performed at the Toyo no Akari banquet. One can just imagine what he wrote in the letter, which included this poem:

*You must surely have acquired godlike dignity by now
O maiden of the dance who once twirled those heavenly sleeves
For I too, your companion long ago, have grown older*

Counting up all the months and years that had passed, she was both amused and touched that he had found it impossible to keep to himself the nostalgia he suddenly felt for the past. Wasn’t it all a little silly now?

*You mention that dance of old and make it seem like today
When I donned that hikage¹³ garland and yielded to you
Melting in your bright sunshine like the frost that drenched your sleeves*

His Gosechi lady had chosen paper appropriate to the season for her reply—blue with printed designs of plants that matched the vestments of the maidens of the dance. She had written in a manner that would disguise her identity by mingling dark, thick brushstrokes with lighter ones and by randomly placing throughout the letter characters written in cursive script. As he perused her note, Genji found her calligraphy enchanting, an exceptional hand for someone of her background.

Genji’s son had been attracted to Koremitsu’s daughter, and he was now wandering about with a secret passion in his heart. Unable to get near her and having been brusquely dismissed, he was too awkward and bashful at the age of twelve to tell her how he felt; feeling sorry for himself, he considered giving up. Yet the image of her beautiful face was etched on his heart, and he wondered if she might possibly be some consolation to him for his loss of Kumoinokari.

His Majesty had intended for the Gosechi dancers to stay on at the palace and go immediately into his service, but they withdrew after the conclusion of the festival. Yoshikiyo’s daughter went to Karasaki on the shores of Lake Biwa to perform rites of purification. Not to be outdone, Koremitsu sent his daughter to Naniwa, where she also underwent ritual purification. The Azechi Major Counselor petitioned Emperor Reizei, asking that his daughter be taken into the

palace again, only this time formally as a consort. Tō no Chūjō's younger brother was criticized for presenting a maiden who was not properly qualified to be a Gosechi dancer, but his daughter was allowed to return to the palace as well.

When Koremitsu noted that His Majesty was lacking one of his Assistant Handmaids—implying that he wanted his daughter appointed to the position—Genji agreed to support the request in recognition of all the service Koremitsu had provided over the years. When Genji's son heard about this plan, however, he was distraught. *If only I weren't so young and my rank so low, I might try asking for her myself.* The prospect of simply giving up without even letting her know he had feelings for her—though admittedly his attachment wasn't all that strong—was yet another disappointment that, coupled with his loss of Kumoinokari, occasioned more tears.

The older brother of the maiden of the dance was a page serving in His Majesty's private quarters. Prior to going to the palace, the young man had also served Genji's son. The young gentleman thus took advantage of their relationship one day to speak to the page in an unusually familiar tone.

“So, when does your sister go to the palace?”

“I heard she's going this year,” the page answered.

“She's really pretty and ... well ... it may sound silly, but the truth is ... I've fallen for her. I envy you ... you get to see her all the time. Do you think you might be able to arrange it so I can meet her again?”

“How could I do that? I can't just visit her any time I like, and her other brothers aren't allowed anywhere near her. So it would be very difficult, my lord, for you to get permission to see her.”

“In that case, could you take this to her?” He handed the page a letter.

The older brother was now faced with a dilemma. His father had sternly warned him on many an occasion not to do such things, but now his young lord was pressuring him. In the end, he felt sympathy for Genji's son and took the letter with him.

Koremitsu's daughter was enchanted by the note—was it because she was more worldly than her youth might suggest? Written on thin green paper that matched the color of the coral evergreen garland she had worn for the Gosechi dance, it was stylishly bundled with other sheets of various colors. The calligraphy was the work of a youthful hand that, once it had matured, would likely produce exemplary work.

*Was it obvious in the sun ... the way my heart was drawn
To the sleeves of the maiden's heavenly robe of feathers*

Her hair adorned by a garland of coral evergreen

While the page and his sister were reading the young gentleman's poem, Koremitsu suddenly entered. Startled and flustered, they were unable to hide the letter in time. They blushed as he took it from them.

"What's this?" His tone was reproving. "This is outrageous!" He called to his son, who was trying to flee the scene, and made him come back to the room. "Who sent this?"

"The son of the Chancellor ... he said I should bring it to her."

Koremitsu's mood suddenly changed and he smiled.

"Our innocent young scholar seems to be playing at amorous games ... you, on the other hand, don't seem too reliable, even though you're the same age as he." He praised Genji's son, then showed the letter to his wife, who happened to be the mother of both the page and the maiden of the dance. "If Genji's son is thinking of taking our daughter as a wife, that might be preferable to sending her to the palace. Seeing how the Chancellor has treated his women—how he never forgets them once he begins an affair—I imagine we can trust the son as well. Who knows ... I might end up like that old novitiate in Akashi." Koremitsu set such musings aside, however, and hurried to finish preparations for sending his daughter to the palace.

The young gentleman was now more than ever fixated on Kumoinokari, having failed to get a letter to her after they were separated. Of the two young women he was yearning for, she had the higher social status, and underlying his expression of unbearable longing was the anxiety that he might never see her again. He no longer went to the Sanjō residence, since it was too sad and unpleasant for him to visit his grandmother. Memories of Kumoinokari's room and the places where they had grown accustomed to playing over the years came back to him more frequently, and because they made the Sanjō residence seem depressing to him, he locked himself away in his study in the east annex at the Nijō villa.

Genji spoke to Hanachirusato about his son and asked her to look after him. "Princess Ōmiya does not seem to have many years left, so please help him after she is gone. I'm asking because you have known him since he was a child." It was her nature to go along with whatever she was told, and so she assisted the young gentleman in a warm, loving manner.

From time to time he caught a glimpse of Hanachirusato.

Her face is not really all that beautiful, and yet Father never thought of abandoning her. What a cruel fate I have to suffer, longing in vain, captivated by a lovely face that brings me nothing but grief. Why couldn't I fall in love with

someone like Hanachirusato, who is so sweetly compliant.

On the other hand, it struck him that there was something a little pathetic about a woman whose face had little effect on a man when he looked at her.

*The relationship between them has lasted all these years, but I can understand why Father, knowing her looks and character, tries to hide her defects by keeping her hidden away behind layers and layers of screens and curtains that are like the hundredfold petals of a crinum.*¹⁴

The young gentleman's powers of observation and judgment were enough to put even adults to shame. Everywhere he had lived, he had been in the presence of women with lovely features—even his grandmother, who had assumed the guise of a nun, was still radiant. Thus, whenever he caught sight of Hanachirusato, who had not been blessed with good looks and who, with her emaciated body and thinning hair, was now past her prime and losing what little charm she once had, he tended to criticize her flaws.

As the year drew to a close, Princess Ōmiya was absorbed in preparing robes for the New Year—though this year the only person she was preparing them for was Genji's son. She made many fine sets of robes for him, but seeing them only made him sad.

“Why did you go to so much trouble,” he said, “when I may not go the palace on New Year’s Day?”

“And why wouldn’t you go? You sound like some weary, broken-down old man.”

“I’m not old, but I do feel broken down,” he muttered to himself, tears welling up.

Princess Ōmiya surmised that he was upset about Kumoinokari and had to fight back her own tears.

“Even a man of lower rank has to maintain his pride. You mustn’t go on being so moody and pensive all the time. I wonder why you’re so despondent, so lost in your thoughts like this. It’s rather ominous, since it may weaken you against malevolent spirits.”

“What are you talking about? People dismiss me because I’m at the sixth rank ... I know that this is only for a while, but it makes attendance at the palace unpleasant. If Grandfather were alive, no one would make disparaging remarks about me, not even in jest. My father is still alive, but he’s so formal with me and keeps me at such a distance that I never feel comfortable going to see him. The only time I can get near him is when he visits the east annex. The woman who resides in the west hall there tries to look after me, but I wouldn’t be having such troubles if my mother were here now.”

He was trying to hide his tears, and his expression so touched his grandmother

that she began to weep.

“Anyone who has lost his mother, whether he’s of high or low station in life, feels as sad as you do. But when you are grown up and your destiny plays out, even with all the troubles it might bring, no one will look down on you then. So you mustn’t fret so much about things. If only the Chancellor had lived a while longer … I know that the boundless shade of support your father spreads over us is just as reliable as your grandfather’s … and yet, so many things have not gone as I would have hoped! My own son, the Palace Minister, has a reputation as a man of upstanding character, but as things change more and more from what they once were, I am beginning to regret my long life. The world is certainly a hateful place when it makes a young man with his whole future before him take such a dark view of things, even matters as trivial as this.” She wept.

Because Genji did not have to attend the festivities at the palace, he observed New Year’s Day quietly. Following the example set by Yoshifusa,¹⁵ he had the Inspection of the Blue Horses performed at his own villa at Nijō, and on the feast days he followed the accepted rituals and customs of the palace while adding unprecedented touches that gave them a solemn grandeur.

Just after the twentieth day of the second month, Emperor Reizei paid a formal imperial visit to Retired Emperor Suzaku. It was still a bit early for the cherry blossoms to be in full bloom, but Reizei had to go before the third month, which was the anniversary of the death of his mother, Fujitsubo, and thus an inauspicious time for an imperial progress. Still, the colors of the early blossoms were vivid, and Suzaku had his palace refurbished and burnished with extra care. Everyone who was part of the procession, from high-ranking officials and princes of the blood on down, had also taken special care with their appearance. The men wore outer robes of a sober, mossy green over white robes with an inner lining of reddish-purple. His Majesty had summoned Genji to join him on the progress, and they both wore crimson robes that day. They had always resembled each other, but now, in their radiant splendor, they seemed one and the same person. The extraordinary lengths to which each man had gone in preparing his attire made this procession unusually elegant.

Suzaku had aged gracefully, and his looks and comportment had only grown more resplendent with the passing of time. Emperor Reizei had not gone to the trouble of inviting men of letters this day, but instead summoned ten students from the academy who were said to be gifted scholars of Chinese verse. The topic for the poetry was set just as it would have been for the Ministry of Ceremonial Examinations—it was rumored that this was done for the benefit of Genji’s son, who was soon to take the examination. Some of the students lost their nerve, panicking at the prospect of composing on the topic; one by one they

boarded boats and drifted out onto the garden pond, seemingly at their wits' end. As the sun slowly descended in the sky, a pair of boats with elaborately decorated prows—one with the head of a dragon, the other with the head of a blue heron¹⁶—was rowed out onto the pond. Musicians were on board each boat, and, when they began to play songs for tuning their instruments, the sounds mingled enchantingly with the reverberation of the wind in the hills. Genji's son felt bitter resentment at the world: *If I didn't have to do all this tedious studying, I'd be able to join in the diversions.*

The performance of the “Dance of the Spring Warbler” brought back memories of that banquet held long ago to celebrate the cherry blossoms. “Will we ever witness such a splendid occasion again?” Suzaku asked, prompting Genji to reflect sadly on the events of his father’s reign.

When the dance was finished, Genji offered a winecup to Suzaku:

*The voice of the warbler is the same as ever
It brings back memories of long ago ... and yet
The blossoms he so loved have changed, as have the times*

Suzaku replied:

*Even at this humble abode, cut off
From the ninefold palace by springtime mists
The warbler’s song announces the season*

Genji’s half brother, Prince Sochinomiya, who was now Minister of War, offered His Majesty a cup and, mindful of the criticism implied by the tone of wistful nostalgia and lonely isolation of the two previous poems, wittily turned them into a poem of praise:

*The song of the warbler has not changed
But in concert with these bamboo flutes
Hands down past glories to the present*

Taking the cup, Reizei replied:

*Flitting from branch to branch, the warbler sings
Longing for days of old ... perhaps this means
The colors of the blossoms have faded*

Reizei looked incomparably elegant as he recited his verse. This was a private

banquet, but not many poems were composed. The reason may be that few cups of wine were passed around, since offering a cup demanded a verse. Or it may be that not everything was written down.

The music being played in the garden was far away and hard to hear, so Emperor Reizei ordered koto and other stringed instruments brought in before the company. Sochinomiya took up the *biwa*, Tō no Chūjō selected a six-string koto, Suzaku received a thirteen-string koto, and Genji was given a seven-string koto. The quality of the tones produced by these surpassingly gifted virtuosos, who put all their skill into their performances, was peerless. Many of the nobles there sang lyrics or the syllables of the musical scale in accompaniment. They sang the *saibara* “Glorious Day” and “Cherry-Blossom Maid.” The moon rose, delightfully shrouded in mist, fires were lit in ironwork cressets on the island in the pond, and the musical diversions came to an end.

Though it was late at night, it would have been unkind of Emperor Reizei—especially on the occasion of an imperial visit—to avoid the quarters of Suzaku’s mother, the former Kokiden Consort. He went to call on her on his way out, and Genji accompanied him. The old Imperial Mother was overjoyed at being granted an audience with His Majesty. Now in her late fifties, it was clear that she had aged a great deal. Genji, recalling Fujitsubo, was troubled by the rueful thought that *some* people manage to live a long life.

“As you can tell, I’ve grown so old,” she said, “that I’ve become terribly forgetful. But I am humbled that you have honored me with this visit ... it brings back vivid memories of events in reigns long past.” She broke down and cried.

“After the two people who sheltered me beneath their beneficent shade passed away and left me on my own,” replied Reizei, “I was in such a state of grief that I could not tell what season it was or whether the spring had even passed. But today it seems I have found a measure of comfort. I promise that I shall call on you again.”

Genji also responded in an appropriately respectful manner, “And I shall do all I can to serve you.”

Amidst the clattering bustle of Emperor Reizei’s hurried departure, the former Kokiden Consort felt her heart pounding, and her thoughts grew troubled. *What must Genji think of me?* She held many bitter grudges from the past. *What a shame that I could do nothing to undermine his karmic destiny, which was to hold the reins of power.*

Her younger sister, Oborozukiyo, would dwell in moments of quiet recollection on the many things that made her heart ache. She had never entirely ceased her secret correspondence with Genji—brief messages carried as if on the wind whenever an appropriate occasion arose.

There were times when the former Kokiden Consort would petition the palace—when she was peeved over some matter regarding an appointment, or a title, or her stipends—and the thought that she had lived long enough to find herself in such a position always put her in a bad mood and made her wish for a return to her days of glory. As she grew older, she became ill-tempered and spiteful to the point that even Suzaku found it unbearable to be around his mother.

Now, as it turned out, Genji's son had produced a masterful poem in Chinese that day, and he advanced in good order through the regular course of study at the academy. Although the ten students His Majesty had selected all had a reputation for being clever and had studied for years, only three of them passed, and at the Autumn Ceremonial for Court Promotions the young gentleman was finally promoted to the lower fifth rank, receiving an appointment as gentleman-in-waiting. All this time not a moment had gone by when he didn't think about Kumoinokari, but because her father kept such a close watch, he could not manage to see her, no matter how he tried. All the young lovers could do was exchange the occasional note, and so their relationship was a torment for both of them.

Genji had his heart set on building a more tranquil residence—one that, all things being equal, would be spacious and attractive and serve as a place where he could gather all of the ladies he cared about, including those who were living in more distant locations such as the Akashi lady at the Ōi villa in the hills. He decided to have his new estate constructed in the vicinity of Kyōgoku and Rokujō on the eastern edge of the capital, and so he acquired four parcels of land,¹⁷ one of which contained the former villa of the lady at Rokujō, which the Umetsubo Empress had inherited when her mother died.

Prince Hyōbu was to turn fifty the following year, and so his daughter, Murasaki, had been preparing a celebration for him. Genji knew that the celebration of this milestone was something he could not ignore, and so he put the past behind him and saw to it that the pace of construction of his Rokujō estate was accelerated. If they were going to go the trouble of having the celebration, he reasoned, it might as well be done someplace that was new and remarkable.

With the coming of the New Year, Genji was preoccupied with preparations for the birthday celebration. He busied himself with the selection of the musicians and dancers who would perform at the banquet following the religious services he had commissioned to pray for a long life for Prince Hyōbu. Murasaki was taking care of other details—the decorations and adornments for the sutra scrolls and Buddhist statuary, the robes that were to be worn on the day of the services, and the gifts for the priests. She even delegated some responsibilities to

Hanachirusato. The relationship between the two women had grown over time, becoming more warm and cordial.

Prince Hyōbu heard rumors about these preparations, which were echoing all throughout the court, and was moved by conflicting emotions.

For years Genji has blessed others with his gracious generosity, he thought, but he has acted spitefully toward me and my house, has made me feel awkward on any number of occasions, has shown no consideration to my staff, and has often given me just cause to be aggrieved. I must have done something to make him resent me.

Such ruminations made him feel sad and hurt, but, at the same time, Genji had done much to make him rejoice.

Of all the women who have been close to him, it has been my daughter's fortune to be the one he loves most deeply—the one who is most important and special to him—so even though his regard for her has not been extended to my house, he still does me honor. Now, as I am about to pass my fiftieth year, he is busy preparing a celebration for me, and news of it is buzzing around the court. Coming so late in my life, this is an honor I never anticipated.

Prince Hyōbu's principal wife was less generously inclined in her opinion of Genji, who had over time given her many reasons to resent him, having delayed her daughter's entrance into service as a consort at the palace, and then having promoted his own stepdaughter for Empress.

With construction completed, the move to the Rokujō estate took place in the eighth month of the following year. The Umetsubo Empress was expected to occupy the southwest¹⁸ quadrant because that had been the former residence of her mother. Genji and Murasaki occupied the southeast quadrant. The northeast quadrant was given to Hanachirusato, who had been living in the east annex at Nijō, while the northwest quadrant was being reserved for the Akashi lady. Some of the hills and ponds originally on the four parcels of land were not in a proper or pleasing location, and so Genji had them excavated and shifted; by reshaping the appearance of the streams and the position of the hills, he was able to build each quadrant elegantly in accordance with the tastes and wishes of his ladies.

The southeast quadrant was notable for its tall hills, and every kind of tree that blooms in the spring was planted there. The design of the pond was particularly appealing, and the garden in front of the residence was planted in five-needle pine, red plum, cherry, wisteria, mountain rose, rock azaleas, and other spring plants. Though the garden was planned with the spring season in mind, unobtrusive clusters of autumn plants were also set about here and there.

The original hills of the southwest corner, Umetsubo's quadrant, were planted

with trees and shrubs that would produce the vivid colors of autumn foliage. Waters from a spring were diverted and channeled into streams flowing off into the distance, and boulders were placed in the streams to make the burbling sound of the flowing water more distinct. Genji also had a waterfall constructed to create the impression of a vista of distant autumn fields. Umetsubo had moved here at the perfect season, since all of the blooming plants and foliage were at their peak, providing an elegant prospect that rendered superfluous any excursion to view the autumn hills and plains around Ōi in Sagano.

The northeast quadrant had invigorating spring waters, and so it was designed with the summer in mind to provide abundant shade. Tall bamboo was planted in the garden near the front of the residence in a manner that would allow cooling breezes to pass through, and large trees cast deep shade like a lush grove, creating the effect of being in a mountain retreat. A hedge of hareflower shrub,¹⁹ which would have white blooms in summer, enclosed the garden where mandarin orange trees, their fragrance bringing back memories of the past,²⁰ had been planted alongside various other summer flowers—pinks, roses, peonies—and a scattering of plants that bloomed in the spring or fall. On the east side of this quadrant, a wattle fence was set up to mark off riding grounds, and a pavilion was constructed to view events such as the mounted archery contests held every year in the fifth month. Fragrant sweet flag had been planted along the edge of the pond so that it would be growing in thick profusion just as the contests were held. On the far side of the grounds, stables had been erected for the finest of horses.

Rows of storehouses were built along the northern edge of the northwest quadrant. A thick line of pine trees grew along the enclosure that cordoned off the storehouses; they would make a lovely vista when covered with snow. Chrysanthemums had been planted along a fence of bamboo wattle with the expectation that they would be covered by the morning frosts of early winter. Nara oaks, seemingly proud of their red leaves, which were in tune with the present season, had been transplanted along with various other trees—the names of which were unknown—brought from deep in the mountains to create the impression of a shaded grove.

The move took place during the week of the autumnal equinox celebrations, which began on the tenth day of the eighth month. Genji had decided that his women should all move in at once, but Umetsubo delayed her move a little, mindful of the unseemly confusion that might arise. Hanachirusato, meek and compliant as always, moved on the same night as Genji and Murasaki. Murasaki's garden was of course out of season at the time, but it was still captivating. Fifteen carriages made up the procession, while the escort consisted

of noblemen and officials mostly of the fourth and fifth ranks, with a few men from the sixth rank who were carefully chosen for their steady temperament. The procession was in no way ostentatious or excessive in size, for Genji was concerned that he might be criticized at the court for building his own pleasure palace; he took care to do nothing special that might make the occasion seem stunning or magnificent. He treated Hanachirusato with more or less the same regard that he showed Murasaki, and had his son, now a gentleman-in-waiting, accompany her to her new residence. This was as it should have been, since he had already been assisting her at the east annex at Nijō. The apartments for the attendants and the staff had been laid out carefully, with special attention paid to the assignment of rooms, and it was reported that everyone found the furnishings far superior to other places they had lived.

Umetsubo withdrew from the palace and went to her new quarters at the Rokujō estate five or six days after Genji's move. Her procession was simple but stately. No one could doubt that she had been blessed with more than her share of good fortune, but because she was modest and dignified by nature, everyone at court held her in the highest esteem. Genji had had walls and covered passageways constructed along the interior boundaries separating the four quadrants of the estate in order to facilitate movement between the residences and to promote pleasant, harmonious relations among his women.

The leaves began to change color in the ninth month, and the garden in front of Umetsubo's residence was spectacular beyond words. At dusk, as an autumn breeze was blowing, she mixed various flowers and leaves in the lid of a box and sent them to Murasaki's quarters. She chose one of her pages to deliver the gift. This girl, who was tall and statuesque, wore a woven, patterned robe of pale violet lined with blue over a short, dark purple singlet and a diaphanous outer robe of pale russet.²¹ She carried herself with practiced gracefulness as she traversed the passageways and arched bridges that spanned the garden streams. Normally, the custom of sending a gift like this called for a more mature woman, but Umetsubo was so taken with this lovely page girl that she simply couldn't abandon the idea of using her for this task. The girl had served Umetsubo in the most august of settings, and so she had acquired a pleasingly refined manner in her comportment and appearance that was like no one else's. Umetsubo's accompanying letter included this poem:

*Because your garden prefers that season
It waits for the spring ... but look on these leaves
Carried from my abode by autumn winds*

Murasaki's younger ladies-in-waiting looked charming as they received the page and praised the girl effusively. For her reply Murasaki spread moss in the lid of the box, placed some stones on top to suggest rocky crags, and then added a small five-needle pine tree to complete a miniature landscape. She sent it with a poem attached to a branch of five-needle pine:

*Autumn leaves scattered by the wind are but fleeting trifles ...
You must view the true colors of spring, the unchanging green
Of this pine tree, its roots clinging to these eternal rocks*

Peering carefully at the miniature landscape, Umetsubo marveled at the ingenious craftsmanship of the little pine tree clinging to the rocks. She was struck by the cleverness Murasaki showed in coming up with such a response so quickly. Her ladies-in-waiting were also deeply impressed.

"Her letter concerning the autumn leaves," Genji remarked to Murasaki, "has something of an artful challenge about it. You would do better to respond to her when the blossoms of spring are at their peak. I wonder if our Princess Tatsuta²² took offense at your disparaging her autumn leaves at this season of the year. You should make a tactical retreat and wait until you are sheltered by the shade of spring blossoms to respond to her more forcefully."

So youthful-looking and dashing as he spoke, all the attendants were thrilled by his radiant splendor. This new estate was all that he could have hoped for, and his women exchanged letters in harmony and goodwill.

The Akashi lady assumed that lower-ranking women like herself would be moved as inconspicuously as possible to the Rokujō estate after his women of high status had settled there. As it turned out, she was moved during the tenth month. Genji showed her the same degree of consideration he had given his other women in preparing her furnishings and arranging for her arrival. Indeed, because he was worried about the reputation of his daughter, the Akashi Princess, he made sure that every detail of her mother's move was carried out with great dignity and proper form.

¹ This official academy (大学) or university was loosely based on Chinese bureaucratic models and used to train young men for positions in the government. The course of study largely emphasized the Confucian classics and focused on the fields of philosophy, law, ethics, and letters (primarily history and poetry). It also provided instruction in practical fields such as mathematics and yin-yang studies. Students did not have to come from elite aristocratic families, and while they were at the academy they were not in line for any promotion. So Genji's decision could be viewed as putting his son at a severe disadvantage in terms of his

future standing at court.

² It has long been noted that the word *Yamatodamashii* occurs only once in the narrative and that its appearance here is the earliest known surviving use of the word in a Japanese text. Later nationalist and nativist interests led to overinterpretations, but it is nonetheless worth noting that *Yamatodamashii* does indicate a strong consciousness of cultural difference between the Heian court's view of itself and its conception of China.

³ The arrangement would have been based on the custom of seating according to age, not rank.

⁴ This daughter's name will be explained below.

⁵ *Azechi* refers to a bureau under the direction of one of the Major Counselors that was responsible for public affairs in various provinces. The title eventually became honorary.

⁶ Lu Chi, "The Hero" from *Wenxuan*. The implication is that tears, like leaves, fall of their own accord and do not need either a breeze or the playing of a koto to make them drop.

⁷ The song is "The Seasonal Change of Wardrobes in Autumn." The implication of the line and the song is that it is time for Genji's son to change his wardrobe from the blue-green clothing that marks his status at the sixth rank to clothes dyed imperial purple with *hagi* flowers (bush clover flowers in autumn colors of reddish-purple and white) to mark a higher status.

⁸ There are several sources for this maxim, including the *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji*). It is worth noting this allusion here because it is of a piece with the other allusions in this chapter, which are generally drawn from the Chinese classics relevant to Genji's son, and demonstrates how carefully Murasaki Shikibu crafted her narrative.

⁹ *Kumoi no kari* means "wild geese in the cloudy skies," and this remark is the origin of the name traditionally used to identify Tō no Chūjō's second daughter. Because Tō no Chūjō has so many children, I have for the most part used their traditional names simply to avoid the confusion that can arise by referring to them by their court positions only.

¹⁰ The Gosechi Festival (also referred to as *Niinamesai*, the tasting of the new crop) was a series of feast days held in the middle of the eleventh month to celebrate the harvest. On those years when a new emperor had assumed the throne, the festival was called *Daijōsai* and was marked by offerings of thanks to the gods and imperial ancestors. These festivals were capped by great banquets called *Toyo no Akari*, the Feast of the Glowing Harvest, at which the Gosechi dancers performed the Dance of the Heavenly Maidens. During normal years, four young women were chosen as maidens of the dance, but five were chosen for the *Daijōsai*. Two of the maidens came from high noble houses, and two (or three) would come from the houses of officials, particularly provincial governors.

¹¹ This goddess has been identified with the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu.

¹² *Shūishū* 1210 (Hitomaro): "Ages ago I began to yearn for you, O maiden of the dance, twirling your sleeves inside the sacred enclosure."

¹³ The Gosechi dancer's poem plays on the word *hikage*, which can be understood to mean either a garland worn on the head of the maidens of the dance or sunlight. The *hikage* garland takes its name from a plant called *hikagegusa*—coral evergreen—originally used to adorn the dancers' headdresses at the Gosechi Festival. By the Heian period, the garland was more commonly made up of strips of silk or mulberry paper.

¹⁴ The name for crinum is *hamayū*, literally, "beach paper." It is called that because crinum is generally found near the shore (or beach, *hama*), and its complex flowers, with their numerous overlapping (hundredfold) petals, resemble strips of white mulberry paper (*yū*).

¹⁵ Fujiwara Yoshifusa (804–872) was the first Fujiwara to serve as both chancellor and regent.

¹⁶ A similar scene is described in the *Momiji no ga* chapter.

¹⁷ The text specifies that Genji acquired four *machi* (or *chō*町), which was a unit of measure used in laying out the grid pattern of the capital, Heian-kyō. A *machi* was the area marked out on four sides by surrounding streets or alleys and was equivalent to about 15,000 square meters. Thus, the total size of the land Genji acquired (60,000 square meters) was roughly 6 hectares (about 14.8 acres), which was certainly an impressive estate.

¹⁸ Directions are designated in the original text by signs of the Chinese zodiac: southwest is Ram/Monkey, southeast is Dragon/Snake, northwest is Dog/Boar, and northeast is Ox/Tiger. I note this here because estates such as Genji's were built according to geomantic principles that influenced design, landscaping, and spatial/seasonal orientation.

¹⁹ The Japanese name of this flowering shrub is *unohana* (also called *utsugi*), which may be written with the character for rabbit / hare (thus hareflower). The English name is *deutzia* (*deutzia crenata*), but it also has common names such as mayflower or summer snow. Hareflower has a rustic feel that seems to best convey the design of this landscape.

²⁰ *Kokinshū* 139 (Anonymous): “The fragrance of the orange blossoms awaiting the fifth month brings to mind the perfumed sleeves of a lover from long ago.” This poem is alluded to in the *Hanachirusato* chapter.

²¹ *Akakuchiba* (red fallen leaf—a pale reddish tan) is produced by weaving together threads of red (the warp or vertical) and yellow silk (the weft or horizontal). Sometimes the cloth was lined with yellow, but not in this case, since the page girl is wearing a *kazami*, a thin, gauzy outer garment. *Akakuchiba* has no precise equivalent in English, but because it has a reddish, almost light brown tinge, I have chosen to identify it as a pale shade of russet.

²² Genji refers to Umetsubo as Tatsuta-hime, the goddess of fall, who weaves the brocade of autumn foliage on Mount Tatsuta.

XXII

Tamakazura

A Lovely Garland1

THOUGH MANY months and years had come and gone, Genji had not forgotten his relationship with the lady of the evening faces, which had been fleeting as the dew. He had never stopped loving her, and despite his many affairs with women who were each distinctive in looks and personality, he was always overcome with sad regret whenever he remembered *her*. At such moments, he would think wistfully, *If only she were alive*.

Ukon, who had been with the lady when she died, had remained in Genji's service ever since that dreadful night. She was now one of his older and most familiar attendants, and while she did not come from an especially distinguished background, she was dear to Genji, who thought of her as a memento of the lady. At the time of his exile to Suma, he had entrusted Murasaki with overseeing all of his staff, and so he sent them over to the west hall of his old Nijō villa to serve her. Murasaki came to regard Ukon as good-natured and modest, but Ukon herself was constantly beset with feelings of sorrow and remorse.

If only my former mistress had lived, she thought. My lord would certainly have held her in as high regard as he does the lady from Akashi. He has proven that his heart is loyal and sensitive by never abandoning any of his women, even those for whom he has no deep affection. And still he looks after them all properly ... while my former lady may not have belonged among the very elite compared to his most distinguished women, she undoubtedly would have been included among those he brought here to his new estate.

The whereabouts of her late mistress's daughter—the little girl who had been sired by Tō no Chūjō and left behind in the western precincts of the capital—remained a mystery. Ukon had kept the circumstances of her lady's death that

night a closely guarded secret out of deference to Genji, who ordered her not to speak about the incident: “There’s nothing we can do about it now, and so never let my name slip out in connection with this.” As a result of his injunction, she did not try to look for or even contact the little girl.

In the meantime, the husband of the girl’s nurse was appointed Junior Assistant to the Governor General’s office in Kyūshū, and so it was decided that when they left the capital they would have to take the little girl with them. The child would have been four the year they left. Weeping day and night, the nurse prayed to all the myriad gods and to Buddha, asking them to reveal where her mistress had gone. She made inquiries at all the most likely places, but in the end she heard nothing.

If that’s how things are, what can I do about it? she thought. I shall care for her as a memento of her mother. But how sad for her that she must accompany us on this strange, undignified journey to some distant province. I so want to let her father know.

Unfortunately, the nurse had no suitable means to contact Tō no Chūjō, and so she discussed the matter with her fellow attendants.

“We have no idea where her mother is, so even if we do contact her father, what do we tell him when he asks us about the lady?”

“And if we send the child to her father’s house to live with people unfamiliar to her ... well, that will definitely be a concern later on.”

“If he finds out the girl is his, there is absolutely no way he would let her leave the capital.”

The child was quite pretty, and it was already apparent that she would grow up to be a refined, beautiful woman. It was thus heartbreakingly heartbreaking for the nurse and attendants when, at the outset of their journey to Kyūshū, they placed her on a humble-looking boat, which had no special furnishings suitable for the daughter of a man of high status, and rowed out to sea. The little girl still had memories of her late mother, and from time to time she would ask her nurse, “Are we going to Mother’s place?” The nurse was constantly breaking down in tears, as were her two daughters, who also missed their late mistress. Since tears were inauspicious and could bring misfortune on a voyage, the nurse admonished her daughters for weeping—even though she could not control her own emotions.

As they sailed along taking in the fascinating landscapes that they passed, one of the nurse’s daughters exclaimed, “If only she could see these scenes ... our mistress was so young and sensitive!” The other daughter’s mind was longingly fixed on the capital, saying, “Were she still alive, we would never have had to leave home.” Feeling forlorn, she looked with envy at the returning waves.² Hearing the rough voices of the oarsmen singing their shanty—“With what

sorrow in our hearts have we come from far away”—the daughters turned to each other and wept.

*For whom is the boatman longing ...
I hear his melancholy voice
Off the bay at Ōshima*

*Both the past and future remain unknown
As we head into the offing unsure
Where to find the one for whom we're yearning*

Since they were going off to distant provinces,³ they composed their respective poems in response to their moods.

They passed the cape at Kane, and as they entered Hakata Bay they repeated the customary line: “I shall not forget you ...”⁴ For those on board, the words had special significance. Upon arriving in Kyūshū, they wept anew, longing for their mistress and realizing just how far from the capital they had journeyed. The nurse did everything she could, mornings and nights, to raise the child with special care. Every now and then, she would see her mistress in her dreams; because the spectral figure of the woman who had appeared to Genji the night the lady died also appeared in those dreams, the nurse would wake up feeling ill and troubled. As a result, she sensed that her mistress was no longer among the living—and that intuition made her terribly depressed.

When his term of service to the Governor General’s office was completed, the Junior Assistant contemplated going back to the capital, but he hesitated—the trip was long and arduous, and he had neither the authority nor the financial means to facilitate his return. In the interim, as he continued to put off his departure, he fell gravely ill. He knew that he would not live much longer, and as he observed the little girl, who was now almost ten years old and becoming ominously beautiful, he spoke anxiously about her.

“I will soon end up abandoning her just as her mother did. What will become of her then? I always felt that it was shameful to bring her up in such an undignified place as this, and I planned to take her back to the capital at some point and inform the right people, trusting that her karmic destiny was to find a perfect match. The capital is a big place, you know, and it would be no problem finding someone appropriate for her there. That’s why I was making arrangements to take her ... but now it looks as though I must end my life here.” He then gave final instructions to his three sons. “You must make sure, above all else, that you take her back. Don’t worry about holding memorial services for

me.”

The Junior Assistant never told anyone about the girl’s mother, not even his staff. Instead, he simply said that the girl was his grandchild and that he had his reasons for bringing her up. He kept her hidden away, and the kindness with which he treated her was boundless. Thus, when he suddenly died, his wife, who served as the girl’s nurse, was grief-stricken and devastated and could think of nothing but leaving for the capital. Unfortunately, her late husband had been on bad terms with many people in the province, and she fearfully imagined them doing one thing or another to make it difficult for her to go back. Preoccupied with such worries, she spent many years distracted and dazed. During this time, the girl grew into a splendid young woman more pure and beautiful than even her late mother and—perhaps because her father’s noble blood flowed in her veins—blessed with an exquisitely refined sensibility. She was generous by nature and perfectly composed in all respects. As word about her spread, a great many provincial suitors sent ardent letters trying to woo her; but the nurse and attendants, shocked at the presumptuousness of these boorish upstarts, responded to not a single one of them, dismissing them all out of hand.

The nurse decided to spread rumors about the young lady as a way to protect her: “Her looks may be passable enough, it’s true, but she has a rather extreme defect that will keep her from marrying. She’ll become a nun, and I plan to be by her side for as long as I live.”

Then, when people started gossiping—saying things like “I hear the granddaughter of the late Junior Assistant has something really wrong with her. What a waste!”—the nurse realized that this was inauspicious.

“One way or another we must get her to the capital and inform her father. When she was just a toddler, he found her incredibly adorable, so no matter what else happens, it’s unlikely he would simply dismiss her.” She sighed and offered a silent prayer to Buddha and the gods.

All of the nurse’s daughters and sons had found suitable spouses in that province and had settled down there. Although the nurse was still prepared in her heart to go back to the capital, the prospect of a return seemed to be receding farther away than ever. The young lady in her charge was now an adult of mature judgment who found the world a terribly trying place. She went on the three prescribed annual retreats during the first fifteen days of the first, fifth and ninth months: fasting, undergoing purification, and praying for rebirth in Amida’s Pure Land. Now almost twenty and reaching the prime of her beauty, she lived in Hizen Province. The few genteel families in that region had heard the rumors about her defects, and yet a constant stream of tiresome letters continued to pour in, much to the annoyance of the nurse and the staff.

A certain gentleman of the fifth rank, Taifu no Gen,⁵ who served in the Governor General's office as Master Inspector, had relatives in Higo Province and was well known throughout all of Kyūshū. He was said to be a fierce warrior, a man of power and authority, yet within his fearless heart there beat a little of the romantic as well, and his dream was to gather around him a host of superbly beautiful women. Hearing about the young lady, he sent off his own letter: "No matter how terrible her defects might be, I promise to put up with them and never abandon her." His words were so earnest and passionate that the nurse and attendants considered the man weirdly frightening.

"Oh dear, I'm afraid not. She couldn't possibly entertain such a proposal, since she is, after all, planning to become a nun."

When this reply was delivered to Taifu no Gen, he was alarmed, worried that the young lady was about to renounce the world. In his typically assertive manner, he hastened over to Hizen Province. He called the nurse's sons together and made them an offer: "If things turn out the way I want, then I will of course use my power and authority for your benefit ..." The two younger brothers were interested in giving way and making a deal with the man.

"Naturally, I feel sorry for her, since he's so far beneath her, but he's the kind of man we can definitely trust to provide a base of support for each of us. On the other hand, if he takes a dislike to us and acts spitefully, how will we be able to get by in this region? She may be of noble blood, but her father doesn't recognize her ... so what good will it do to take her back to the capital, since no one at court knows anything about her? At this point, it's a stroke of good fortune that the Master Inspector is so smitten. It must have been her destiny to come down to this rustic province, so what would be the sense in running away now? This man has an indomitable spirit, and if he gets angry he's capable of doing just about anything."

The oldest brother, who was Vice Governor of Bungo Province, found their words shockingly callous.

"What you say may be true, but it would be shameful to just give her away to him, and we would regret it later on. We must honor our father's last wishes and find a way to send her to the capital."

The nurse's daughters, who were upset and in tears, decried the proposal.

"Her mother wandered off to who knows where and simply left her, and so we've always thought that we should make up for that by seeing to it she has a life befitting her status. Now here you are, suggesting that she be married off to that provincial boor."

Taifu no Gen, unaware of these lamentations, continued to send letters, confident of his own standing and reputation. His calligraphy wasn't exactly

what you would call clumsy, and he chose tinted Chinese paper, which he heavily scented. He was also quite sure about the quality of his own literary skills—though his choice of words was very provincial.

Having persuaded the second son to take his side, Taifu no Gen used him to arrange a visit to the family residence. The man was about thirty, tall and massively stout, not all that bad-looking, really, but—and perhaps this was the fault of certain preconceptions the nurse's family may have had about provincial types—his unpleasantly coarse, direct manner was appalling to behold. His face had a healthy sheen, but his voice was rough and his accent so thick that his speech was practically incomprehensible. Suitors usually come courting under the cover of darkness, which is why they are referred to as “surreptitious lovers,”⁶ and so his arrival made for an unusual spring dusk. Indeed, it would have seemed strange even if he had come on an autumn evening.⁷ The nurse, who did not want to hurt his feelings, came out to meet him in the guise of the young lady's grandmother.

“Your late husband was a sensitive, dignified man, and I had hoped that somehow we might have become better acquainted so that I might have spoken with him on more familiar terms. It made me very sad that he passed away before I could realize my wish. I've been thinking that I'd like to do all I can to serve you in his place, and so, steeling myself, I have thrown caution to the wind today and ventured here. Your young lady comes from such a distinguished family that I feel humbled before her. An unworthy man such as myself would always have to think of her as the sovereign of my household and serve her as my superior. You, my lady, seem reluctant to grant my suit, and I wonder if it's because you've heard that I am keeping many other women of insignificant status? And what if I do? You must know that I could never treat your beloved granddaughter as an equal to women of their ilk. Why ... I would treat the young lady as though she were an Empress!” He spoke with great passion.

“Oh my, my ... ,” the nurse replied, “the thought never occurred to me. I'm most grateful for the interest you are showing in her—we are most blessed! But you see, she has certain ... how shall I put this?—*defects*. Maybe her misfortune is due to bad karma, but, in any case, they give her pause when it comes to even thinking about marrying someone, and because she grieves so in private over the situation, it is very difficult for us to see how unhappy she is and not be able to help.”

“Why, she shouldn't feel shy about a little thing like that. It doesn't matter if she's blind or lame, I'll just offer some prayers to fix her right up. Buddha and the gods all around this province never fail to answer *my* prayers.” Singing his own praises, he added, “So ... when shall we set the wedding date?”

The nun, trying to put him off, reminded him of a taboo distinctive to that province: “The season ends this month, so we’ll have to wait until the fourth month.”

Taifu no Gen wanted to compose a poem as he was leaving to show that he understood courtly customs, and so he wracked his brains for some time.

*If my feelings for you ever prove untrue, then I swear
To the god of the godly mirror of Matsuura⁸*

“Hey, that’s not so bad, if I say so myself.” He was grinning, clearly inexperienced in the ways of courtly love.

The nurse was overwhelmed and dazed, and she didn’t feel she could muster a reply. She tried to get her daughters to compose something for her, but they just sat there. “We’re even more stunned than you,” they told her. Worried that it would be rude to let so much time lapse without responding, the nurse finally came up with something:

*If after so many years of prayer
All the hopes I nurtured come to nothing
Should I resent the god of the mirror*

Her voice quavered as she spoke.

“Hold on now, what do you mean by that? Do you doubt my pledge?” Taifu no Gen came barging back in. Sensing his towering presence just outside her curtain, the nurse blanched. Although her daughters had told her they were too stunned to do anything, they managed to gather their courage.

“The lady you are asking for is really quite ... different, you see,” they laughed. “And so our mother’s poem was saying what a terrible shame it would be if her prayers for the success of your marriage proposal are not answered. Mother is getting a little senile, and so she misspoke when she invoked the gods.”

“Oh, so that’s what she meant ...” He was nodding now. “What an interesting turn of phrase! You may have heard that I’m just another provincial rustic, but folks out here aren’t completely uncultured. Anyway, what’s so special about people from the city? I know just as much about poetry, so don’t take me lightly.” He wanted to compose another verse to show off his accomplishments, but apparently he couldn’t come with anything, and so he left.

Upset and frightened that her second son had been won over by Taifu no Gen, the nurse urged her oldest son to take action immediately.

“How am I supposed to help her,” he protested. “There’s no one I can turn to. My own two brothers have broken with me, criticizing me for not being in sympathy with this man. They say if we make an enemy of him, he might want to make it impossible for us to do anything, to make even the slightest move. Whatever I do, there’s just no good alternative.” He thought hard, trying to devise a way out, but nothing came to him.

It was terribly hurtful to see the young lady suffering in private, and he thought it natural for her to be depressed and prefer death to such a marriage. At last he hit upon a desperate plan and they fled Kyūshū for the capital. The nurse’s two daughters were to abandon the men with whom they had lived for some years and accompany their mother and their young mistress. The younger sister, Hyōbu, who had been called Ateki⁹ when she was a little girl, was with her mistress when the party left at night to board a ship to the capital. Taifu no Gen had returned to Higo Province and was to come back to Hizen on the twentieth day of the fourth month, an auspicious date that avoided the end-of-season taboo. It was during the interval when he was away that they chose to flee.

The older daughter’s family was now so large that in the end she decided she could not leave. The two daughters were reluctant to part, and Hyōbu thought it unlikely that she would ever see her older sister again. Although she had been in Kyūshū for sixteen years, she did not find it all that hard at first to leave the place behind. However, when their boat passed the beach in front of the Matsuura Shrine, the realization that she was now truly separated from her older sister made her look back in sorrow.

*Rowing away from Ukishima, isle of woe
Wondering where will we sail, where will we anchor
How anxious our uncertain future makes me feel*

Her young mistress replied:

*I cannot see what lies ahead of me
But setting out adrift upon these waves
In sorrow I cast my fate to the winds*

Overcome by worry, she collapsed and lay prostrate.

They had assumed that word of their escape would spread and that Taifu no Gen, being a man who did not like to lose, would follow in hot pursuit. Worried and nervous about that possibility, they had asked for a speedy boat. The one

they chose had been cleverly constructed, and as they moved ahead with the favorable wind they had hoped for, they raced across the waters at alarming speed. They safely navigated the straits at Hibiki no Nada along the coast of Harima Province. Someone on board cried out, “Is that a pirate boat, that small craft skimming the waves as if it were flying?” Pirates, however, were the least of their worries, and they could not help but wonder if it might be that terrifying man from Higo chasing them. The nurse composed a poem:

*The roaring waters at Hibiki¹⁰
Are nothing compared to the clamor
Stirred in my breast by alarming thoughts*

A voice called out that they were nearing the mouth of the Yodo River at Kawajiri, and the sense of relief that they experienced made it seem as if they had come back to life. The oarsmen were singing a shanty: “Rowing on from Karadomari, on to Kawajiri ...” Their voices were unrefined, but the song was deeply moving. The Vice Governor murmured a line from the song in a voice tinged with poignant nostalgia: “I have forgotten my wife and children, having come so far ...” He mulled over the lyrics. *It’s true, I’ve left everyone behind. What will become of them? The men I might have trusted to stay behind to help them have all accompanied us here. Taifu no Gen will think ill of me and will certainly go after my family. What fate awaits them?* Having calmed down a little now that the voyage was over, he was able to reflect on the situation. *I used poor judgment, leaving like that without taking any steps to help them.* Realizing what a rash decision he had made, his courage left him and he began to cry. He murmured a snatch of verse from Bai Juyi: “In vain have I abandoned wife and children in barbarian lands.”¹¹

Hyōbu overheard him, and various thoughts raced through her mind. *We have truly done something dreadful, have we not? To ignore the feelings of the man I was with for so many years and suddenly run away ... what was I thinking?* Though she might have justified her actions by saying that she was going home, in fact there was no place where she could settle. She could think of no one whom she could call a friend, no one whom she could turn to for support. For the sake of her young mistress, she left behind a world she had grown accustomed to over the years, and now, drifting aimlessly amid the waves and wind, she had no idea what to do. *How will I ever be able to do anything for her?* At her wits’ end and uncertain about the future, she hurried on with the others to the capital.

Calling on an old acquaintance who was living at Kujō, they were able to find lodging at his residence. Although the place was inside the city proper, it was not

an area where the most upright, reliable folks lived, and with all the women peddlers and merchants plying their trade there, they found it dreary and not at all what they had hoped for. The coming of autumn brought with it many lamentations about their past and their future. Even the Vice Governor, the one they all relied on, felt like a waterfowl lost on dry land; in his idleness, he came to believe that he didn't belong in the capital, since he had been away so many years and had no means of making a living. It would have been too awkward for him to go back to Kyūshū, and yet, at the same time, he regretted having left in such a thoughtless manner. Meanwhile, the retainers who had accompanied him were scattering one by one, contacting relatives and running off to return to their home provinces.

The Vice Governor felt sorry for his mother, who was constantly sighing and complaining that they had no means to settle down in the capital. He tried to console her.

“What have we to regret? I am quite comfortable with our decision. No one can censure us for disappearing and moving from place to place, since we did it all in service to the young lady. Just think, even if we were leading a grand and sumptuous lifestyle, how would we feel had we allowed her to be married off to such a man? The gods and the Buddha will show us the way she must take to fulfill her destiny. There is a shrine to Hachiman nearby in Yawata.¹² It's similar to the shrines at Matsuura and Hakozaki in Kyūshū where you used to pray. You made many supplications to Hachiman at the time we left the provinces, and now that we have arrived in the capital, you should go at once to make an offering of thanks for the blessing of a safe journey.”

In order to send her to the shrine at Yawata, he made inquiries to someone who knew the place well and had a connection with a priest of great virtue. This priest had once served as one of the five administrators at the shrine offices and was an acquaintance of the Vice Governor's father back in the old days. With his help, the nurse was able to make her pilgrimage.

“Now that we've prayed to Hachiman,” the Vice Governor said to his mother, “we must next make a pilgrimage to Hatsuse and pray to Kannon at the Hasedera Temple there.¹³ It is one of the most famous temples in our land, and apparently its reputation has spread even to China. The merciful Kannon will surely bless our young lady ... after all, even if she was raised in the hinterlands, she has lived in this country all her life.”

And so they set out on another pilgrimage. They decided that it would be more pious for them to walk rather than go by ox carriage, though this made the journey trying for the young lady, who was not used to traveling on foot. Still, she did as she was told and walked on, forgetting herself, concentrating on her

devotions, praying to Holy Kannon. *What sins have I committed that I should be wandering lost in the world like this? Even though my mother may no longer be in the realm of the living, I ask you to please lead me to the realm that she does inhabit. And, if she is alive, please show me her face.*

Because the young lady had no memory of her mother's face, it made her sad to think that she might not recognize her, even if her mother were still alive. That grief was intensified to an extreme degree by her present unbearable circumstances. The young lady's heart was preoccupied by such thoughts when her party finally arrived at the town of Tsubaichi at the base of Mount Miwa, where Hasedera Temple was located. They arrived early in the day, at about ten o'clock in the morning on the fourth day of their journey, but they did not continue on immediately from there. They were so exhausted they felt as if they were barely alive, and though they had planned the pilgrimage so that the young lady would not have to walk any more than necessary, she was footsore and miserable, which meant they had no choice but to find lodgings and rest before ascending the mountain.

The party consisted of the young lady, the nurse, and Hyōbu—all of whom were covered up by deep-brimmed hats, veils, and travel robes—and the Vice Governor, who was the one they relied upon for support. Their escort consisted of two men armed with bows and arrows, three or four servants and pages, a woman who cleaned their chamberpots, and two old, lowly maidservants. The party had traveled quietly, trying to be as inconspicuous as possible. As the sun was setting and darkness gathered, they busied themselves preparing the stock of votive candles that they would light before the altar. The priest who served as the master of the temple lodging was irritated.

"Why are all of you still here?" he asked. "Other pilgrims are scheduled to arrive tonight. Those stupid maids of mine have forgotten everything I told them and done this on their own!" They were startled by his complaints, but then, just as he had said, another party arrived.

Apparently, this group had made the pilgrimage on foot as well. It included two women of some status and numerous male and female attendants. Several of the gentlemen looked to be of fairly high rank—though they were dressed in plain garb to avoid attracting attention—and they had their servants leading four or five horses. Given their obvious status, the priest definitely wanted them to stay at his lodgings, and in his confusion over how to handle the situation, he walked around scratching his head. The members of the young lady's party all felt bad for him, but it was too inconvenient and unappealing for them to change lodgings at this point. As a compromise, they moved their servants to rooms at the back or to other spaces and partitioned off the main room, drawing a cloth

across it to keep the young lady out of sight. The party that had just arrived did not seem so distinguished as to require excessively deferential treatment, and both sides spoke in low whispers so as not to disturb one another.

Now, as it turned out, one of the women who had just arrived was Ukon, the lady-in-waiting who had mourned for so long the passing of her mistress, the lady of the evening faces. Because that loss had caused her great anguish over the months and years, making her feel unworthy and out of place at Genji's residence, she made frequent pilgrimages to Hasedera to pray that she might be granted fulfillment of her deepest desire, which was to find her late mistress's daughter.

Ukon was used to making this pilgrimage, and it was easy enough to prepare for it; even so, the journey on foot had been hard on her, and she had to lie down to rest. The Vice Governor came over near her, just outside the cloth being used as a curtain. He was carrying a simple tray with food. "Excuse me, but would you mind passing this through to the young lady on the other side of the room? This is very awkward, but there is no stand to put the tray on." As soon as Ukon heard him speak, she realized that the young lady must be someone of superior status. She pulled the cloth aside just a little and peeked out. When she saw the Vice Governor's face, she had the feeling that he was someone she had seen somewhere before, but she wasn't sure who he was. It was long ago, when she was very young; because he now looked heavier, his complexion darker, his dress shabbier, she could not recall his identity.

"Sanjō, please take this to your mistress," the Vice Governor ordered the young lady's attendant. When Ukon glanced at the attendant, she once more had the feeling that this was someone she had seen before—and then it came back to her. Sanjō had once served Ukon's late mistress—indeed, she had been in service for so long and so intimately that she was included among the attendants who went into hiding at that house in Gojō when their mistress was threatened by the family of Tō no Chūjō's principal wife. Now here she was, right before her eyes. Ukon felt she was in a dream. She was eager to find out who the young lady was, but the cloth partition prevented her from taking a look, and she couldn't think of another way to learn her identity. *I have no choice but to ask this woman, Sanjō. I'm sure now that the man who brought the tray was the one who used to go by the name Hyōtōda. Is it possible my lady's daughter is with them?* Impatient to learn the truth, Ukon called out to Sanjō, who was on the other side of the cloth divider. However, the attendant was eating just then, and irritated by the interruption, did not respond right away.

Moving over toward the cloth, Sanjō finally replied, "I don't remember you at all. It's going on close to twenty years since we went to Kyūshū, so how could

someone from the capital possibly know a lowly servant like myself? You must be mistaking me for someone else.” Sanjō wore a provincial-looking robe over a singlet of soft, raw silk. She had also grown very fat. Ukon felt awkward, imagining how old she would probably look to Sanjō, but she put aside her embarrassment and thrust her face through the cloth partition.

“Look at me closely ... don’t you recognize me?”

Sanjō clasped her hands together and wept in joyful surprise.

“Is it really you? How happy I am! Where have you come from? Is our mistress here?” Ukon was deeply moved, recalling how she had been so used to seeing Sanjō when she was still a girl, and realizing how many years had intervened between then and now.

“Is the daughter here? And her nurse? How about the girl they called Ateki?” Ukon asked, mentioning nothing about her late mistress.

“They’re all here. Our young lady is grown up now. I must tell the nurse right away.” She went back inside the cloth partition.

Everyone was amazed.

“I feel like I’m dreaming,” the nurse said, moving over to the cloth partition. “To meet here, of all places, someone for whom I’ve harbored resentment beyond words ...” They removed the partition and cleared away the folding screens and other furnishings. At first, everyone was speechless and could do nothing but cry.

“What has become of my mistress?” the nurse asked. “All these years I have wanted to find her, searching for her even in my dreams, praying that we might meet again, but we lived in such a far-off province that the breezes carried no word of her to us. It made me so terribly sad that I began to think it cruel that I should have to live on into old age in this world of woe. I felt such love and pity for the young girl who had been abandoned, it made me worry that my attachment to her would be a hindrance to me on the road to salvation ... and yet the light of life still flickers in me, and I live on.”

There was no way for Ukon to explain what had happened to their mistress that night so long ago, and she felt it was pointless and troublesome to speak of it now.

“Please ... it serves no purpose for you to ask me about her. She died so young.” And with that confirmation of the death of the lady of the evening faces, the women all choked up and found it hard to suppress their tears.

It was now dark outside, and the Vice Governor was pressing them to quickly finish preparing their votive candles for the temple. The two groups parted ways, feeling flustered at having met unexpectedly under such extraordinary circumstances. “Shall we make our way up together?” Ukon asked. However,

both sides agreed that traveling together might look strange to the attendants and servants, and they did not let even the Vice Governor know what had happened. Thus, with neither Ukon nor the nurse feeling in any way constrained toward one another, they all set out in separate parties for the temple. Ukon furtively glanced ahead, feeling a mix of pain and sorrow. The young lady, viewed from behind, was lovely despite being covered by a hat and veil—her long hair, hidden beneath the early summer singlet she wore, looked exquisite through the thin, gauzy silk.

Ukon's party, being more accustomed to walking, reached the temple first. The other party struggled to help the young lady up the steep climb, arriving at the time of the mid-evening service. With so many pilgrims crowding in, the temple was noisy and bustling. Ukon had made arrangements that a space close to the right-hand side of the statue of Kannon, which was facing east, be cordoned off for her use. Because the priest guiding the young lady's party knew nothing about them, they ended up in an inconvenient spot on the west side of the temple behind the statue. Ukon sought out the young lady. "Would you like to conduct your devotions here with us?" The nurse explained to her son, the Vice Governor, what was happening. Leaving the men there, the women moved to Ukon's space.

"I myself am someone of no significance," Ukon told the young lady, "but because I enjoy the protection of my lord, the Chancellor, I always feel certain I will never encounter anything untoward, even on the deserted road that leads to this temple. It is shameful, I know, but in a place like this there are always impudent people of poor manners who look down on those who seem to be from the provinces."

She wanted very much to continue talking, but the din of the services swallowed up her words. The noise made talking impossible, and so she gave up and prayed instead, addressing the merciful Kannon in her heart.

Time after time I prayed to you, asking that I be allowed to find this young lady somehow ... and now, at last, I've met her, and my prayers have been answered. My lord, the Chancellor, has always had a deep, abiding desire to find her as well, and so once he is informed, please grant her good fortune and happiness.

Pilgrims from many provinces were at the temple just then, including the wife of the Governor of the local province of Yamato. Sanjō was jealous of the woman's glory and power, and so she put her hands to her forehead in supplication and prayed fervently.

"Oh Blessed Kannon, I pray only for this ... if my lady cannot marry the Assistant Governor General of Kyūshū, then let her be the primary wife of the

Governor of this province of Yamato. This would bring great success and happiness to me and mine, and we would be ever grateful to you!"

This prayer struck Ukon as inauspicious.

"You really are an uncouth provincial! Your lady's father, even back when he was just a Captain, was a man of such standing and reputation that he enjoyed the confidence of His Majesty. Now that he is Palace Minister, a man who bends the whole world to his will, how could you possibly pray for her to end up the wife of a provincial Governor, of all things, when she comes from such a glorious lineage?"

"You keep still! And just hold off on all this talk of ministers and the like. When the wife of the Assistant Governor General went to the temple at Shimizu back in Kyūshū to pray to Kannon, I'll bet her procession was every bit as grand as an imperial progress. So, that's enough out of you!" Putting her hands back to her forehead, Sanjō returned to her prayers.

The Vice Governor's party planned to stay on retreat for three days. Ukon had not intended to stay that long, but given this opportunity to talk at her ease with the young lady, she summoned a priest and explained her reason for wanting to go into retreat herself. This priest had long been aware of what she had written in her formal prayers to Kannon, and so he understood the situation when Ukon explained to him what had happened.

"As always I have come to you on behalf of the Fujiwara Princess, Ruri.¹⁴ Make sure you offer my prayers properly. I recently came upon the young lady, and so I must offer my gratitude to Kannon for granting my request." Those in the young lady's party who overheard her were deeply moved.

"What wonderful good fortune," the priest replied. "It is a sign that we have not been lax in our prayers." The raucous services continued all through the night.

When dawn broke, both parties returned to the lodgings of the priest whom Ukon had long relied upon to offer her prayers. There, they were able to talk things over more openly and at their leisure. The young lady seemed embarrassed about her humble clothing; her attitude was quite becoming.

"I never expected to be in service to a lady as distinguished as my present mistress," Ukon began, speaking to the young lady, "but I have seen many noblewomen in my life, and having observed them over the years, I can say that none of them can match her—the Chancellor calls her his Murasaki—though I must add that the little girl she looks after, the Akashi Princess, is growing right along. She is just seven, but it's clear given her father's looks that she will grow up to be a great beauty, which is why they are going to such lengths to raise her in the best way possible ... be that as it may, it's wonderful to see that you, my

dear, are no less lovely than those two, even dressed in those robes. Ever since the reign of his father, my lord has had the opportunity to see all the ladies of the palace, from the Empress and imperial consorts on down, and I've heard him claim that the only two he considers the embodiment of the ideal noblewoman are the late mother of our Emperor Reizei and the little Akashi Princess I just mentioned. I myself cannot compare the two ... I didn't know the late Imperial Mother, and even though the Akashi Princess is very pretty, she is still a child, so one can only guess how beautiful she may be in the future. Still, when it comes to my present mistress, Lady Murasaki, no one who has seen her would ever believe that she has an equal. My lord seems to be convinced that she is superior to all other women, and, even if he doesn't want to say so in front of her, I'm sure he would have to include her among his ideal beauties. He teased her once, saying, 'I pity you, really, having to be with me, since you suffer by comparison.' Just to see the two of them together adds years to your life—they make such a grand couple—and it makes you wonder if there could possibly be anyone else like them in the world ... and yet, in what respect are you inferior? There are limits to all things, of course. No matter how excellent a woman may be, no one expects an aureole to be emanating from her head like the Buddha. All the same, I have to say that you are extraordinary." Ukon smiled as she gazed on the young lady, and the old nurse was overjoyed.

"Her refined looks," the nurse chimed in, "were very nearly sunk for good in that uncouth province in Kyūshū. I was so ashamed and depressed about her situation that I abandoned hearth and home to come to the capital. I even left behind my sons and one of my daughters ... the children I was counting on for support. The capital is an unknown world to me now, and so I must ask you, my dear Ukon, to please find a proper place for my young lady as soon as you can. A person like you who serves in the houses of the mightiest nobility must naturally have an opportunity to meet the Palace Minister. Please think of a way to let her father know that she is here ... I'm sure he will accept her as one of his own."

Embarrassed by their conversation, the young lady turned her back on them.

"Oh my," Ukon replied, "I certainly don't count as a significant person, but my lord does summon me to his presence now and then, and I have had occasion to bring the subject of the young lady to his attention. Once he heard me wondering aloud what had become of the daughter of my late mistress, and he told me that he, too, wanted to find out and that if I heard anything I was to inform him."

"The Chancellor is a splendid man, no doubt," the nurse said, "but he already has many distinguished wives. If it please you, I think we should inform the

Palace Minister first ... he is her real father, after all.”

Upon hearing this suggestion, Ukon decided it was time to explain what had happened to the lady of the evening faces.

“My lord found it impossible to forget her,” she said, concluding her story, “and has grieved terribly ever since that dreadful night. He once told me that he wanted to have the daughter as a replacement for his lost lady ... that he felt lonely having so few children, and that if the daughter could be brought to his residence he would announce to the court that she was actually one of his own, a daughter whom he had located after many years. I was a fool for not trying to seek out the young lady then and there, but at that age I was timid and too deferential, and I let the time pass without making any effort to try to find her. Then your husband was appointed Junior Assistant, and I learned his name through the appointment list that year. I caught a glimpse of him previously, on the day he came to my lord’s old residence on Nijo to formally announce his departure just before he left for Kyushu. In spite of all that, I assumed that our late mistress’s little girl would remain at that house in Gojo where the evening faces bloomed. How horrible it is to contemplate that our young lady may have had to spend her entire life out in the provinces.”

They continued talking over various matters all through the day, sharing stories of the past, praying and reading sutras. From their vantage they could look down on the crowd of pilgrims gathered below. The Hatsuse River was flowing before them. Ukon composed the following:

*Had I not journeyed to this sacred place
Where two cedars stand, would I have met you
On the banks of the Hatsuse River¹⁵*

“Oh joyful river!”

The young lady replied:

*Though I knew nothing of the past
Or the rapids at Hatsuse
Our meeting brings a stream of tears*

Upon composing her verse, she broke down and wept. Her looks at that moment left nothing to be desired.

She really is lovely, Ukon thought. Were she uncouth and unpolished, she would be like a gemstone with a flaw. How is it possible that she could have matured so magnificently out in the provinces?

Ukon marveled at how well the old nurse had raised her charge. The young lady's mother had been so young and gentle, so compliant and yielding, but her daughter possessed a refined dignity that made others feel ashamed in her presence and, as her poem indicated, she was well trained. Ukon was now curious about Kyūshū, seeing that such a woman should have come from there. Indeed, looking at some of the women in the Vice Governor's party who were as uncouth as Sanjō, she found the young lady's elegance incomprehensible. When it was dark, they went up to the main hall of the temple and spent all the next day performing their devotions.

An autumn wind came blowing up from the distant valley below, and though it felt chill on the skin, the nurse and others were filled with joyful expectations. The nurse, who was contemplating all manner of things, was in a pensive mood, reflecting on the hardships inflicted on her young mistress, who had been separated from her father and forced to live the life of a provincial. After hearing Ukon talk about the Palace Minister—how he made sure that all of his children, regardless of who the mother was, achieved success in the world—the nurse felt more confident that the young lady, a lower leaf hidden in the shade, could count on him to recognize and support her.

As they were leaving the temple, they exchanged information regarding their respective residences in the capital, since they worried about losing track of each other again. Because Ukon's residence was located near Genji's new villa at Rokujō, it was not far from the young lady's lodgings in Kujō. The proximity of their houses would make it easier for them to stay in contact.

Ukon went to Genji's estate. She hurried there, thinking that she might have an opportunity to speak privately with her lord about the young lady. As her carriage was being drawn through the gate, she could see that the grounds were much more expansive than the Nijō villa. There were numerous other carriages coming and going, and the whole scene, like a bejeweled palace, was dazzling to the eyes of someone as insignificant as Ukon. She was not called to serve Murasaki that night, but even so, she could not sleep as she turned things over in her mind.

The following day, Ukon was honored that Murasaki summoned her specifically, out of all the high-ranking and youthful attendants who had moved from their homes to the new estate. When Genji saw her, he said, "Why have you been away so long? Rather unusual for you, is it not? I suppose even serious, morally upright people engage in youthful antics now and then. Tell me, have you been up to anything interesting?" He was engaging in the usual teasing banter.

"I know that I've been away for seven days, my lord, but it is quite beyond me

to do anything *interesting*, as you put it. I went on a pilgrimage, walking up into the mountains, and there I met someone who is dear to me.”

“And who might that be?”

Ukon hesitated. *If I just blurt it out before having mentioned the matter to my mistress, or if I speak with him privately and she hears about it later, either way she's likely to think that I've been keeping things from her.* With these thoughts in mind, she told Genji, “I would be pleased to tell you by and by.” Just then, some other attendants came in, and she refrained from saying anything more.

Oil lamps were lit. How delightful it was to gaze on the figures of Genji and Murasaki, who seemed so relaxed and intimate. Murasaki was now about twenty-seven or twenty-eight and, having matured beautifully, in the very prime of life. Though Ukon had been away only a short time, it seemed that during her absence her mistress had grown even lovelier. Comparing Murasaki and the young lady in her mind, she concluded that the young lady was truly exceptional and in no way inferior, and yet—was she just imagining it?—there was something separating the two ... and that something was the difference between having experienced good fortune and having missed out on the blessings of life.

Genji, who had retired to his sleeping quarters, called for Ukon to massage his legs. “The younger women seem to find this task rather tiresome,” he told her. “I guess it takes an old couple like us, who understand each other, to have a genuinely close relationship.”

The other ladies-in-waiting giggled into their sleeves.

“Really now,” said one of them, “who could possibly complain about providing such service to our lord?”

“You put us in an awkward spot by teasing us!”

“If an old couple like us were to get a little too close, Murasaki would likely find out and be very cross,” he told Ukon with a laugh. “But it’s when she doesn’t show her jealousy and pretends that she isn’t upset that things get really dangerous.” He was charming and in an expansive mood. At this point in his life, he was no longer burdened with palace responsibilities and felt as though he could take life easy. Bantering over trivial things and trying, most amusingly, to catch out his attendants, he teased even his older ladies-in-waiting.

“Tell me, now, who is this person you met? Have you taken up with some master ascetic?”

“Really, my lord, how vulgar! I found our missing girl, the one related to the passing dew on the evening faces.”

“That must have been a moving experience. Where has she been all this time?”

Ukon was reluctant to share every detail of the young lady’s circumstances,

since she was not sure how Genji would react. She answered him vaguely.

“She was living in a remote mountain village with many of the people who had been with her in the old days, when she was a child. I spoke with them about those times ... it was unbearably sad.”

“All right, that’s enough for now. I’d rather not talk in front of someone who knows nothing about the story,” he said, trying to keep the matter under wraps.

Murasaki covered her ears with her sleeves.

“My, it sounds so complicated. And I’m far too sleepy to listen to you anyway.”

“Is she as attractive as those evening faces of old?”

“I had always assumed she could never match those flowers, but, to my eyes, she has grown up to be far more beautiful.”

“How intriguing. Who would you compare her to ... my lady here?”

“Gracious no, my lord, how could she compare?”

“Still, you seem elated all the same. In any case, if she’s as good-looking as I am, she’ll have no reason to worry.” He was speaking as if he were the young lady’s real father.

After hearing this news from Ukon, Genji summoned her again in order to speak with her one-on-one.

“Given the situation, I have decided to move the young lady here. I remember all of those times over the years when I was filled with remorse for having lost track of her, and so I was overjoyed to learn of her whereabouts. However, after seeing how precarious her life has been up to this point, I feel that I must now be of some use and support her, since I could not do so earlier. But do not mention this to her father, the Palace Minister. He has so many children that his household is always bustling and noisy, and if she were to move there, she would very likely be overlooked and treated indifferently, as someone with no status. I, on the other hand, am alone, with few children, and I shall simply explain to everyone that I discovered a long-lost daughter from some unexpected quarter. I shall show her such special consideration that she’ll have all the elegant young bachelors falling over each other trying to win her hand.”

Ukon was delighted at how things were turning out in the end.

“Very well, my lord, I will do as you wish. Of course, who else besides you would be the one to inform the Palace Minister ... that is, if he is ever to learn about her. In any case, helping the young lady in recompense for the death of her mother, who passed away all too soon, will expiate your sin.”

“You still blame me, don’t you?” Genji smiled bitterly as tears welled up in his eyes. “For years I have sorrowfully pondered the brevity of the bond we shared. Among all the women whom I have gathered here, I have not loved any

of them with the same intense passion I felt for your late mistress. Many of my women have lived long enough to realize how loyal my feelings for them are, and, for that reason, I regret only that my lady of the evening faces should have died so suddenly. There was nothing I could say or do, and her death left only you as a memento of her. I have never forgotten, and, had she lived, I believe that my hopes in life might have been fulfilled."

He sent a letter to the young lady. The experience with his Princess Safflower, who had turned out to be such a disappointment, had made him cautious, and so naturally he was concerned about a woman who had grown up steeped in the ways of the provinces. He wanted to see a letter from her first, and was careful to write in a serious, sober manner—one that conveyed a properly paternal tone. At the end, he appended the following: "My purpose in writing to you like this ..."

*You may not understand, but ask and you will find
That our connection is long and everlasting
Like stems of mikuri reed at Mishima-e¹⁶*

Ukon took Genji's letter and delivered it herself, relaying to the young lady all that Genji had said as well. He sent a variety of robes for her and her attendants—he must have discussed the choice of gifts with Murasaki, and together they had pulled items from their own wardrobe, selecting clothes of the finest hues and tailoring. No doubt, all these gifts must have seemed fabulous to the eyes of those who had been used to living in the provinces.

I would have been thrilled had I received even a token sign of recognition from my real father, but this proposal ..., the young lady thought, feeling hesitant. How can I move to the house of someone I don't know? She seemed troubled, and Ukon, seeing the expression on her face, explained why she should go to the Rokujo estate. The other attendants tried to reassure her as well.

"Your father will naturally learn about you once you have moved to the Chancellor's estate. After all, the bond between parent and child can never be broken."

"It's just like Ukon says ... and if a woman like her, who doesn't have especially high status, was somehow able to find you by praying to the Buddha and the gods ... well then, you, being the daughter of a nobleman, will certainly have your prayers answered. So long as nothing happens to you or your father, you will meet him in the end."

The nurse pressed her charge to compose a response immediately. However, the young lady was anxious about the letter, ashamed that it might expose her provincial upbringing. She took out a piece of richly scented Chinese paper and

wrote her reply poem:

*If there is a connection that binds me to you
Why did I, like humble stems of mikuri reed
Take root in the inlet of this world of sorrow*

She wrote nothing else. Her brushstrokes were faint and, though her hand seemed unsteady and uneven, it was refined all the same. Genji was relieved to see that it was not at all disappointing.

He considered which residence would be most appropriate for her.

The southeast quadrant has no vacant halls. Besides, Murasaki's residence is the liveliest of the four, and with so many attendants in service the young lady would likely be an object of curiosity. The southwest quadrant is quiet and would be a good place for a woman from the provinces, but the Umetsubo Empress lives there; moving her to that residence might create the impression that I am simply sending her into imperial service. The northeast quadrant is a little gloomy, but I could have the library in the west hall cleared out ... she would be sharing the residence, of course, but Hanachirusato is discreet and good-natured, and they should make good companions for each other.

After much deliberation, Genji made his decision. He now told Murasaki for the first time what had happened between him and the lady of the evening faces. Murasaki was put out that he had kept the story hidden away in his heart.

“Aren’t you being unreasonable?” Genji protested. “Even if the woman were still alive, I couldn’t very well have offered to speak about our affair on my own, could I? That I have opened up to you now, when her daughter is moving here, shows that I hold you in special regard.” By the look on his face, the memory of those events long ago evidently moved him still. “Back then, I observed the affairs of others and heard of many cases where the woman becomes deeply attached even when the relationship is not all that intense. As a result, I felt that I did not want to let my own passions get out of control ... and yet, despite my resolve, I indulged in numerous trysts, including some that I should not have pursued. But, among all those women, I remember this young lady’s mother as one whose endearing gentleness was unique. Were she alive, I would consider her no less than equal to the Akashi lady in the northwest residence. Everyone has strengths and weaknesses, and, though she may not have been as clever or well-bred as some, she was refined and sweet all the same.”

“That may be true, but you simply cannot place her on the same level as the Akashi lady,” Murasaki countered. Her outrage over Genji’s relationship with the Akashi lady lingered, but as she gazed at her beloved little Akashi Princess,

who was innocently listening to their conversation and looking so very cute, she had come to accept that Genji's regard for the child's mother was not unreasonable.

All this took place in the ninth month. Moving the young lady to his *Rokujō* estate, however, was no simple task. The old nurse was charged with finding suitable page girls and attendants. Back in *Kyūshū*, she had been able to use official connections to assemble some passable ladies-in-waiting—women who had come scattering down from the capital like leaves—and bring them into her young mistress's service. But in the uproar of their sudden, confused departure, all those attendants had been left behind, so there was no one with her now. Because the capital was large, the nurse naturally turned to women from merchant houses to help in the search for suitable candidates. She did not let them know the identity of her charge's father.

At first, Ukon moved the young lady to her own residence in *Gojō*; then, once the attendants were selected and the wardrobe organized, she took her to Genji's estate during the tenth month. Genji entrusted the young lady to Hanachirusato.

"A woman I loved long ago wearied of our relationship and retreated to a remote mountain village," he told her. "We had a daughter, but she took the girl with her when she left, and I spent years secretly looking for the child, without success. So much time passed that my daughter is now an adult, but recently I heard about her from an unexpected source, and I thought that the least I could do is take care of her now. Since her mother has passed away, I decided to have her move here. I have imposed on you already by asking you to look after my son, and now I ask that you look after my daughter in the same way. She was brought up in the provinces and may have many rustic traits. Teach her anything that might be important for her to know." He sounded earnest.

"I understand," Hanachirusato answered meekly, not wanting to press the matter. "I never knew you had another daughter. It was always lonely for you, having only the Akashi Princess. How wonderful!"

"The young lady's mother was extraordinarily kindhearted. I am trusting you to look after her daughter because I know how gentle you are as well."

"I am truly delighted ... the young gentleman that I look after as best I can does not require much assistance from me, and so I have idle time on my hands."

Not a single attendant at *Rokujō* knew anything about the young lady.

"What sort of woman has he found for his menagerie this time?"

"Some old flame, no doubt. He is truly incorrigible!"

Only two or three carriages were used to make the move. To ensure that the young lady did not look like some provincial rustic, Genji had Ukon accompany her and he presented them with fine silk robes woven in various designs.

That evening, Genji went straight over to the young lady's quarters. The nurse and the more senior attendants had frequently heard his sobriquet, the Radiant Prince, bruited about in the old days, but, having been away from the court for such a long time, they had not given much thought to his magnificent appearance. Thus, they became increasingly unnerved after catching a glimpse of him through the narrow openings in the panels of the standing curtains. Seeing that Ukon had had the door opened for him almost immediately on his arrival, Genji laughed and said, "Any man entering here is certain to feel special." He took a seat in the narrow gallery just outside the main room. "These lamps are creating a rather romantic atmosphere. I had heard that you wanted to see your father's face, but perhaps I was mistaken?" He pulled one of the curtain panels just a little to the side to peer in; though the young lady was deeply embarrassed and turned away, he was still able to determine, to his relief, that she was indeed a beauty.

"Can someone bring some more lamps? This is all a bit too decorous." Ukon adjusted the wick on one of the lamps and brought it closer. "You are certainly a reserved one, aren't you?" Genji teased with a laugh. The young lady's eyes—so like her mother's—were almost dauntingly attractive. He did not address her in a formal manner, as he might have done a stranger, but assumed an intimate, fatherly tone with her.

"For years, I had no idea where you were, and during all that time not a moment went by when I was not grieving over you ... but now that I see you here before me, I feel as though I'm dreaming, and that feeling, when coupled with memories of things past, is hard to bear and makes it hard to speak." He wiped tears from his eyes.

The remembrance of her mother made him genuinely sad. Calculating the young lady's age, he reproached her, saying, "I doubt that there has ever been a case like ours where a parent and child have been separated for so long. Our karmic destiny has been a painful one ... but, come now, you are no longer at an age when you can act so shy and innocent, and I want to talk with you about all that has happened over the years. Why are you being so apprehensive and reticent?"

She was much too shy to speak directly to him, and so she murmured in hushed tones, "I was still young and, like the Leech Child, unable to stand on my own after three years.¹⁷ I fell in the world and was cast adrift in the provinces. There I lived a precarious existence, not knowing if I would survive or not." Her voice had a youthful quality that also reminded him of her mother.

He smiled. "And who else besides me will take pity on the hardships you endured?" Her response, with its allusion to the Leech Child, suggested that she

was not without some training. Just before he withdrew, he gave Ukon instructions on how to manage the young lady's household.

Genji was pleased that she was so presentable, and he talked to Murasaki about her.

"She has spent so much time in the provinces, I was a bit condescending toward her. I just assumed that she would be pathetic, but instead she seems so poised that I felt ashamed at having prejudged her. I'll now let it be known that we have a great beauty residing here, and I am looking forward to rousing the hopes and passions of those like my brother, Prince Sochinomiya, who enjoy visiting my humble abode. Those ardent gentlemen are always acting so serious and proper whenever they're around, but that's only because there hasn't been anyone here to interest them as an object of desire. I'm going to go out of my way to promote her, and then we'll be able to judge once and for all the true character of these so-called *gentlemen*."

"What a strange father you are ... more of a pander, really. The first thing you think of is how to tempt men to pursue her. It's outrageous and shameful," Murasaki scolded him.

"Well, to tell the truth," Genji said, laughing, "if I had felt this way about you when you were young, I might have tried handling things the same way. And to think, I simply took you for my wife without exploring all of the interesting possibilities available to me."

Murasaki blushed, which made her look ever so young and enchanting. Genji pulled an inkstone over and, as if practicing his calligraphy, scribbled the following:

*What connection binds us, like stems binding
A lovely garland, bringing you to one
Fated always to yearn for a lost love¹⁸*

"My lovely garland ... *Tamakazura*. How touched I am that you bind me to your mother," he murmured to himself.

Murasaki was gazing at him. *The young lady truly seems to be a memento of someone he deeply cared about.*

Genji spoke to his son about the newest resident.

"I found her under these circumstances, so please don't look down on her but treat her kindly, as she is your sister." The young gentleman then went to call on her, and he spoke in a most serious tone.

"You should have summoned me earlier. I may not be a man of high status, but I shall always be at your service. I'm sorry I did not call on you when you

moved here.” Those attendants like the nurse and Hyōbu, who knew that two were not really siblings, felt uncomfortable.

The young lady’s attendants had done all that they could to make her residence in Kyūshū elegant and sophisticated, but they now recognized how hopelessly provincial it had been compared to these new quarters at Rokujō. The furnishings here were refined in a modern style, and the appearance and manners of those who treated Genji’s Tamakazura as a member of the family were dazzling to behold. Sanjō now looked down with disdain on the Assistant Governor General of Kyūshū, and, remembering the fierce countenance and violent temperament of Taifu no Gen, she was filled with dread.

Genji gratefully acknowledged the kind services of the former Vice Governor of Bungo, as did Ukon, who often spoke about it. Saying that there must not be any carelessness in the management of Tamakazura’s household, Genji selected her staff and gave them strict instructions as to their responsibilities. The Vice Governor was among those chosen for her staff. For a man who had lived so long in the provinces and had so suddenly left it all behind, the privilege of entering and leaving a great nobleman’s estate—the kind of place he never dared imagine he might be granted even temporary access to—and the position of command over others to carry out his duties were both great honors. Genji’s solicitous attention to every detail was deeply humbling.

With the year coming to a close, Genji turned his attention to the decorations and robes for Tamakazura’s quarters—as in fact he did for all his exalted ladies. He had these items prepared with the rather condescending thought that, even though Tamakazura was beautiful and talented, she might have a whiff of the provincial about her. As the time to present his gifts neared, he consulted Murasaki; they took stock of the cuts and colors of the formal robes that the tailors, who were in competition with one another, had put all their skills into making.

“There are an awful lot of them, aren’t there,” Genji noted. “I’d better distribute them evenly, so no one feels slighted.”

He had all the robes made by the wardrobe staff and by Murasaki brought out for inspection. Murasaki was extremely skilled at dyeing, and Genji was amazed at the unparalleled effects of coloring and shading she was able to achieve. Comparing the plump, softened cloth that had been supplied by various fullers, he and Murasaki selected bolts of deep purple or crimson fabric and had them placed into clothing chests or boxes. With the help of older, more senior women on the staff, the cloth was then divided into sets to be distributed to each of Genji’s ladies.

Murasaki was now looking over the formal robes.

"It's hard to distinguish among all of these, but you should keep in mind the looks of the person who is going to receive the gift. If the robe doesn't suit the wearer, it can be rather unsightly."

Genji smiled. "Here you are, pretending to be so nonchalant when all along you've been imagining what my women will look like in their robes. So tell me, then, which one of these suits you?"

"I couldn't possibly know that, since I have only my mirror to guide me." He had made her feel self-conscious.

Genji chose for Murasaki a superb formal spring robe in an up-to-date color scheme—purple with vividly woven patterns in crimson on the outside, crimson with designs in purple for the lining. For his daughter, the Akashi Princess, he selected a long robe in the cherry-blossom style—white lined with a deep reddish-purple—to which he added an under robe of soft, glossy silk. For Hanachirusato, he selected a summer robe in light blue woven with figures from the seashore—waves, shells, sea plants—clean and lovely without being too showy. To this, he added a dark red under robe of gauzy silk. Finally, for his Tamakazura, living now in the west hall of the northeast residence, he provided a cloak of pure red to which he added a long robe of fallen-leaf tan lined with yellow. Murasaki may have feigned indifference, but she was in fact imagining what the young lady would look like in this outfit. Based on all that she had been told, she guessed that the woman probably resembled her father, Tō no Chūjō—that is, strikingly good-looking, but somewhat lacking in refinement. Though her face betrayed nothing of her musings, Genji could sense that there was something on her mind.

"Really, now—selecting robes on the basis of a person's looks might anger them. No matter how well you think it might suit them, there are limits to what the colors can do for someone, while a person's features, even those that are not so attractive, may well reveal her depths." So saying, he selected for his Princess Safflower a robe in the willow pattern—a weave of white and greenish-yellow silks with a pattern of Chinese grasses in wild profusion—a suggestive motif, given her stiff, formal tastes. The robe was fresh and elegant, not at all a match to the lady's features. Genji could not help smiling.

Murasaki looked on in outrage as he made his selection for the Akashi lady—a white formal robe that had a vaguely Chinese air about it, with its woven pattern of butterflies and birds fluttering amongst branches of plum, to which he added a dark red under robe made of glossy silk. His choices seemed an affront to her as she imagined how elegant and refined the Akashi lady would look in them. For his lady of the molted cicada shell, who was now a nun, Genji selected a tasteful robe in a muted blue-gray weave to which he added two under robes

from his own wardrobe—one of yellow and another in a shade of light purple that people of her rank were permitted to wear.¹⁹ He attached a letter to each set of clothing with instructions to wear the gifts on New Year's Day. Genji was curious to see if the robes did indeed, as Murasaki had suggested, match their wearers.

The women's replies were all brilliantly executed, and they showed great consideration in their choice of gifts for the messengers—all, that is, except for his Princess Safflower, who was still living in her residence in the annex of the Nijō villa. Because she was now at a little remove from Genji compared to his other ladies, she was expected to respond in a more reserved manner as befitted her status. However, she was such a stickler when it came to protocol that she was incapable of deviating from customary practices. She formally placed a robe dyed the color of yellow mountain rose over the messenger's shoulder—a robe she had evidently worn in her youth, since the cuffs of the sleeves were soiled. She did not, however, provide an under robe, which made the outer garment seem a bit like a hollow tree. Her reply was written on thick, heavily scented official stock—Michinokuni paper that had yellowed with age.

"Ahh, what is to become of me. Your gift brings sorrow, reminding me of your absence."

*When I don this I am torn with bitter regret
Should I return this Chinese robe, its sleeves now drenched
Or turn it inside out that I may dream of you*

The style of her calligraphy was out of date. Genji studied the letter with a wry smile, and because he did not put it down right away, Murasaki observed him, wondering what was going on. He then noticed the yellow robe on the messenger's shoulder—so poorly made and embarrassingly inappropriate that it put him in a foul mood. Observing his lord's face, the messenger nervously stole out of the room. Genji's ladies-in-waiting were amused, tittering and whispering about how shocking it was.

For someone to be so unbearably old-fashioned, so excruciatingly awkward, he reflected. *Why, it would have been better had she sent nothing at all ... certainly not that robe. She is really too much!* The expression around Genji's eyes was unnerving.

"Poets in ancient times seemed reluctant to give up phrases like 'Chinese robes' or 'sleeves drenched in tears.' Of course, I count myself as one of their company. After all, clinging stubbornly to established ways of doing things, eschewing all modern vocabulary, is not at all annoying ... indeed, it can be

admirable in its way. Even so, it is a little absurd that when, for instance, you want to speak about a gathering of people on some occasion—a banquet, say, or an audience before an Emperor—you are never permitted to stray from using the three syllables *ma-to-i*, which is nothing more than the ancient term for sitting in a circle. Can you imagine? And, apparently, it was considered de rigueur at those charming contests of love poetry held ages ago to place the five syllables ‘Oh cruel lover’²⁰ at the caesura in order to achieve the proper affect.”

He now laughed. “Some people thoroughly study and memorize all the old primers on poetic place names and guides for proper composition, then select words from them and adhere strictly to the rules of composition. This lady once sent me a handbook written by her father, Prince Hitachi, and said that I should look it over. It was filled with jottings on the essentials of Japanese poetry and suggestions on how to avoid flaws in composition. For someone like me, who is a little slow when it comes to absorbing such teachings, I found it hard to look at without slowly succumbing to writer’s block. Indeed, the book was so tediously difficult, I sent it back to her. For someone who claims to know all of the guides, her response was rather uninspired.”

It makes one feel sorry for his Princess Safflower that he should have been so amused at her expense. Murasaki, speaking seriously, asked him, “Why did you send the handbook back? Wouldn’t it have been better to have made a copy to give to the Akashi Princess? I had some poetry manuals among my own books, but worms destroyed them. People like me who don’t know the basics of composition can’t possibly have an adequate understanding.”

“Such things are of no use for my daughter’s education since, generally speaking, it isn’t good for women to focus too much on a single interest. Of course, it would be regrettable were she to acquire no learning at all. In the end, if a woman is to be agreeable to a man, she must not be flighty or focused on herself, but be passive and gentle.”

Since he apparently had forgotten all about his reply, Murasaki prodded him: “She wrote that she was inclined to return your gifts. It would be rude and hurtful were you not to respond.” And so Genji wrote back, being by nature a man who could not abandon his feelings for a woman. Still, he seemed to have adapted an extremely casual tone for his reply:

*Do you mean to say you will return the robe
Or turn it inside out to bring dreams of me ...
I pity those robes spread out alone at night*

“Your feelings are perfectly understandable.”

¹ *Kazura* is a general term for vines or creepers. Since vines were used to fashion garlands for headdresses, the word *kazura* (written with a different Chinese character) came by analogy to refer to garlands. The word as it appears in the original text is written in the *kana* syllabary, so the dual readings are unavoidable. *Tama* means “jewel” or “gem,” but here it is used as an aesthetic intensifier, emphasizing the beauty of the garland of vines rather than the presence of actual gemstones.

² *Tales of Ise*, section 7: “Yearning to go back the way I have come, how enviously I watch those waves return” (alluded to in the *Suma* chapter as well).

³ *Kokinshū* 961 (Ono no Takamura, composed in exile): “Did I ever imagine it? Having fallen in the world, I find myself pulling in trawling lines on the shore of a distant province.” This poem was cited in the *Suma* chapter.

⁴ *Man'yōshū* 1230: “Though I have passed the august cape at Kane, I shall not forget you, O god of Shiga!” The poem is an offering of thanks to the local deity for a safe passage through treacherous waters. The vow not to forget is, in this case, also directed toward the lady of the evening faces.

⁵ For the sake of convenience, I have elected to use this character’s title as his name (as I have done, e.g., with Tō no Chūjō).

⁶ The word used in the original is *yobai*, which literally means “to creep/crawl in at night.”

⁷ *Kokinshū* 546 (Anonymous): “Though I cannot help but yearn for you no matter what season, how very strange I feel at dusk in the autumn.” This poem is alluded to earlier in the *Usugumo* chapter.

⁸ Taifu no Gen’s poem is in the correct form of thirty-one syllables, but the poem seems incomplete, since it is missing a line telling us what or how he swears to the god. For that reason, I have rendered it differently here as a couplet. There is also a clumsy, nonsensical play on the words *kami* (gods) and *kagami* (mirror).

⁹ A childhood name, not to be confused with the name of the little girl, Atekimi, who appears in the *Aoi* chapter.

¹⁰ The place name *Hibiki no Nada* (straits at Hibiki) permits a play on the word *hibiki*, which means “to reverberate” or “to echo (loudly).”

¹¹ *Hakushi monjū* 144, from “The Prisoner’s Song.”

¹² Hachiman is a major Shinto god, a guardian deity who protects Japan and its people. “Yawata” is another reading for the characters used for the name Hachiman. The shrine mentioned here is the Iwashimizu Hachiman-gū, which still exists.

¹³ Kannon is a bodhisattva associated with compassion and mercy, usually represented as female. The Hasedera Kannon was an eleven-faced statue (because Kannon’s mercy is infinite, she is often depicted with numerous arms and faces) that was considered especially efficacious in answering prayers. Because of Kannon’s powers, Hasedera in Hatsuse was an important pilgrimage site during the Heian period.

¹⁴ This is probably the young lady’s childhood name, which is written with the characters for lapis lazuli.

¹⁵ *Kokinshū* 982 (Anonymous): “If you truly long for me, come to the foot of Mount Miwa, to my hut ... to the gate where the sacred cedars stand.” The poem uses the place name Furukawa (literally, “ancient river,” though Furu is an alternative name for an area near Nara called Isonokami). Nonetheless, the river referred to here is the Hatsuse. Alluded to earlier in the *Sakaki* chapter.

¹⁶ The final sentence of the letter is completed by the poem. Genji plays on the word *suji*, which refers both to the “stems” of the reeds found at the inlet at Mishima (Mishima-e) and to “connections” between people. This play on stems / connections is a central one in the poetic discourse of this chapter.

¹⁷ The story of the Leech Child appears in the *Akashi* chapter above.

¹⁸ This poem also plays on the word *suji*, which appears earlier in the chapter. *Tamakazura* is the word I have rendered “lovely garland,” which gives this chapter its title. It is also the traditional name given to the daughter of the lady of the evening faces. From this point on, I use the traditional appellation to identify this character.

¹⁹ Shades of purple and crimson were “forbidden colors”—i.e., they were colors only people of imperial

lineage were allowed to wear.

20 The five syllables in Japanese are *a-da-hi-to-no*.

XXIII

Hatsune

First Song of Spring

THE SKY dawned perfectly clear on New Year's morning. Even the hedgerows of humblest peasant grasses were beginning to take on a fresh hue of green amidst the remaining patches of snow, and new buds were forming a haze of color in the mist-shrouded trees, looking as if they were impatient to bloom. The sight of such things naturally sets people's hearts at ease, and so how much more wonderful must the spring have looked at the jewel-like estate at Rokujō, with the many splendid delights offered up by its gardens and the dazzling polish of its residences all decked out for the season. No words could possibly do justice to the scene.

The garden in front of Murasaki's quarters, which had been designed with spring in mind, was especially beautiful. The scent of plum blossoms wafted over to her blinds where they mingled with the fragrance of the perfumes inside. It all put one in mind of Amida's Pure Land paradise, though of course it wasn't paradise but the place where Genji's beloved lived in peace and comfort. She selected the youngest and most accomplished of her attendants to serve the Akashi Princess and retained the slightly older ladies-in-waiting for herself. While they gathered in groups here and there around the residence—their refined manners and spectacularly fashionable outfits drew approving looks—they playfully celebrated *hagatame*¹ by praying for a long life, bringing in the mirror rice cakes that were traditional for the New Year, reciting the line "To live in your sheltering shade for a thousand years,"² and directly praying for all manner of blessings in love and fortune for the coming year.³ When Genji peeked in on them, he caught them in casual poses, their hands tucked inside the front fold of their robes. Embarrassed, they pulled their hands out, and some of the women grumbled, "How awkward ... he may have overheard our wishes for the year!"

"And how fervently you were praying for my good fortune!"⁴ Genji said. "Each of you has her own wishes, I imagine. Will you share them with me? Perhaps I shall find some way to make them come true." His smiling face was like a harbinger of good luck to the women.

Chūjō, who had intimately served Genji's late wife, and who had once proudly considered herself an object of Genji's affections, replied, "We were talking about the line 'We can see ahead of time,' and celebrating the thousand years of good fortune for you reflected in the mirror. As for me, I have no special wishes for the New Year."

Visitors crowded in all throughout the morning, and because the villa was bustling and noisy, Genji decided to put off his New Year's visits to each of his ladies until the evening. He paid extra attention to his wardrobe and appearance and was, by all accounts, splendid to behold.

"I looked on with envy at your attendants, who were amusing themselves this morning. I would like to have shown the celebratory mirror rice cakes to you as well so that you might conceive this year," he said to Murasaki. He recited the usual greetings and seasonal formulas, scattering in a few teasing remarks of his own, then offered her the following:

*Reflected on the mirrorlike surface
Of the pond where the thin ice melts away
Two faces unlike any in this world*

The two of them really did look magnificent together, just as he said.

Murasaki replied:

*In the mirror of that clear, spotless pond
I see pure reflections ... two who are meant
To be together a thousand ages*

Their exchange of vows, which promised eternal union, was perfect in every respect. This particular New Year's Day happened to fall on the Day of the Rat, when it was customary to pull up pine seedlings to ensure long life and felicity.⁵ On such a day, it was quite natural for them to expect that their prayers to live a thousand springs would indeed be answered.

When he went over to call on the Akashi Princess, the page girls and lower-ranking servants were playing, pulling up pine shoots on the hill in the garden. The younger ladies-in-waiting looked as though they wanted to join in. The Akashi lady had sent over fruit and flowers in untrimmed woven baskets as well

as boxes of various delicacies that she had gone to great trouble to assemble. Accompanying these gifts was a remarkably well-crafted mechanical warbler, cleverly moved from its normal perch on a branch of plum to a branch of five-needle pine in order to honor the Day of the Rat—and, perhaps, implying how much the lady pined for her daughter.

*Months and years I have spent waiting for her ...
Will I hear tidings of the young seedling
In the warbler's first song of spring today*

“In this village where no warbler sings ...” the Akashi lady added. Genji knew all too well how hard this arrangement had been for her. He found it difficult to hold back his tears—though he knew how inauspicious it was to weep on New Year’s Day.

“You must write the response yourself,” he told his daughter. “It would not do to begrudge her the first message of the New Year—your first song of spring, as it were.”

He ordered an inkstone brought out and had her write. She had such a darling air about her, and as he gazed on her features—which were so lovely that even those who were around her all the time never tired of gazing at her—Genji was troubled by the guilty realization that almost four years had passed now since the mother had last seen her child.

*Though many years have passed since they parted
How could the warbler, having left her nest
Forget her roots and her pining mother*

Reflecting a childish sensibility, the poem was straightforward and, with its trite plays on pines, pining, and roots, had a whiff of the poetic exercise about it.

When he looked in on Hanchirusato’s summer-inspired residence, the atmosphere was subdued—perhaps because the garden was out of season—and while the place was not especially showy, there were signs that his lady there was living in refined dignity. The passage of the years had not estranged them, and their relationship remained a deeply felt one. Genji no longer pressed her for physical intimacy. Instead, they remained very close and exchanged special vows to remain as husband and wife—at least in name. A curtain separated them, and when he drew aside one of the panels a little to look at her, she did not object and remained seated there. The light blue formal robe—the one he had given her—combined with the hues of her other robes to create a subtle, quiet

effect, just as he had imagined it would. Her hair, however, was now well past the peak of its glory.

Her looks are nothing to be ashamed of, he thought, but she ought to use extensions. Another man might be put off, but I am truly happy to be looking after her. What would have become of her had she been a flighty woman and turned away from me?

Whenever he met and talked with her, it made him feel good to think about his loyalty and her prudent discretion, and he was satisfied that their relationship was good enough as it was. They spoke in warm, nostalgic tones about all that had happened over the past year, and then he made his way to the west hall to see his lovely garland, Tamakazura.

Having just moved here in the tenth month, she had not yet had time to settle into her quarters. Still, the place was done up attractively, her pretty page girls exuded a fresh charm, and there was a large contingent of ladies-in-waiting. The furnishings were adequate for her basic needs, though not every little detail or accessory had been seen to completely. Despite the unsettled state of the residence, it possessed a spare elegance. The moment he caught a glimpse of Tamakazura, she took his breath away. She was gorgeous in the formal robe of yellow mountain rose that he had sent her, and her dazzling radiance seemed to illuminate every corner of the room, dispelling all dark shadows. Fascinated, he couldn't take his eyes off her. Her hair was thinning a little at its ends—was it due to the stress and depression she had suffered because of all she had been through?—and cascaded lightly over her robe in clean lines. Everything about her emanated a vivid beauty, and he was struck by how unfortunate he would have been had he never found her ... and with that thought came another: Would he now be able to let her go?

Tamakazura had grown accustomed to him looking directly at her with no curtain or blind to separate them, but there was still a distance between them—he was not, after all, her real father—and she remained wary about many things, doubting that all this could be reality and not a dream. For his part, Genji found her reticence and cautious demeanor extremely delightful.

“It seems like you’ve been here for years, though you’ve only just moved in. I feel now that things have transpired just as I had hoped they would, so please do not stand on ceremony ... and do visit with my Lady Murasaki. A young girl in her residence is just now learning to play the koto, and you might practice with her. The mistress of the southeast residence is not the type of woman who will make you feel awkward or look down on you.”

“I shall do as you say,” she replied. Her attitude was truly respectful.

When evening came, he went to visit the Akashi lady. As soon as he pushed

open the door of the passageway closest to her chambers, the vibrant scent of her perfume drifted toward him on the breeze blowing in from the blinds and created the impression that this was a place of special refinement. The lady was nowhere in sight. Looking around to see where she might be, he picked up some papers and bound notebooks left scattered around an inkstone and leafed through them. An evocatively pleasing seven-string Chinese-style koto had been placed on a cushion of elaborately embroidered Luoyang brocade imported from China, and *jījū* incense was smoldering in a fashionable round, lacquered brazier that apparently had been set out to suffuse the surroundings with an alluring scent, which in turn mingled with the fragrance of chinaberry perfume to create a sensuous atmosphere. The pieces of paper scattered about had been used casually for calligraphy practice, and the writings displayed various unusual styles that demonstrated a practiced hand. She had avoided any overly elaborate use of Chinese characters in cursive and instead employed a graceful, easy hand. The reply poem sent by the lady's "young seedling" must have touched her, for, as she read it over and over, she had jotted down a jumble of lines from old poems that were meaningful to her. Among her jottings was this poem:

*O rare happiness ... the warbler who flits
From branch to branch in her flowering home
Has called on her old nest in the valley*

"At last I hear the voice I have been waiting for ..." In addition, perhaps to change her mood and console herself, she had written down another line of verse: "Because she makes her home on a hillside where plum trees blossom ..." ⁶ Glancing through the papers, he smiled, and his graciousness was humbling.

He dipped a brush in ink and was about to write something when the Akashi lady slipped into the room. Her reserved bearing and the care she took in her appearance distinguished her from his other women and thus made her special to him. The white formal robe he had sent her, with its Chinese-style pattern of birds and butterflies in branches of plum, made for a stark contrast with the black of her cascading hair, which tapered a little at its ends and added a feeling of vivacious elegance. It was enough to make him decide to spend the night with her, even though he was fully aware of the furor he would cause by not spending the first night of the year with Murasaki. He was also anxious about the reaction of his other women, knowing that the status of the Akashi lady was different from those of higher birth. In Murasaki's quarters, there were women who would be even more outraged.

He left before dawn and returned to the southeast residence. The Akashi lady

did not think it necessary for him to leave while it was still dark, and her sorrow lingered on in the wake of his departure. Genji had already guessed how displeased Murasaki would be, since she had waited for him all night, and so he assumed an air of boyish innocence as he tried to placate her with his cajolery. “Strange, really, but I dozed off last night, and before I knew it, I was sound asleep ... just like I was a youth again. How come you didn’t send someone to wake me up?” She didn’t respond to his charming blandishments, and since it was clear she was going to be prickly to deal with, he pretended to take a nap, retreating to his sleeping quarters and only getting up when the sun was high.

Using the expected crush of seasonal visitors that day as his pretext, Genji was able for the most part to avoid Murasaki. A steady stream of guests—princes and high-ranking officials—flowed through the Rokujō estate. Genji had prepared musical diversions, and the wonderful keepsakes and rewards that he presented to those who performed were incomparable. All of the gentlemen who gathered there behaved as though they were inferior to no one, but of course not one of them could have been considered in any way Genji’s equal. Each of the gentlemen, taken by himself, exhibited many virtues, but—and I know it’s rude of me to say so—they were all simply overshadowed by Genji. Since even the most insignificant underling took special care of his appearance when he called at the Rokujō estate, it is hardly surprising that those young, amorous noblemen who were in hopes of winning Tamakazura were especially on edge, fussing over their appearance more than normal for this New Year in hopes of looking attractive to the young lady.

The buds on the plum trees were opening up, the evening breeze softly carried the scent of the blossoms, and the sound of various musical instruments and the beating of rhythm to the *saibara* “This Magnificent Estate”⁷ were thrilling in the twilight. When Genji added his own voice to the final words of the song, the performance became even more exhilarating. No matter what kind of music was being played, when he graciously added his talents to the performance, the coloration and tone clearly improved, as anyone could tell.

For the ladies in the other quadrants, the far-off bustle of horses and carriages coming and going made them unhappy and impatient. They felt like souls reborn into Amida’s Pure Land paradise inside a lotus flower that has not yet opened, so that the music surrounding Amida sounded distant and muffled. This feeling was even worse for the ladies who remained in the east annex at Nijō. The tedium of their idle lifestyles increased with the accumulating months and years, yet they thought of their residence as a mountain retreat where they would know nothing of the sorrows of the world.⁸ Resigned to their destinies in this way, how could they reproach Genji for being cold to them? They had nothing to worry about or

feel lonely over, apart from his neglect of them. His lady of the molted cicada shell pursued the religious life of a nun without distraction, while his Princess Safflower was absorbed in her study of all kinds of books in *kana* and living as she wished—even the management of her everyday household needs was taken care of in accord with her desires. After the busy days of New Year celebrations were over, Genji finally went to call on them.

Because the Hitachi Princess, his Safflower, occupied such a high social status, it pained him that she should seem so pathetic, and he treated her with special regard—at least he made an outward show of his regard. The thick hair of her youth, which had been her one glory, had thinned over the years, and because he could not bring himself to look at her profile, which seemed to him to resemble the white foam in the pool beneath a waterfall, he did not sit down straight across from her. Just as he had imagined, the willow-style formal robe he had sent her was a frightful mismatch with her looks—no doubt the fault lay in the wearer, not the clothes. Rather than wear multiple layers underneath, as any normal lady might, she had on only a black, lusterless singlet of silk that had been stiffly starched. As a result, she seemed uncomfortable, looking quite chilled.

What has become of the matching garments I sent with the formal robe? He couldn't help but sigh for, unlike the colors of the buds on the tree, the only thing that stood out brightly in the early spring mist was the red bud of that nose of hers. He had the standing curtain in her chambers repositioned so that it was squarely between them. Though she did not understand the true reason for his moving the curtain, assuming instead that he was merely showing respect, it was touching to see her looking so relaxed and trusting, calmly assured by his show of kindness and loyalty. Even in day-to-day matters, she did not act like a normal woman, and because he found her circumstances pitiful and sad, he was deeply moved. *Well, at least I'll always be here for her.* The attention that he showed her and the concern he felt in his heart were rare and made him feel self-satisfied. Her voice quavered, and she was shivering from the cold while they talked. He could barely stand to watch her.

"Isn't there anyone who looks after your wardrobe? In a comfortable residence like this, you should feel relaxed and dress in soft, warm clothing. It does you no good to pay attention only to the outer robe."

Unpolished as she was, she smiled sheepishly when he said this and replied, "I have been assisting my brother, the priest who lives as a hermit at Daigoji Temple, and was unable to see to my own robes. Ever since I gave my sable jacket to him, I've been cold."

The man must be as cold-blooded as his sister if he needed to take her fur,

Genji thought. *No wonder the two of them have such red noses. Docile obedience to a brother is all fine and well, but she is taking it much too far.*

In a rather strict and overly proper manner he proceeded to lecture her: “Never mind about the sable jacket. It’s fine that you gave it up so that a mountain ascetic can use it in place of a straw raincoat. The main thing is that those white under robes, which you evidently don’t deem very important, well ... why not wear seven layers of them? If there is anything you need that I’ve forgotten to provide you, whatever the occasion, you must alert me. I am by nature a little slow and absentminded, and so I sometimes neglect to take care of things ... but perhaps that’s natural, given that I have so many competing responsibilities that keep me busy.”

Genji had the storehouses of the main Nijō villa opened and robes of silk and patterned weaves brought to her. Although the residence was not overgrown or dilapidated, the atmosphere was quiet, since Genji did not live there, and the only thing that struck him as particularly charming was the grove of trees in the garden. He looked around and could see that there was no one to appreciate the scent of the red plum in bloom.

*Having come to view the blossoms of spring
At the abode I lived in long ago
What strange, mysterious flowers I see*

He whispered the poem to himself, though she would not have guessed in any case that his mention of flowers, *hana*, was also a reference to her nose.

He next peeked in on the nun, his lady of the molted cicada shell. She was living in a quiet, completely unadorned room, and he was touched to see that most of the space was reserved for the Buddha and that she apparently performed both rigorous and less stringent devotions there. Sutra scrolls, decorations for the statue, and the plain implements and vessels used for holy water created a delightful impression, unsullied and elegant; it was evident to him that, though she was now a nun, she still had a penchant for doing things properly and thoroughly. She was seated behind attractive standing curtains of bluish-gray material, completely hidden from view except for the cuffs of her sleeves, which were just slightly exposed. The difference between the color of the outer robe he had sent her and the accompanying under robes caught his attention, and he felt tears well up.

“I should have been content to merely yearn from a distance for the isle of Matsu no Urashima.⁹ How sadly vexed our relationship has been from the very beginning. And yet, though something has always come between us, our bond

has certainly never been broken.” The nun seemed to be deeply moved by his words.

“By putting my trust in you as I have, I know in my heart that our bond is not shallow,” she replied.

“How hard it must be, praying to the Buddha constantly for forgiveness ... retribution in this world, perhaps, for all those times you made me suffer. Do you have any idea how much you hurt me? Some men, I might add, aren’t as mild-mannered as I ... though I’m sure you’re quite aware of that by now.”

She was embarrassed that he had evidently heard gossip about the unwelcome advances of her stepson, the Governor of Kawachi. “What greater retribution could there be than for you to see me here like this?” Her tears bespoke genuine sorrow and imparted an air of even deeper reserve that made her more alluring than in the old days. The hesitation he himself felt—she was now a nun, after all—actually heightened her attractiveness for him, and he knew that it would be impossible to let her go. Of course he couldn’t very well say anything suggestive to her, and so they merely chatted about events past and present. All the while, he cast glances back toward the quarters of the Hitachi Princess, wistfully thinking, *If only she could at least manage this sort of pleasant conversation.*

Many women were sheltered beneath his shade. He looked in on all of them, warmly reassuring them, “Though there may be times when day after day passes without any word from me, you may be certain that I never let myself forget you in my heart. The only thing I worry about is the final parting we face on the road to death. We know not how long we may live.”¹⁰ He loved all of his women, treating each one appropriately as her station in life demanded; while his own status was so high that he might well have been self-centered, he never behaved in a high-handed manner toward them, but was kind and gentle to all so that they were able to get through the years by relying on his gracious generosity.

This year an *otokotōka* was scheduled for the fourteenth day of the first month.¹¹ A troupe of male courtiers made the rounds from the imperial palace to the Suzaku Palace and then on to the estate at Rokujō, performing various *saibara* and dances. Because it was a fair distance between the Suzaku Palace and Genji’s estate, the troupe arrived at dawn. By then, the moon was shining all the brighter in a cloudless sky, and the garden, covered with a light dusting of snow, looked mysteriously beautiful. There were many skilled musicians among the noblemen gathered there, and the sound of the flutes they played was enchanting. Knowing that they were in Genji’s presence, they seemed to play with special brio.

All of the women in residence at the Rokujō estate had been notified beforehand that they should come to view the performance of the *otokotōka*, and

spaces had been curtained off for them in the west and east halls and along the passageways of the southeast residence. Tamakazura came over to join Murasaki in the main hall, where she met the Akashi Princess. Because Murasaki was with them as well, they conversed with just a curtain between them.

The night sky was already growing light when the troupe was at the residence of the mother of Retired Emperor Suzaku, and so Rokujō had been intended originally to serve as a way station for the performers, a place where they could receive some light drinks and refreshments. Instead, they were welcomed lavishly, and the provisions were unprecedented, far exceeding expectations. The snow slowly piled up under the chill, eerie light of the moon, and the wind rustled through the upper branches of the pine trees—a bleak, desolate setting. Against this colorless backdrop, the outfits of the singers and dancers, light bud green outer robes over white under layers, did not stand out and provided no adornment to the scene, while the cotton flowers that decorated the headdresses added no glow. Yet the overall effect of the performance in that setting was so coolly sublime and cheerful that those who watched it thought it added years to their lives.

Genji's son and the sons of the Palace Minister, Tō no Chūjō, stood out from the crowd and were pleasingly handsome. In the faint light of early morning and in the biting cold air, with snowflakes drifting gently down, the figures of the dancing courtiers grouped together and the sound of their wonderful voices singing the *saibara* “Bamboo River” were so magnificent, it was a shame that the moment could not be captured in a painting. The sleeves of the women, with their fabulous mix of colors, spilled out beyond the edges of the curtains and made it seem as if one were looking at a brocade of early spring blossoms through a mist at dawn. It was a strangely uplifting scene, though it must be said that the bizarre sight of the tall hats worn by the dancers and the raucous vulgarity of their wishes for good fortune and fertility did not sound all that felicitous. As the troupe was leaving, Genji matched the imperial palace by presenting all with traditional gifts of cotton.

When dawn broke, the women returned to their quarters. Genji retired to his own sleeping chambers and rested until the sun was high.

My son sang every bit as skillfully as Tō no Chūjō’s second son. How amazing that this age should produce so many gentlemen of talent and learning, he mused. Of course, there were many people of extraordinary gifts and wisdom in the old days, but when it comes to expressions of the heart, they are in no way superior to people of the present age. I sent my son to the academy with the hope that he would become a serious official capable of serving the palace ... and I definitely wanted him to avoid my own frivolous, amorous inclinations. Still, I

must say, it would be best for him to develop a more playful side to his character. He's always so serious and proper—his behavior can be annoying. Such thoughts arose out of love for his son.

Humming “Ten Thousand Springs,” which had been performed that morning, Genji said, “I really want to put on a concert that will provide an opportunity to have all my women gather here. I must sponsor a banquet next month to thank the performers, so perhaps then ...” He took out all of the stringed instruments that had been stored in their splendid covers, wiped them clean, and retuned the strings that had gone slack. The women, out of consideration for his plans, did everything they could to help him get ready.

¹ *Hagatame* literally means “tooth hardening” and was used as a general reference for New Year’s feasts at the court, which always included *mochi* (highly glutinous cakes of pounded rice) as a key celebratory food. Because of its chewy consistency, eating *mochi* was thought to strengthen teeth. The wordplay, however, is more complex, because the word for one’s years (i.e., a lifespan), *yowai*, could be written with the character for tooth. *Kagami mochi* (mirror rice cake) was also served as a New Year’s decoration; its name likely derives from its round, flat shape.

² *Kokinshū* 356 (Sosei): “Because I wish to live in your sheltering shade for a thousand years, I pray that you, like an eternal pine, will live forever.”

³ Many of the New Year’s celebrations at court originated in rituals conducted to guarantee good harvests and fertility, and so there is a mild sexual undertone to some of the bantering that follows.

⁴ Genji is referring to a line of a poem that Chūjō cites immediately below. *Kokinshū* 1086 (Ōtomo Kuronushi): “Because they have erected a mountain of mirrors in Ōmi, we can see ahead of time that you, our gracious lord, will live a thousand years.” Genji deliberately misinterprets the poem, taking the word *kimi* (“you, our gracious lord”) to refer to himself.

⁵ This custom arose in part because the word for “rat” (*ne*) is a homophone for the word “root.”

⁶ *Kokin rokujō* 4385 (Anonymous): “Because she makes her home on a hillside where plum trees blossom, it is not so rare to hear the warbler’s song there.”

⁷ “Our great lord is truly blessed, truly blessed, for he has built his estate amidst the *sakigusa*, built it amidst the three-leaf, the four-leaf *sakigusa*.” It is not clear what plant this is.

⁸ *Kokinshū* 955 (Mononobe Yoshina): “I should like to follow the mountain path to a retreat where I would know nothing of sorrow ... but the one I love is a fetter that binds me to this world.”

⁹ *Gosenshū* 1093 (Sosei): “Today I see the famed pines on the isle of Matsu no Urashima ... doubtless they too have tender feelings, these fisher folk who live here.” This poem is alluded to in the *Sakaki* chapter as well.

¹⁰ *Saneakira shū* 50 (Daughter of Prince Atsuyoshi): “We know not how long we may live ... not wanting to forget you, the feelings in my heart grow ever stronger.”

¹¹ This celebration is depicted at the palace in the *Suetsumuhana* chapter.

XXIV

Kochō

Butterflies

IT WAS now past the twentieth day of the third month, and the atmosphere of the spring garden in front of Murasaki's residence—the colors of the flowers and blossoms, the songs of the birds—was astonishing, surpassing all expectations. The ladies in the other residences at Rokujō observed this and asked in wonder how that could be, given that it was so late in the season. Apparently, the younger women were dissatisfied that they were always inside and could catch only glimpses of the garden's glories: the stand of trees on the landscaped hill, the area around the island in the pond, and the views of the moss, which had grown a dark green.

Now, Genji had had a pair of Chinese-style pleasure boats constructed, one with a prow carved in the shape of a dragon's head, the other with a prow shaped like the head of a blue heron, and he hurried to have them outfitted. On the day they were to be launched, he summoned musicians from the Bureau of Music at the palace and had them perform on the boats. Many princes of the blood and high-ranking officials were in attendance.

At around this time, the Umetsubo Empress happened to be in residence in the southwest quadrant. She expected that she might soon receive a reply to the challenge she had sent in her poem to Murasaki the previous autumn—the one in which she mentioned the garden that “waits for the spring.”¹ Genji very much wanted her to view Murasaki's garden during the season of its flowering, but an Empress could not go on a frivolous outing, and the pleasure of viewing the flowers was not a sufficient reason to justify her visit. So instead, he invited some of her younger ladies-in-waiting, who would likely have a deep appreciation of such an excursion, to board his new boats and row around the southeast pond to view Murasaki's garden. Genji had designed his estate so that

the ponds of the southwest and southeast quadrants were connected by a channel that flowed around a small man-made hill, a promontory that served to separate the ponds and block each of them from the other's view.

On the day of the outing, the boats were rowed from the southwest pond around the promontory and up to the east fishing pavilion in the southeast pond, where a party of young ladies-in-waiting who served Murasaki had assembled. The two pleasure boats had been gaily decorated after the Chinese fashion—even the page boys who were holding the oars at the stern had their hair done up in loops at the side of their heads. When they rowed out into the middle of the large pond, the young women felt as if they had truly arrived in an unknown, foreign land, and since they were not accustomed to such sights, it was a thrilling and fascinating experience. The boats pulled up close to the craggy shade of the inlet on the island for the party to survey the scene; even the most insignificant of the rocks placed there looked like something out of a painting. Here and there, the top branches of the trees, enfolded in spring mist, overspread the landscape like a brocade cloth, and the onlookers could faintly make out the garden of Murasaki's residence in the distance, the drooping branches of its willows now deepening in color and an indescribable, almost radiant fragrance wafting toward them. Cherry blossoms had passed their peak elsewhere, but here they seemed to be smiling, reveling in their full glory, and the light purple buds of wisteria twining about the passageways were beginning to open up in clusters one after another. Even more spectacular were the yellow mountain roses. Mirrored in the surface, they seemed to be overflowing the banks and spilling into the water itself, doubling their beauty, which was already at its height. Pairs of waterfowl, having mated for life, sported on the ponds or flew about with narrow twigs in their beaks. Mandarin ducks paddled about, making small ripples in their wake that seemed to weave patterns in the water. The women wanted to capture the scene as a motif in woven cloth.

And so they passed the day, having lost track of time like that woodcutter in China who watched, entranced, while immortals played Go until the handle of his ax rotted away.

*When the breeze rustles the mountain roses
They give their yellow to the rippling pond ...
Is this the famed Cape of Yamabuki²*

*This blossoming pond of a garden in spring
Is so like the rapids at Ide River³
Where mountain roses bloom in watery depths*

*What need have we to visit Mount Hōrai
Isle of immortals on the Great Tortoise's back
For we leave behind undying fame on these boats*

*On our boat, bathed in radiant sunshine
Water droplets fall from the steering oar
Like petals scattering from tree branches*

The young women exchanged trivial poems like these one after another, each according to her own sentiments, and they lost track of where they were going and where they would return. It was perfectly natural that the hearts of these ladies-in-waiting should be so moved by the reflections on the surface of the water.

As evening approached, they rowed back up to the east fishing pavilion and, though reluctant to leave the boats, they disembarked to the captivating strains of Chinese court music, with musicians and dancers performing “The Emperor’s Deer.” The furnishings at the pavilion were simple but elegant. Conscious of not wanting to look inferior to the others, all of the young women had gone to great trouble with their makeup and choice of clothing, and they presented a scene every bit equal to the springtime brocade of mingling blossoms and flowers.⁴ The musicians performed various lovely and unusual songs not normally heard at court. Genji had taken special care to select the finest dancers, and he urged them to do their best in order to enthrall the young women.

Night fell, and Genji, who felt that he had not yet done enough, ordered fires to be lit in cressets in the garden right in front of Murasaki’s residence. Ordering the musicians and dancers to occupy the moss-covered space below the south steps leading up to the main hall, he gave wind and string instruments to each of the princes and officials, depending on their individual musical talents. The most gifted of the master musicians took up their wind instruments—reeds, pipes, and flutes—and began to play a tuning song in the bright *sō* mode,⁵ which was appropriate for the spring season. After this, the noblemen seated above them on the veranda, where various *koto* had been set out and tuned ahead of time, joined in, plucking the strings in an energetic, cheerful style. When they played the *saibara* “Glorious Day,” even the lowest of the manservants, who knew nothing at all about matters of taste and beauty, stood jostling together in the spaces among the horses and carriages near the main gate, smiling in appreciation as they listened, and thinking how good it was to be alive to hear this.

The colors of the sky at that time of year, the tonal quality of the instruments, and the echoing music played in the spring mode worked to convince everyone

that there was indeed a distinction between the seasons, and that spring was superior. The concert continued on through the night. After the singers shifted from major to minor key to join in singing “Joyful Spring,”⁶ Prince Sochinomiya sang the *saibara* “Green Willow”⁷ twice in a pleasing voice. Genji, as the master of the celebration, added his voice to harmonize with his brother’s.

Dawn broke. In her quarters, Umetsubo could hear the music, which sounded like the singing of birds in the early morning. She felt a grudging admiration, conceding that she had lost the contest between spring and autumn. The Rokujō estate as a whole was always filled with the radiance of spring, but there were some who felt disappointed that Murasaki did not have a child of her own, a deep relationship to which she could devote herself with all her heart.

Meanwhile, gossip had spread about Tamakazura, the young lady living in the west hall of the northeast residence—about how beautiful she was and how the Chancellor himself appeared to be lavishing his attentions on her. The spread of such rumors was just what Genji had hoped for, and it seemed that many men had their hearts ravished by reports of her. Those whose status gave them the confidence to consider themselves worthy would send written messages by way of her attendants that subtly hinted at their true feelings, or they would resort to intermediaries to convey their expressions of love by the spoken word. There were almost certainly many other young men who burned with a passion for her that they dare not mention. Apparently the oldest son of Tō no Chūjō, a young Captain named Kashiwagi, was smitten, obviously unaware of Tamakazura’s background.

The principal wife of Prince Sochinomiya, a woman he had been with for a long time, had passed away three years earlier, and he had been living on his own ever since. As a result, he showed no hesitation in expressing his interest in Tamakazura. On the morning of Genji’s celebration of spring, he pretended to be quite inebriated and, adorning his hair with blooms of wisteria, performed a supple, seductive dance extravagantly praising Tamakazura’s beauty—it was outrageously amusing. Observing this performance, Genji was delighted that Sochinomiya was interested in the young woman, even though he pretended to pay no attention to the Prince’s antics. When winecups were offered, Sochinomiya’s expression suggested he was in extreme distress, and he declined. “If there is no possibility of fulfilling my hopes, then I have no choice but to make my getaway. It is all too much to endure!”

*Because my heart is taken with this purple hue
Who cares if gossips say I’m at the precipice ...
That I’ve thrown myself away for wisteria⁸*

He offered a spray of wisteria for Genji's headdress.
Genji couldn't help but smile.

*Come now, do not leave, but look at these spring flowers
And tell me ... are you really at the precipice
Would you cast your life away for wisteria*

Because Genji pressured him like this, Sochinomiya had no choice but to stay, which made the diversions that morning all the more amusing.

Today was to be the first of four days of reading the *Sutra of the Perfection of Wisdom*—a service commissioned by Umetsubo.⁹ Many of the nobles who attended the celebration of spring did not leave, but withdrew to private chambers to change into the formal court dress required to attend the readings. Others who had previous engagements that prevented them from attending simply withdrew. At noon, during the Hour of the Horse, everyone gathered at the southwest residence. Genji led the party, and they all followed him through the passageway. Every single courtier who served at the palace was present. Since most of the participants had enjoyed the benefits of Genji's gracious patronage, the assembly was grand and solemn.

Murasaki arranged an offering of flowers to the Buddha. She selected eight of her loveliest page girls to carry the flowers, four of them dressed as birds and the other four dressed as butterflies. The girls dressed as birds carried silver vases filled with stems of cherry blossoms; the girls dressed as butterflies brought gold vases containing mountain roses. Such flowers are commonly found elsewhere in the world, but these particular bunches, with their incomparable sheen, were perfection itself. As the party rowed around the little hill separating the ponds and proceeded toward the garden in Umetsubo's residence, some of the cherry blossoms in the vases scattered in the breeze. The sky was balmy and clear, and the pages on their boats coming through the spring haze made for a magnificent tableau. Genji did not bother having the tent that the dancers used the day before moved to Umetsubo's garden. Instead, he had his servants prepare the covered walkway connecting the residences as a performance space for the musicians and dancers. He had temporary seating set up there as well.

The page girls approached the south steps leading into the main hall and presented the flowers. The courtiers who were assisting the priests as incense bearers took the flowers and placed them on a shelf beside the vessels containing holy water. Genji's son read aloud the letter that had come with the flowers. It included this poem:

*O pine cricket, who waits musing beneath the grass
Longing for the autumn, are you indifferent
To these butterflies who have come from my garden*

Realizing that this was the reply to her poem praising autumn foliage, Umetsubo looked out on the party and smiled. Her ladies-in-waiting who had gone on the excursion the day before spoke up, still intoxicated by the flowers they had seen. “It truly is as the poem says ... Your Majesty cannot gainsay the beautiful colors of spring.”

The brilliant court music of “The Bird,” which tells of the Kalavinka singing in Buddha’s paradise, resounded in gorgeous tones across the space and mingled with the bright, serene song of a warbler; as waterfowl called out constantly across the pond in accompaniment to the fast finale of the music, the effect was utterly captivating. Even more wonderful was the sight of butterflies delicately fluttering about, dancing in the shade of a hedge spilling over with mountain rose in bloom.

Beginning with Umetsubo’s staff, those courtiers who merited reward for their services this day were presented with gifts of robes, which they passed along, one after another. They also presented long robes to the page girls—white lined with red for the girls dressed as birds, pale dried-leaf tan lined with yellow for those dressed as butterflies. The colors matched each group of pages so perfectly that the choice must have been made ahead of time. The higher-ranking musicians received white singlets, while those of lower rank received a bolt of silk cloth. Genji’s son was awarded a long robe of light purple lined with blue, to which was added a set of women’s robes. Umetsubo composed her reply:

“Yesterday I truly felt I must weep at the song of spring.”¹⁰

*Kochō ... the word butterfly says “come” ...
And I might have, had there been no mountain
Of mountain roses blocking my way there*¹¹

Although both Umetsubo and Murasaki were women of remarkable breeding and talent, apparently neither of them was up to the task of composing for an occasion such as this, since their poems were not at all what was expected of them.

By the way, the ladies-in-waiting who had gone sightseeing in the boats, as well as Umetsubo’s attendants, received lavish gifts from Murasaki. It would be difficult to describe all of those presents in detail, and so I will refrain from doing so here. The women at Rokujō put on numerous trivial amusements to

divert themselves all the time, mornings and evenings; because they passed their days pleasantly, even those who were in service to them naturally felt that they themselves had no cares. In that harmonious state, the women in both residences exchanged poems and letters.

After Tamakazura met Murasaki on the day of the *otokotōka*, the two continued to exchange letters. It wasn't clear whether she was a young lady of deep or shallow sensibility, but she had an attractive personality and proper judgment, perhaps because she had experienced so much hardship. Because her behavior didn't put people off, she was on good terms with all of the women at the Rokujō estate. A large number of suitors pursued her, but Genji was not in a hurry to make a decision ... indeed, he himself had feelings for her that were definitely not those of a sober patriarch. At times, he even considered informing Tō no Chūjō about his daughter just so that he could be free to pursue her for himself.

In addition to all the other pressures on her, Tamakazura felt uncomfortable that Genji's son would come up close, just outside her blinds, and speak directly to her. Her attendants merely assumed that this was perfectly natural behavior for a sibling, and, in any case, the young gentleman, who was prim and serious by nature, was not at an age when he would be attracted to her.

Tō no Chūjō's sons were encouraged by Genji's son, who was unaware of their relationship to Tamakazura, and went about striking lovelorn poses and sighing about how they were unable to express to her all that was in their hearts. She was not at all moved by these lovers' complaints but was troubled privately, constantly wishing that her real father might be informed of her identity. She never confided her true emotions to Genji, and her attitude of earnest familiarity and trust toward him, which he took as a mark of her innocence, endeared her to him. She did not look all that much like her mother, but there were certain things about her personality and mannerisms that reminded him of his lost love—though he felt that Tamakazura was the more gifted woman.

The seasonal change of wardrobes came on the first day of the fourth month, and out came stylishly modern summer robes. Even the skies took on a mysteriously charming appeal. Genji now had more leisure time, since he had ceded responsibilities at the palace, and he passed the time enjoying all sorts of musical diversions. Numerous letters inquiring about Tamakazura arrived during this period, and he was pleased that things were going as planned. She, on the other hand, was unsettled by his frequent visits to her chambers in the west hall, where he would look over the letters and urge her to reply to those men who merited a response.

Genji smiled wryly when he saw a bundle of papers that Sochinomiya had

written in quick succession to vent his frustration over the lack of a response.

“The two of us have been inseparable since childhood,” he told Tamakazura, “and, out of all of my father’s sons, he is the only one I have felt especially close to. That said, he has always been extremely reserved with me when it comes to matters of love and has tended to keep his affairs to himself. Thus I find it both touching and amusing to see him now, at his age, expressing these amorous feelings for you. You must send him a reply. I can’t think of anyone better, even for a woman with a modicum of breeding, to exchange poems with, since he is a man of considerable talent and refinement.” Normally a young lady would have been thrilled to hear this, but his comments only made Tamakazura feel awkward.

Now the Major Captain of the Right, who was brother to the Shōkyōden Consort and thus uncle to the current Crown Prince, was an earnest and solemn individual. Yet even Confucius stumbled on the Mountain of Love, and so it was that this Major Captain, in imitation of the sage, had fallen hard for Tamakazura —a situation Genji found quite amusing. As he continued looking over and comparing all of the letters, his eye fell on one composed on light blue Chinese paper that was pleasantly scented with rich perfume and folded into a small, narrow knot. “Why is it folded like this? Has your suitor’s longing got him all tied up in knots?” He unfolded the paper and opened the letter. The calligraphy was astounding.

*You seem unaware of my feelings for you
Perhaps because my love wells up like a spring
Whose waters seep clear and unseen from the rocks*

The style of the hand was modern and playful. “Who’s this from?” Genji asked. Tamakazura gave him an evasive answer.

Genji summoned Ukon.

“Go through all the letters,” he ordered. “Select those from men who are the most worthy and have her send replies. But take care. If a woman who is flirtatious and flighty and fond of faddish things gets involved in some untoward affair ... well, the man is not entirely to blame now, is he? Speaking from experience, whenever a woman failed to send me a reply, I was apt to resent her, to think her cold and cruel, to wonder if perhaps she lacked judgment or training, or, if the woman was of lower status, to dismiss her as impudent and above herself. Even when a letter isn’t all that serious—a few lines about flowers and butterflies—if the woman doesn’t reply, she comes across as a tease and is likely to rouse a man’s passion. Then again, sometimes when a woman fails to

respond, the man may well forget her ... and how could he be censured if he does?

“Of course, a woman who responds too eagerly to some trivial letter sent out of casual interest or less than pure motives will certainly bring trouble on herself later on. Generally speaking, a woman who is not demure but does as she pleases, constantly making a show of her sensitivity to beauty and sadness and displaying her elegant wit, will eventually come to seem tiresome. Neither Prince Sochinomiya nor the Major Captain are the kind of men who just go about rashly expressing themselves in a letter, and so it would be unbecoming of your mistress were she to fail to acknowledge their letters in a way that their station in life demands. As for the letters from men of lower rank, judge them with an understanding heart, of course, according to the sincerity of their feelings. Also, take into account their merits and reply appropriately.”

Tamakazura was sitting with her back turned to them, and her profile was distinctly alluring. She was dressed in stylishly up-to-date fashion, wearing a singlet in the pinks style—red plum lined with a greenish blue—under a robe in the hareflower style—white over a lining of pale bud green—a color very much in tune with the season. Her bearing still had a whiff of the provinces about it, a quality apparent in her rather common tendency toward languidness. Still, she was quick to pick up on things by observing the other women, and as she learned how to conduct herself, her bearing grew more graceful, and her languidness took on a supple refinement. She was careful in her use of makeup, and so she looked more attractive than ever, exuding an air of flowering beauty that was now making Genji seriously regret his plans to arrange a marriage for her. Ukon smiled as she gazed at the two of them. *He's really too young to be called her father¹² ... the title doesn't suit him at all. How splendid the two of them look sitting side by side like some married couple.*

“Rest assured, my lord,” Ukon replied, “that I have not passed along any letters to my mistress. It seems that some of the women thought it might be awkward to send back the three or four letters you were looking at just now ... but we accepted just the letters and allowed no one to visit her. And my mistress has not replied to any of them. She will do so only when my lord instructs her to ... and, even then, only reluctantly.”

“Very well, then—but who sent the one folded in that youthful knot? The calligraphy is really skillful.” Genji smiled as he looked at it again.

“The messenger insisted that this one had to be delivered directly to her. It's from the Palace Minister's oldest son, Kashiwagi. It turns out that he knows Miruko, one of the attendants here, and she gave it to my mistress before anyone else knew what was happening. Absolutely no one else has seen it.”

"It's quite endearing. He may still be at a lower rank at court, but given his father's status, we can hardly dismiss his suit out of hand. There are few men among all the noble houses who have a reputation equal to Kashiwagi's. And he is certainly the most mature and thoughtful of the young men of his cohort. He will in due course learn the truth about his relationship to Tamakazura; but in the meantime, I'd like you to have her answer politely in a way that gives some excuse for her refusal without being explicit about the real reason. Still, such a spectacular letter!" He found it hard to put down.

"It may make you uncomfortable," Genji continued, "the way I am going on about all these things, even though I'm not your real father. But when the time comes to inform the Palace Minister about you, there are several things to consider ... after all, you are still young, and if you were to thrust yourself on someone you've had no contact with for close to twenty years while your situation remains unsettled, who knows how might things turn out. Not well, I fear. I believe the appropriate opportunity to tell him will arise once you are settled and established in society.

"As for your suitors, Prince Sochinomiya may be living by himself, but he is a playboy by nature, and there are rumors that he sees lots of women. I've also heard that he has a number of 'mistresses' at his call ... women who go by the disreputable term 'kept woman.' A wife who could mend his ways, who could get him to pay attention to her alone without resorting to displays of jealousy, would surely have a harmonious marriage. When a woman has a tendency to be jealous, her husband will naturally tire of her. You must take care to never let that happen.

"The Major Captain of the Right is reportedly disgruntled that his wife of many years has grown old, and he is seeking your hand even though her family is upset about the situation. That sort of thing is to be expected, but, after thinking the matter over privately I haven't been able to decide how to handle it. When a problem like this arises, it isn't easy for a young woman to readily speak her mind to her father, but you are no longer at an age when you can keep your thoughts to yourself, and so you should state your own preferences now. Consider me the same as the people you knew in the past, the same as your mother. I am worried that we will not make a choice that makes you happy."

He spoke so solemnly that she wasn't sure how to answer him off the top of her head. At the same time, she was aware that to say nothing would make her look all the more immature.

"For as long as I can remember, I had no parents, and so I do not know what to think about this." She was very gentle and easygoing; Genji thought her remarks had real merit.

"If that's the case, then remember the old saying that an adoptive parent is better than a birth parent. Think of me as your real father and recognize that my feelings for you are not common."

His actual feelings were blindingly shameful, and so he could hardly bring those up to her. From time to time he used phrases that hinted at his desire, but she took no notice of them; he sighed, for no apparent reason, and left her chambers. As he made his way out, however, he paused to appreciate the lush, verdant Chinese bamboo growing near her quarters, lured by the way it softly yielded to the breeze.

*The young bamboo whose roots I set so deep
At my villa ... must it grow joint by joint
For years till it sends out shoots on its own*

"I would regret your leaving," Genji added.

He lifted the blind on the veranda, and she came out of her room, sat down in the gallery, and replied:

*If not now after so many years
When if ever can the young bamboo
Go search for the roots from which it sprang*

"It appears the time has not yet come."

Genji felt sorry for her. She was in fact not as resigned to the situation as her words suggested, but remained sad and impatient, wondering when he would get around to informing her father. This is not to say that she wasn't grateful for his kindness; after all, she may have called the Palace Minister her father, but he had been practically a stranger to her since her childhood and would never give her the kind of attention she had received from Genji. Because she had taken to reading old romances, gradually gleaning from them lessons about human feelings and behavior as well as about the customs and manners of the world, she felt constrained by her obligation to Genji and came to believe it would be difficult to approach her real father.

Genji felt increasingly attracted to the young lady. He talked about her with Murasaki.

"She has a mysteriously alluring way about her. Her mother, the woman I knew long ago, wasn't all that cheerful, but her daughter has a lively sensibility that is quick to grasp things and an open, friendly personality. Perhaps we will not have to worry about her after all."

Because it was obvious that his feelings were not simply those of a father, Murasaki guessed what was going on.

“She may be ‘quick to grasp things,’ as you put it, but if she lets her guard down and innocently puts her trust in you, she’ll regret it for sure.”

“And why wouldn’t she put her trust in me?”

“You ask why? Your amorous proclivities, which have so often brought me unbearable heartache, remind me why time and time again.” She smiled.

Nothing ever escapes her jealous heart, he thought.

“There you go with your unpleasant suspicions again. If I truly felt that way about her, as you imply, she could hardly not have noticed ... and yet she trusts me.”

He would bring more trouble on himself if he exposed his true feelings, so he changed the subject. But now that Murasaki had seen through him, his heart was in turmoil as he tried to figure out how to deal with Tamakazura. He realized just how perverse and outrageous his desire for the young lady was.

With Tamakazura so much on his mind, Genji frequently went over to her quarters to check on her. One quiet evening in the sultry atmosphere following a rain shower, Genji looked out at a pleasant view of young maples and oaks in the garden, their intertwining branches thick and verdant against the sky. He murmured a line from Bai Juyi: “The skies of the fourth month, so calm, so pure ...”¹³ The scene made him think of Tamakazura’s vivacious beauty, and, as always, he furtively slipped off to her chambers. She was relaxing, casually practicing her calligraphy, but when he arrived she stood up, and the blush of embarrassment on her face was utterly charming. Her gentle, soft movements suddenly put him in mind of her mother long ago, and his emotions were hard to control.

“When I first saw you I didn’t think you looked all that much like your mother, but since then there have been times when, mysteriously, I have mistaken you for her. Those moments have moved me deeply. Since my own son does not share the striking good looks of his mother, I came to believe that parents and children don’t really resemble one another all that much, but here you are, the very image of your mother.” He teared up. Playing with a mandarin orange that had been placed together with some other fruit in the lid of a box, he composed a verse:

*How redolent with the scent of orange
Are your sleeves and hers ... when I compare them
There seems no difference between you two*

“Because your mother has always been in my heart, I have spent all these years grieving inconsolably for her. That is why I wonder, now that I am looking after you like this, if this is not all a dream ... and that feeling is almost unbearable. Please do not think ill of me for saying this.”

He took her hand. Tamakazura had never experienced anything like this, but, though she found his behavior atrocious, she kept her composure.

*Comparing these sleeves scented with orange
You say we are the same ... but will the fruit
Be as frail and short-lived as the blossom*

Her head bowed, looking timid and scared, she was utterly captivating to him.

Gazing on the sweet beauty of her plump hands and arms, her smooth, unblemished skin visible through her sheer summer robe, his desire for her grew stronger, and finally, on this day, he told her a little of his feelings of love. She felt wretched, not knowing what to do, and he could sense that she was trembling.

“Why do you detest me so? I shall keep our relationship concealed, so that no one can censure us in any way. You will be able to keep it secret as well if you simply act as though nothing has happened. Because my feelings for you mingle with my paternal devotion, which cannot be considered shallow, my love is unlike anything the world has seen. Do you really think less of me than you do of those men who send you letters? It would be hard to find anyone who has such deep consideration for you as I ... and that’s why I worry so much about you.”

For someone with such paternal devotion, he was incredibly forward.

The rain had stopped. As the wind rustled the bamboo, the moonlight shone brightly, creating a quiet atmosphere on a delightful evening. Tamakazura’s ladies-in-waiting had withdrawn, conscious of the intimate conversation their mistress was engaged in, and were no longer serving close to her chambers. Genji’s relationship with the young lady had developed to the point that they were constantly meeting, but the absence of her attendants at this moment provided him a rare opportunity; and because his confession of love had roused his passions, he quietly slipped off his outer robe, skillfully muffling the rustle of his soft, unstarched summer clothing, and lay down beside her. She was in true misery, wondering in shock and confusion what people would think. If she were with her father, no matter how coldly he might treat her, she would never have experienced anything as unpleasant as this. Sad and depressed, she started to cry, though she did try to hold back her tears. She seemed so forlorn that he tried to

comfort her.

"It is painful to see how much you detest me. It is the way of the world that even a woman who is not all that close to a man should yield herself. So why is it, given how close we have been all this time, that you are disgusted by my show of intimacy? I shall never force my feelings on you again after this. Having endured these feelings to such an extraordinary degree, will I ever find respite from them?"

He said many other things to her, speaking intimately with an air of deep sensitivity and kindness. Her resemblance to her mother brought back emotions he had experienced long ago, making his yearning all the more intense. Still, he recognized that his passion was inappropriate and contemptible, and so he reconsidered and went no further. Concerned that her women might think it suspicious that he had stayed so long, he left before the night grew late.

"I would be most distressed were you to revile me from now on. Is there anyone else who would lose his heart over you the way I have? My devotion to you is boundless, and I will never do anything that might invite the censure of others. I just want to talk with you about trivial matters as a way to find some comfort for the love that I lost long ago. Please tell me you are of like mind." Despite his many pleas, she seemed further distracted and upset. Genji sighed. "I hadn't realized that your dislike of me was so great. How much more hateful will I be to you after this! Make sure that no one even dreams of what went on here tonight," he added as he left.

Though Tamakazura was an adult, she had no experience with sexual relationships and had led such a sheltered life that she didn't even know a woman who possessed a modicum of knowledge about such things. Thus, she had been unable to imagine what intimacy really meant beyond holding hands and lying together. She lamented that the world was indeed unjust and outrageous, and she looked so distressed that her women, who assumed she had fallen ill, were at a loss how to treat her. Hyōbu privately spoke to her. "His lordship's gracious attentions are humbling. It is hard to imagine that even your real father would look after you the way he does." Listening to her, Tamakazura grew increasingly disgusted at the thought of Genji's unimaginably deplorable desires, and she found her lot in life thoroughly disheartening.

His letter arrived early the next morning. She was lying down pretending to be ill, but her ladies-in-waiting brought in an inkstone and insisted that she reply at once. She reluctantly perused his letter, written on white paper that on the surface exuded a calm and sober feeling. The calligraphy was splendid. "I shall find it hard to forget the pain your extraordinarily cold attitude has caused me. I wonder what your women think about last night."

*We did not share intimate sleep nor did I glimpse
The roots of the young grass ... so why is she depressed
Acting as if something untoward has happened*

“How childish of you.” His paternal admonition was galling, given his behavior the previous night. But since it might arouse suspicions were she not to reply, she chose a piece of thick Michinokuni paper and curtly scribbled down, “I saw your note. I’m not feeling well and cannot reply.”

Genji smiled. *She may be a mature woman in years, but her attitude shows she’s still a girl, all prim and serious.* Genji’s deplorable sentiments and his tendency to be roused by rejection revealed a perverse temperament. After confessing his love, he showed no modesty or restraint—anything that might put one in mind of that lover who compared himself to the Pine of Ota¹⁴—but instead he plied her with a flood of troublesome letters, so many that she came to feel increasingly hounded. Anxious that she had no place of refuge, she really did fall ill.

Only a few people knew the truth about Genji’s feelings, and everyone, strangers and intimates alike, thought of him as the very image of a father. Consequently, her emotions were in turmoil as she fretted over everything.

If word about this gets out, I’ll be a laughingstock and the object of malicious gossip. Even if my real father finds out about me, he probably won’t take me seriously ... and, if he hears rumors about Genji and me, he more than anyone will surely despise me.

Each of her suitors—including Sochinomiya and the Major Captain—felt encouraged in his pursuit of Tamakazura once he learned that Genji was not unfavorably disposed toward him. Kashiwagi, who had compared himself to clear water seeping through rocks, had learned from Miruko that the Chancellor implicitly approved of him. This made him extremely happy, and, still ignorant of his relationship to Tamakazura, he apparently went about in a lovelorn daze, earnestly giving voice to love’s complaints.

¹ This poem appears near the end of the *Otome* chapter.

² The Japanese word for mountain rose is *yamabuki* (also called Japanese rose or kerria rose). *Yamabukinosaki* (Cape of Yamabuki) is located in Ōmi.

³ *Kokinshū* 125 (Anonymous): “The petals of the mountain roses at Ide, where frogs sing out, have scattered ... would that I had come to see them at their peak!”

⁴ *Kokinshū* 56 (Sosei): “Looking around in the distance at the mingling willows and cherry trees before my eyes ... a springtime brocade in the capital.”

⁵ As the term implies, a tuning song was a short piece used to get all the instruments in the same mode. The various modes usually had seasonal or poetic associations.

⁶ Neither the music nor the choreography for this song have survived.

⁷ This song tells of a warbler weaving a straw hat out of twigs of willow and plum.

⁸ Sochinomiya's poem involves a complex set of wordplays and associations. The word I have translated as "purple" is *murasaki* (the modern Japanese word for purple), but at this time the word refers to the gromwell (or purple gromwell) and alludes to *Kokinshū* 867 (Anonymous): "Because of this one purple gromwell, I look on all the grasses in Musashino with tender feelings" (see the *Wakamurasaki* chapter). Just as Genji associated *murasaki* with wisteria (*fubi*), Sochinomiya associates Tamakazura with the imperial color, attributing noble connections to her. *Fubi* provides additional wordplay, since it can mean in this context either "wisteria" or "precipice."

⁹ This type of ceremony could be held at the palace or at an aristocratic house. If at the palace, it was performed in the Shishinden by 100 priests. This sutra, known as the *Prajnaparamita*, is very long, and shorter versions of the text, which have come to be known as the *Heart Sutra* and the *Diamond Sutra*, came to be widely used.

¹⁰ *Kokinshū* 498 (Anonymous): "Is it for feelings of love that I must weep at the spring song of the warbler in the top of the plum tree in my garden."

¹¹ Umetsubo gives the meaning "come" to the *ko* of *kochō*. This kind of wordplay is possible because of the orthographic conventions that allowed the word to be written in the *kana* syllabary as こてふ (*ko-te-fu*). Without Chinese characters to fix the meaning, *ko* can be read as "come" while *te* can be read as a quotative particle and *fu* as the word for "to say."

¹² Genji was about eighteen when he had his affair with Tamakazura's mother, the lady of the evening faces. He is now about thirty-six, and Tamakazura is about twenty-two.

¹³ *Hakushi monjū* 1280.

¹⁴ This poem is cited in a later commentary, but it is not clear what Murasaki Shikibu's source was.

XXV

Hotaru

Fireflies

NOW THAT Genji had achieved such august status, he was able to live at ease, no longer burdened with the responsibilities of state. All those who relied on him for support also settled into ideal circumstances, living as they wished with no anxieties, pleasantly passing the time.

All, that is, except for Tamakazura, who sadly had a new, wholly unexpected worry added to a life already filled with misfortune. She felt tormented as she wracked her brain trying to figure out what to do. Genji's feelings for her were certainly nothing compared to the dire situation she had faced with Taifu no Gen. And yet because she found herself in circumstances that no one would have thought possible and that she had to keep to herself all the time, she came to view Genji as perverse and unpleasant. She was at an age when she was expected to have an understanding of the world, and she did consider various ways to deal with the matter—but it was at times like this that she bitterly lamented the absence of a mother. It filled her with sorrow and regret when she thought again of her loss and of all that had befallen her.

After he confessed his love, Genji too was assailed with painful emotions. Fully aware that people might be observing him, he couldn't send her even the most inconsequential message. Suffering as he was, he frequently went over to her quarters and intimated his extraordinary feelings whenever her attendants were not around. Each time he did so, she would feel her chest tightening, but because she couldn't say anything directly to him that might be insulting or cause him shame, she would just pretend that she did not catch his drift. She was by nature a smiling, openhearted young lady, and no matter how prim and proper she might act, her engaging charm always showed through.

Prince Sochinomiya, among others, was pursuing her seriously. Though he

had not been laboring at his love for all that long, he sent her a plea with the obligatory complaint about the tedium of the rainy season in the fifth month: “At least permit me to come near you. How it would disperse this cloudy mood of mine if I could express to you directly even a little of the longing I feel in my heart.”

Genji looked at the note. “I see no harm in this. If all these gentlemen are really in love with you, then you should meet them. You must not remain cold and aloof. Answer them from time to time.” He gave her instructions on how to respond, but she found the task so disagreeable that she told him that she didn’t feel well and wasn’t up to it. Few of her ladies-in-waiting were of distinguished breeding or came from families of impeccable reputation. There was one woman, however, whose training was not all that unacceptable. Her maternal great-uncle had been a Consultant in the Council of State, but her family had fallen on hard times. When Genji found her and placed her in Tamakazura’s service, she took the name Saishō to reflect her great-uncle’s position. Her calligraphy was good and she was a mature woman, so Genji assigned her the task of writing replies when the occasion demanded. He summoned her and dictated a response to Sochinomiya. Since the Prince would think this was a reply from Tamakazura, Genji was curious to see what he would write in return.

After Genji began behaving unpleasantly, Tamakazura would occasionally look over the letters of Sochinomiya and her other suitors whenever she received a message professing undying devotion. It wasn’t that she was all that attracted to him—rather, she felt that she wanted to find some way to avoid Genji’s detestable advances and calculated that she might be able to use the Prince for that end.

Sochinomiya was amazed to receive this rare reply—one that was better than he had hoped for, in fact—and so he very discreetly paid a visit to Tamakazura, unaware that Genji would be there as well, waiting for him and manipulating the situation despicably for his own amusement. Sochinomiya was seated on a cushion just inside the hinged double doors in the corner of the outer chamber off her main room. With only a standing curtain separating them, Tamakazura was quite close to him. An enticing fragrance wafted in—it wasn’t clear where it was coming from—and Genji had gone to great effort to create a seductive atmosphere. His attention to such detail was not exactly what one would call fatherly, but, despite his troubling perversity, he himself cut a magnificent figure. Saishō, who was acting as intermediary, was embarrassed at her inability to remember all that her mistress said in reply to the Prince; when Genji would tug on her sleeves or pinch her for hesitating, she grew flustered and was at a loss as to what she should do.

The dark evening of the new moon had just passed. In the faint, misty light of the overcast skies, the subtle grace of Sochinomiya's figure took on a fashionable sheen. The fragrance of incense carried by a light breeze wafted in from somewhere in the interior of the residence. It mingled with the rich perfume of Genji's robes to permeate the room with a heady aroma. Sochinomiya was captivated by the intimations he had of Tamakazura's elegance, which was more alluring than he had imagined earlier.

He spoke, calmly recounting in dignified terms how much his heart yearned for her and avoiding anything even vaguely suggestive. His behavior and appearance were marks of special refinement. Catching faint snatches of what he said, Genji found it most entertaining.

Tamakazura withdrew to the narrow room just inside the east veranda, and while she was resting there, Saishō entered on her knees, bringing a message from Sochinomiya. Genji scolded her.

"Your behavior is making the Prince uncomfortable. It's always best, in all cases, to adapt to the situation at hand. This is no time for you to be acting childishly. You simply cannot keep such a distance as this and have a messenger going back and forth—not with a man of his status. It's fine for you to want to keep him from hearing your voice, but you must move a little closer to him."

Upset and uncertain what to do—and also worried that Genji, given his inclinations, might use her hesitation as an excuse to barge into her chambers—she weighed her options and decided to slip back behind the standing curtain at the edge of the main room and lie down there. When she returned, the Prince made a long, rambling plea to her; as she wavered, trying to think of an appropriate reply, Genji moved over beside the curtain and lifted up one of the panels, draping it over the crossbeam at the top of the frame. At that very moment, there was a flash of light. Tamakazura was mortified, wondering if someone had lit a torch.

Earlier that evening, Genji had wrapped up a large number of fireflies in a piece of thin silk and then covered them up so that their light wouldn't be visible. Then, as he pretended in an offhand manner to be adjusting the furnishings around her, he released them.¹ The insects flashed so suddenly, illuminating everything around them, that Tamakazura was caught by surprise and in a panic hid her face behind a fan. Her profile was exquisite.

Genji had given considerable thought to how everything would look.

If there is a bright flash of light, the Prince will catch a glimpse of her. From what I can tell, he is pursuing her only because he thinks she is my daughter. He probably never guessed that her looks and personality would be this perfect. This should rouse that amorous heart of his and throw it into confusion!

He would never have considered stirring up the passions of other men in this way had she been his real daughter—truly he was capable of perverse, deplorable behavior. Once he set all of this in motion, he slipped out by another exit and made his way back to his quarters.

In the darkness, Socinomiya had been able to guess roughly where Tamakazura was seated, and when he realized that she was closer to him than he had imagined, his heart beat excitedly. As he was peeking through a gap in the indescribably delicate curtain panels, he could see that she was no more than nine or ten feet away, judging by the space between the pillars in the room. Then an unexpected flash of light gave him a brief glimpse of her, and he could see that she was perfection itself. Just as suddenly, she was covered in darkness again and hidden from sight. Yet the beauty he witnessed in that brief instant was just the sort of thing that inspires elegant romances. To be sure, it was just a glimpse, but he could tell from her reclining figure that she was tall and willowy, and he wanted to see more. Her image now truly clung to his heart.

*The light of fireflies voiceless and silent
And the flames of love burning quietly
Inside me ... can either be extinguished²*

“Do you understand?”

If she were to take too much time fussing over a reply at a moment like this, she might appear coquettish, and so she answered him right away:

*The silent firefly that burns inwardly
Seems to have a love that shines more brightly
Than the firefly who speaks of love’s complaints*

After giving this brief reply, which cleverly deflected the intent of his poem, she withdrew to an interior room, leaving the Prince to complain bitterly and at some length about the anguish she was causing him by acting so aloof. Despite his feelings, he was concerned that people might consider it indecent if he stayed there through the night, and so he left, going out into the damp darkness to the distressing accompaniment of rain dripping from the eaves.

A cuckoo must surely have called out at that moment,³ and perhaps Sochinomiya even composed a poem; but because it was too much trouble, I didn’t bother to note every little detail when I heard what happened. Her ladies-in-waiting thought his youthful, refined appearance was auspicious and that he very much resembled Genji. They also remarked on how solicitous their lord had

been in arranging all of the details of the meeting that evening, just like a mother helping her daughter. Of course, they knew nothing about his true motives.

All day and all night, Tamakazura was tormented by her thoughts of Genji, who outwardly acted like a father to her, but who inwardly harbored those lewd desires.

This is all due to my unfortunate destiny. If my father knew about me and my situation was normal, and if under those circumstances Genji still had feelings for me, then I see no reason why it would be inappropriate to be one of his wives; but this situation just isn't normal ... and I'll end up being the target of malicious gossip.

For his part, Genji had decided most sincerely that he could never let her become the subject of prurient rumors. Yet his own lascivious proclivities remained a problem for him. Had he ever actually gained control over his desire for the Umetsubo Empress? Sometimes he would banter seductively with her, but her elevated status posed a tremendous obstacle, putting her out of his reach and making it impossible for him to speak as openly with her as he wished. Tamakazura, on the other hand, had a warm and friendly personality and was a stylishly modern young lady. Thus, he naturally found it hard to suppress his feelings. From time to time, he would engage in behavior toward her that would have been considered troubling to anyone who might have witnessed it. Yet he always thought better of it and restrained himself from acting on his desires so that the two of them maintained their relationship as father and daughter.

It was the day of the Sweet Flag Festival, the fifth day of the fifth month, and riding competitions were held at both the palace and the Rokujō estate. On his way to the riding grounds in the northeast quadrant, Genji took advantage of the opportunity to call on Tamakazura.

“So how did things go? Did the Prince stay late into the night? Let’s make sure he doesn’t get too familiar with you. He has—how shall I put it?—some rather peculiar quirks. Then again, there are few people who haven’t hurt someone or made some sort of mistake.”

He looked thoroughly youthful and handsome as he alternately praised and condemned his half brother. He had casually pulled on a cloak over a singlet, and their luxurious hues seemed to flow out around him, creating a brilliant combination. Where and by what means had such splendid robes been created? They didn’t look like clothes dyed by human hands. Though the colors and designs were nothing out of the ordinary, they struck Tamakazura as remarkably fresh and original. She found the fragrance of his robes enticing and was conscious of just how wonderful he would have looked to her had it not been for the anxiety he caused.

A letter from Prince Sochinomiya arrived on thin white paper tied to a white root of sweet flag. The calligraphy looked very refined—a delight to the eye to be sure, though the poem itself had nothing distinctive about it.⁴

*On this Day of Sweet Flags, is no one
Moved enough to pluck the flower's roots
That weep unseen in flowing waters*

The root that he had chosen was an especially fine specimen, one that would provide a model for such exchanges in the future. Genji advised Tamakazura to respond that day and then went on his way. Several of her attendants also encouraged her to write back, and she complied—what could she have been thinking on this particular occasion that made her agree to write?

*How shallow is the flowing water from whence
The root of the sweet flag is plucked ... as shallow
As the stream of your indiscriminate tears*

“Childish, really,” she added, but wrote nothing more. The Prince, who was a connoisseur of finer things, was mildly disappointed with her letter. *If only her calligraphy displayed a little more brio!*

Bright and festive bundles of medicinal herbs tied with colorful thread—the customary gift on this day—arrived from her many suitors. So much had happened that she was now able to live more at ease, with no lingering vestiges of all the misfortunes that she had experienced over the years. All things being equal, given the change in her situation, how could she have prayed this day for anything other than fulfillment of her wish not to hurt or offend anyone during the coming year?

Genji peeked in on Hanachirusato as well.

“The archery contests for the Left Palace Guard will be held at the riding ground today, and my son told me that he would be bringing his men here afterward. Be ready to receive them. They will likely arrive before dusk. It’s strange ... I have tried to keep this gathering low key and secret, but as usual many of the princes caught wind of it and plan to attend, and so now it’s become a major event. Make sure everything is prepared for them.”

He gazed out through the gallery at the riding grounds, which were not far off to the east side of Hanachirusato’s residence.

“Young ladies, you may open the doors and windows along this passageway and watch the events from here. There are many excellent officers in the Left

Guard—men who are every bit the equal of lower-ranking courtiers.”

The women thought the spectacle was wonderful. Page girls from Tamakazura’s quarters came over to watch as well; they hung over the doors new blinds, which still had the greenish tint of fresh bamboo, and stylish modern curtains of white panels with hems dyed a dark purple. The page girls and lower-ranking servants wandered to and fro behind these curtains.

Tamakazura’s page girls wore light purple dress gowns of gauzy silk over robes in the sweet flag style—blue lined with plum red.⁵ Her four attractive servants, who were skilled at their tasks, wore trains in the chinaberry style—lilac that gradually darkened to purple at the hems—and formal Chinese-style jackets in a pattern of young leaves of pinks, which were closely associated with this festival day. Hanachirusato’s page girls had gauzy dress gowns in the pinks style—red plum lined with blue—worn casually over dark red singlets. The expressions on their faces made it clear that they were vying to attract the attention of the men. For their part, the young gentlemen, observing the women, struck their own poses.

At around two in the afternoon, during the Hour of the Ram, Genji went out to the pavilion on the riding grounds. Just as he had expected, all of the princes had assembled there. The archery contests, both on foot and mounted, were not as formal as those at the palace, since officers at the rank of Middle Captain and Lesser Captain had been brought in to participate, and the men passed the day in a lively competition that was conducted in a new, modern form. The women did not fully comprehend all that was going on, but they enjoyed taking in the magnificent attire that even the lower-ranking guardsmen wore and the mysterious skills the men used as they did their utmost to triumph. The riding grounds could be viewed at a distance from the east hall of Murasaki’s residence in the southeast quadrant, and so the young women there also observed the contests. A Chinese-style dance, “Striking the Ball,” and a Korean dance, “Two Dragons,” were performed, and the raucous sounds of court music—flutes, pipes and drums—rang out as winners were announced. The festivities continued on into evening until it was too dark to see anything. The men received gifts and rewards, and it was late at night when they all finally went home.

Genji stayed the night at Hanachirusato’s residence, and they discussed various matters.

“Prince Sochinomiya, the Minister of War, is far superior to other men. His isn’t the most handsome, perhaps, but he is considerate and cultivated—an altogether captivating individual. Did you happen to sneak a peek at him? Everyone goes on about how splendid he is, though I suppose he must have his flaws ...”

“I know that he is your younger brother, but I thought he looked older than you. I have heard that the two of you are close and that he never lets an occasion like the one today go by without calling on you. In the old days, when my sister was Consort and I regularly visited the palace, I once caught a glimpse of him ... but, after that, I never really saw him again. His looks have certainly grown more dignified as he has matured. They say your young half brother, the Governor General of Kyūshū,⁶ is a good-looking man as well, but he lacks standing, since he is not a prince of the blood and has not even been given a commoner’s name.”

She has a sharp eye, Genji mused, but he smiled and did not broach the subject of the merits and flaws of others who had attended that day. He thought it disgraceful when people criticized others or looked down on them, and so he said nothing about Tamakazura’s other main suitor, the Major Captain of the Right—though he did have thoughts about the man. *They say he has a reputation as someone you want to get to know, but there is something about him ... for some reason I get the sense that I’d be dissatisfied were we to forge a close family tie.*

His relationship with Hanachirusato was close and familiar but nothing special. They slept in separate beds now. It pained him to speculate on why they had begun to drift apart. In general, she never complained or flashed signs of jealousy and resentment about things that he did. Since she always had to hear secondhand about the various entertainments and festivities he sponsored throughout the year, she thought that today’s events, which were a rarity for her, had brought glitter and honor to her residence.

*Have you come this day to pluck the sweet flag
Amidst the scorned grass at the water’s edge
Where the stallion no longer deigns to graze⁷*

She spoke softly. It wasn’t much of a poem, but Genji was touched nonetheless.

*When would the youthful stallion whose shadow
Is cast alongside those of faithful grebes
Ever be drawn away from the sweet flag*

Their poems were frank and open.

“Though I always seem to be apart from you, mornings and nights, it is a comfort seeing you this way,” he teased, but because she was so calm and reserved by nature, he spoke to her in quiet tones. She had yielded the raised dais

of her bedchamber to him, and he went inside and retired for the night, setting up a curtain to separate them. She had long been resigned to the fact that it would be inappropriate for her to sleep next to him, and Genji did not go out of his way to call her to him.

The rainy season continued for longer than usual this year, and because the women at Rokujo were bored and had no way to brighten either the skies or their mood, they passed the days and nights amusing themselves with illustrated tales. The Akashi lady prepared some stylish and interesting works of that type and sent them over to the quarters of her daughter, the Akashi Princess.

Meanwhile, the lady in the west hall, Tamakazura, was more intrigued than the others by these stories, which she found fascinating and strange, perhaps because she had come from the provinces. Whatever the reason, she was utterly absorbed in reading them day and night. Quite a few of the young women who had been assigned to her quarters were proficient at reading and copying, and so she was able to collect quite a few texts describing the personal circumstances of a variety of remarkable characters. She couldn't tell if those stories were true or mere fiction, and, moreover, she couldn't find a single character whose circumstances were similar to her own. It appeared as though the heroine Princess in *The Tale of Sumiyoshi* experienced many remarkable incidents considered unusual as much in her own day as in the present. She compared the heroine's narrow escape from a forced marriage to the Chief Auditor to her own experience with the loathsome Taifu no Gen.

Genji couldn't avoid seeing these illustrated tales, which were left scattered all around Tamakazura's quarters.

"Ahh ... how tedious," he chided. "Women are by nature blithely content to allow others to deceive them. You know full well these tales have only the slightest connection to reality, and yet you let your heart be moved by trivial words and get so caught up in the plots that you copy them out without giving a thought to the tangled mess your hair has become in this humid weather."

Genji smiled. "Of course, if we didn't have these old tales to read," he continued, "we'd have nothing to divert us in our idle hours. What's more, even among this mass of falsehoods we find some stories that are properly written and exhibit enough sensitivity to make us imagine that they really happened. On the one hand, we may know that it's all silly, but we're still fascinated and affected by the fiction. When we read about some lovely princess lost in troubled thoughts, we're drawn to her story ... or, when we encounter a tale that makes us wonder uncertainly if what it describes is really plausible or proper, we're nonetheless surprised and amazed that it could be told with such marvelous exaggeration. Of course, later on, when we come back to the tale in a calmer

state of mind, we might dislike it or think it inappropriate ... yet even then there may be aspects of the story that seem as charming to us as when we first read it. Recently, whenever I overhear one of the ladies-in-waiting reading to my little daughter, I'm struck by the realization that there are without doubt skilled storytellers in this world and that such tales must come from the mouths of people accustomed to spinning lies ... but perhaps that is not case?"

As soon as he spoke those words, Tamakazura shot back, "There is certainly no doubt that someone practiced at lying would be inclined to draw such a conclusion ... for all sorts of reasons. I remain convinced, however, that these stories are quite truthful."

She pushed her inkstone away, and, when she did, Genji responded, "Have I been speaking rudely of your stories? Tales have provided a record of events in the world since the age of the gods, but histories of Japan like the *Nihongi* give only partial accounts of the facts. The type of tales you are reading provide detailed descriptions that make more sense and follow the way of history."

Genji smiled again before continuing.

"A story may not relate things exactly as they happened out of consideration for the circumstances of its characters. Yet there are moments when one wants to pass on to later generations the appearance and condition of people living in the present—both the good and the bad. These are the subjects that people never tire of, no matter how many times they read about them. Thus, it's hard to keep such matters to oneself, and so you begin to tell stories about them. If you want to be upright and proper, then you will select only the good details to relate. Or, if you want to play to people's baser interests, then you will compile the strange and wondrous details of bad behavior. But in either case, you will always be speaking about things of this world. Styles of storytelling may differ in other lands, and even in Japan tales from the past certainly differ from those of the present ... and of course there are distinctions between deep and shallow topics and themes. For that reason, the narrow-minded conclusion that all tales are falsehoods misses the heart of the matter. Even the Dharma, which was explicated for us through Sakyamuni's splendidly pure heart, contains *hōben*, those parables that he told to illustrate the truth of the Law. There are many contradictory parts in the sutras that raise doubts in the mind of an unenlightened person. However, if you carefully consider the matter, you realize that all of the sutras have a single aim. The distinction between enlightenment and suffering is really no different from the distinction between the good and the bad in tales such as these. In the end, the correct view of the matter is that nothing is worthless." Genji was now claiming that tales were beneficial.

"Tell me, then," he concluded, "have you found any stories of piously foolish

men like me among all your old scrolls? There couldn't possibly be any fictional princesses in this world who are as extremely aloof and heartless as you ... who pretend not to notice anything. So, how about it? Shall we make a story unlike any other that has ever been told and pass it on to later generations?"

Genji sidled over to her. Tamakazura turned away from him, hiding her face in her collar, and said, "Even if we don't make a story together, the relationship we do have is so bizarre and unbelievable that it will likely never become the subject of court gossip."

"You think it's bizarre? Truly, there has never been a daughter as cruel as you." He had moved even closer, and his behavior was much too forward.

*Having a surfeit of cares and longings
I seek answers for them in tales of old
But find there no child as unfilial*

"Even the teachings of Buddha admonish unfilial children," he added. When she refused to show her face, he began stroking her hair. As he did so, her resentment led her to reply:

*Though I have searched through all these ancient tales
Truly I find no models in this world
For parental feelings resembling yours*

He felt ashamed when he heard her poem and went no further than stroking her hair. Given her situation, whatever would become of her?

Murasaki was also reading illustrated tales under the pretext that the Akashi Princess had requested them, and she was finding it hard to put them down. Looking at an illustration from *Tales of Kumano*,⁸ she remarked, "This is quite skillfully rendered." She gazed at the little girl, who was innocently taking a nap, and remembered when she was that age.

Genji studied the illustration. "How precocious children were back then. I was quite reserved by comparison when I was their age ... a model of behavior, really." In truth, he was fond of being the model for all sorts of unheard-of behavior.

"You shouldn't be reading love stories in front of her," he continued. "She may not be all that intrigued by some young girl holding a secret love in her heart, but she is destined to be Empress, and it would be most unfortunate if she grew to accept the idea that it was normal for such affairs to actually take place." Had Tamakazura heard what he just said, she certainly would have taken

umbrage at the difference in the way he treated his daughter and the way he treated her.

“People with shallow minds may imitate the behavior they read about in these stories, but they look rather pathetic when they do,” Murasaki replied. “In *The Tale of the Hollow Tree*, the young Fujiwara Princess, Atemiya, is a prudent, dignified woman who never goes astray. However, her manner is stiff and unyielding, she lacks feminine grace, and her story ends up being just as bad an influence.”

“People in real life seem to be the same,” Genji said. “Everyone has their own way of doing things, but it’s hard to strike a proper balance. A woman who has been brought up with the greatest care by parents who are not without breeding may grow up to be innocent and childlike, but the fact that she may also have many flaws will, sad to say, lead people to wonder what her parents were up to and how they went about raising their daughter. On the other hand, when you see a young woman who in appearance and behavior is exactly what she should be for someone of her status, clearly her parents’ efforts have paid off, and she brings honor to their house. If a young lady’s nurses or attendants praise her to an absurd degree, then when her actions or words don’t match her puffed-up reputation she will not seem as attractive. Parents should never let people who lack taste and judgment go about praising their daughters.” He was determined to do everything in his power to ensure that his own daughter would avoid criticism.

Many of the tales depicted mean, vindictive stepmothers. He worried that the Akashi Princess might get the idea that all stepmothers were like those she read about. As a result, he took extra precaution when selecting stories and having clean copies and illustrations of them made for her.

Genji had always kept his son away from Murasaki, but he did not set the same strict prohibition when it came to the Akashi Princess.

So long as I’m alive, he had reasoned, their relationship really doesn’t make much difference, but when I consider what might happen after I’m gone, it becomes more important. If they are close siblings, then he will have special feelings for her as her brother and look after her and protect her at the court.

Thus, Genji allowed his son access to the narrow outer room just inside his daughter’s blinds on the southern side of her quarters. Beyond that, Genji did not permit him to enter the living area of the ladies-in-waiting on the north side of the residence, since one of the attendants there might help him gain access to Murasaki. Because he had so few children, Genji paid special attention to his son, and because the young gentleman was generally serious and calm by temperament, Genji felt safe trusting him around his daughter, the Akashi

Princess. Indeed, whenever the young man saw his little sister innocently playing with her dolls, memories of all the times as a boy he had played similar games with Kumoinokari came flooding back. He would often play with her, taking up the role of a guardsman—his current position—in service at the Doll Palace; whenever he did so, tears would well up in his eyes.

The young gentleman exchanged casual letters with many young ladies whose families permitted such activity, though he made sure not to raise any expectations of a serious relationship. Whenever he met a woman who caught his fancy and made him think, *Well, why not her?*, he would recall Kumoinokari and force himself to dismiss his interest as nothing serious. The slight he had suffered as a consequence of being at only the sixth rank when he entered court service was still galling to him, and he could not shake his obsessive wish to set right the past. *If only I could make them see those cursed blue sleeves of mine in a different light.* If he pressed the matter insistently enough, he would wear down Tō no Chūjō and eventually gain permission to take Kumoinokari as his wife. Yet, recalling the heartache he had endured, he could not set aside his determination to make the Palace Minister admit, one way or another, the wrong he had committed. He showed extraordinary kindness to no one but Kumoinokari, though on the whole he was never irritable with anyone in her household.

Her brothers considered him arrogant for not pursuing their sister—did he think he was too good for their father? Kashiwagi had fallen head over heels for Tamakazura, but because he had no one he could count on to convey his messages, he turned at last to Genji's son for help, only to receive a cold response: “If we were talking about someone else, you'd have no patience for this sort of escapade and criticize it harshly.” Their relationship resembled the one between their fathers back in the old days.

Tō no Chūjō had many sons by several wives, and each had acquired the appropriate degree of courtly acclaim and influence that he had a right to expect given the status of his mother's family and his own innate abilities. Unfortunately for Tō no Chūjō, he didn't have many daughters, and he was filled with regret that their fortunes had not prospered—his oldest daughter, the Kokiden Consort, had not achieved what he had expected of her at the palace, while his younger daughter, Kumoinokari, had involved herself with Genji's son in spite of his plans to give her to the present Crown Prince. In addition, he had never forgotten the little “wild pink” he had fathered, and ever since he mentioned her that rainy night so many years ago, he continued to wonder sadly about her fate.

What became of the child? I allowed myself to be distracted by my feelings for

her unreliable mother, and so I ended up losing track of my beloved daughter. A father must never let a daughter out of his sight. What if a woman who claims she is my daughter is now living in miserable circumstances? Well ... no matter what, if she were to show up now ...

He was always telling his sons, “If a woman should appear saying she’s my daughter, hear her out. I did many things I shouldn’t have when I was younger and gave myself over to the whims of my heart ... but of all my missteps, this was the worst. My feelings for her mother were anything but ordinary, but she became estranged from me and ran away, upset over some trivial matter. I have so few daughters, I regret that I should have lost one.”

The reality was that he had not felt that way for a long time—in fact, he had all but forgotten about the girl. Recently, however, as he observed so many people looking out carefully for their daughters, Tō no Chūjō, who remained as competitive as always, felt sad and dissatisfied, sure that he alone had not fulfilled his ambitions.

One day he had a dream and summoned a diviner to interpret it.

“You may soon learn that a child of yours, one you lost long ago, is being looked after by someone else,” he was told. Upon hearing this interpretation, he began to think about the girl again, and he once more mentioned the matter to his sons. *People almost never take in a girl child*, he thought, puzzled. *What could this possibly mean?*

¹ There are several literary antecedents for using fireflies in this manner. See in particular *Tales of Ise*, section 39.

² *Omohi* (written in modern orthography as *omoi*), the word for “love” in this poem, contains the orthographic element *hi*, which can be read as a homophone for “fire” or “flame.” This is a common type of wordplay in love poetry.

³ *Kokinshū* 153 (Ki no Tomonori): “Lost in melancholy thoughts during the summer rains, I wonder where the cuckoo that cried late at night has gone.”

⁴ The criticism of the poem here is perhaps based on the fact that the wordplay—*ne* for “root” and “sound,” *nakare* for “weeping” and “flowing”—is conventional. The repeated denigration of certain poems in the narrative is of course a way for Murasaki Shikibu to deflect criticism of her own writing.

⁵ There is no firm consensus about what color combinations certain styles employed, and my choices here simply represent likely combinations.

⁶ This character does not appear elsewhere in the story. By Murasaki Shikibu’s day, the position of governor general, like certain provincial governorships, was an honorary post occupied by a prince who usually remained in the capital. A senior assistant governor general administered actual duties on site. I mention this here because the title of any prince who held this position is *Sochinomiya* (or *Sochinomiko*). This is the position held at the beginning of the narrative by Genji’s favorite half brother (and Tamakazura’s ardent suitor), Prince Sochinomiya, who by this point is Minister of War. For the sake of simplicity, as I have done with Tō no Chūjō, I decided to stay with the name / title by which this character is initially

identified in the text throughout the translation. However, it must be noted that the traditional name for Prince Sochinomiya is Prince Hotaru, that is, Prince Fireflies, a name given to him because of the events of this chapter.

⁷ A mildly seductive poem that alludes to *Kokinshū* 892 (Anonymous): “Because the grasses beneath the forest of Ōaraki have withered, no colts come here to graze, no man comes to harvest.” This poem appears in the *Momiji no ga* chapter, where its erotic implications are made more explicit by the behavior of the amorous old Naishi. The word *koma* in this poem normally refers to a colt, but can also refer to an adult horse, and so the translation as “stallion” seems more appropriate in this context. Genji’s reply, with its reference to grebes, birds that mate for life, is a declaration of his loyalty to Hanachirusato.

⁸ This work has been lost.

XXVI

Tokonatsu

Wild Pinks

IT WAS a very hot day, and Genji had stepped out to the east fishing pavilion to cool down. His son was accompanying him, as were many courtiers with whom he had a close relationship. They were grilling sweetfish taken from one of the rivers west of the capital and bullhead taken from the Kamo River. As usual, Tō no Chūjō's sons had come to call on Genji's son.

"I was bored and sleepy," Genji said, "so you all showed up at just the right time." He ordered wine and ice water, and the party noisily drank and ate the fish and chilled rice gruel. A refreshing breeze was blowing through the pavilion, and as the sun slowly followed its westerly course through a cloudless sky, the raucous cries of cicadas screeched unpleasantly.

"It's so hot today, it doesn't do much good even to be on the water. Excuse me if I'm being discourteous, but ... , " Genji apologized as he stretched out on his side. "When the weather is as hot and humid as this, musical diversions are out of the question, and the tedium makes it difficult to get through the day. It's hard on you young guardsmen when you're on duty, is it not? You can't even loosen your sashes then. Well, you can at least unwind here ... how about a few stories on the goings-on at court these days? Something a little intriguing and eye-opening to stir me from my torpor. For some reason, I feel like an old man who has lost touch with what's happening in the world."

Despite his request, no one could think of anything remotely intriguing, and so they all seemed to shrink back in shame, their backs pressed up against the cool railing of the pavilion.

Genji turned to Tō no Chūjō's second son, Kōbai.

"What's this I've heard? Someone mentioned that your father has discovered a long-lost daughter he had by someone who was not a wife and that he's going

to take her in and look after her. Is that true?”

“There’s really nothing much to talk about, my lord,” Kōbai replied. “This past spring my father called in a diviner to interpret a dream and was told it meant that he had a daughter being raised by someone else. Then, a certain woman somehow found out about this through an acquaintance and came forward to make herself known, saying she had a connection to the person in question. My older brother, Kashiwagi, went to see her—he was to find out if there was any truth to her claim. I wasn’t privy to all the details, but in any case, the court has been abuzz recently with rumors about this peculiar story. Of course, this sort of thing is harmful to my father and brings dishonor to our house.”

So it is true, Genji thought.

“Well, you have to admit it was greedy of your father to go looking for one gosling that had gone astray—unnecessary, really, given his already enormous flock. Having so few children myself, I would like to find a daughter of my own like that, but I’ve never heard of any coming forward ... perhaps they consider my station in life inadequate for them. Still, if this daughter of his has gone to the trouble of coming forward, it’s unlikely that she has no connection at all with your father. He did busy himself with clandestine affairs in any number of places when he was young, and once you’ve stirred up the depths of the water, so to speak, you can hardly expect the reflection of the moon to look cloudless.” He smiled, and his son, who had already heard the details, could not keep a serious expression. Kōbai and his younger brother, the Fujiwara Gentleman-in-Waiting, were not amused.

“Why don’t you go pick up the Palace Minister’s fallen leaf.” Genji turned toward his son. “You may leave behind a bad reputation as an unworthy suitor, but you could at least comfort yourself with a little something to decorate your headdress ... one that has fallen from the same tree as his other daughters. Either way, what difference would it make?”

On the surface, Genji and Tō no Chūjō were still friendly, but events had often strained their relationship, even back when they were young men, and tensions between them had increased recently. Genji resented the hurt and shame that his son had suffered at the hands of Tō no Chūjō because of that youthful indiscretion with Kumoinokari, and he figured it would do no harm to let it slip out just how much the situation annoyed him.

When Genji first heard the story about the long-lost daughter, it set him to thinking.

It’s clear now that he won’t look down on Tamakazura when I finally tell him about her. He is a brilliant, dignified man and a good minister ... but he also has

a very rigid sense of right and wrong, and he's so forthright when giving both praise and condemnation, he will certainly criticize me for keeping her away from him. Still, even if I present her to him without warning, he would not regard her lightly, but treat her with proper respect.

The evening breeze was invigorating, and the young men were reluctant to go home. “Should I withdraw to relax and take in the cool of the evening? I’ve gradually reached the age when I’m no longer welcome in the company of youth,” Genji said, taking his leave; but since he was going over to Tamakazura’s quarters, they tagged along with him.

They were all wearing uniform cloaks of the same style and color, and it was hard to tell the young men apart in the fading twilight. Genji encouraged Tamakazura to step out of her main room toward the veranda so that the young men might catch a glimpse of her.

“Kōbai and his brothers are outside,” he whispered to her in private. “They look like they wanted to fly over here, but my son was not inclined to accommodate their wishes ... you see, he’s so stiff and proper. It’s likely that each of these young gentlemen holds secret designs on you. Even a young woman of lower status, hidden away in the interior of her home, will depend on rumors about her to rouse the curiosity of men. Speculations about this estate are always swirling about, and apparently people go around exaggerating the situation here, which they are convinced is more complicated than it really is. Several women may live here, but their position or age makes it inappropriate for men to pursue them. Now that you’re in residence, however, I’ve been thinking it might be interesting, given how bored and lonely I am, to have you help me test the depth or shallowness of the feelings these young gentlemen profess to have for you. My hopes have been fulfilled at last.”

The garden in front of her residence had not been designed with ostentatious plants in mind—the only colors reflected exquisitely in the faint light at dusk were those of Chinese and Japanese varieties of pinks blossoming in profusion and intimately twining around the low fence that enclosed the space. The young men moved over near the flowers and stood there, each feeling dissatisfied that he could not pick them to his heart’s content.

“These young men,” Genji told her, “are well trained ... prudent, considerate, and each accomplished in his own way. Kashiwagi is a little more mature—in fact, he’s so upright, he makes me feel awkward. Tell me, is he corresponding with you? You mustn’t make him self-conscious by pushing him away from you.”

Genji’s son stood out as exceptionally handsome and accomplished, even among this group of superlative young men.

"It's strange that the Palace Minister should find my son so disagreeable. Surrounded by the glittering radiance of his own household, so pure and untainted, is he driven by a prideful disdain of any young lord of imperial descent?"

"Was there no one to tell your son, 'Come, my lord, be my daughter's husband'?"¹ Tamakazura replied.

"Well, now, he hasn't exactly asked to be served a wedding feast. It's just that he was so close to Kumoinokari from the time they were children that their hearts were bound together ... and it's hateful of Tō no Chūjō to have kept them apart all this time. Because my son was considered too low in rank, too lightly regarded at the court, Tō no Chūjō pretends that he knows nothing about their feelings and puts the responsibility for the problem on me ... but perhaps something else is worrying him," Genji grumbled.

It sounded to Tamakazura as if the relationship between these two powerful men was being strained by this situation, and it made her sad and depressed to think that, as a result, her real father might never be told of her existence.

When the moon set, lanterns were lit. "It's much too hot to have lanterns so close by. Cresset fires would be better." He summoned an attendant and ordered a single cresset to be set up nearby. He pulled over a six-string Japanese koto, which had a marvelous look to it, and when he began to pluck the strings, he found that Tamakazura had already tuned it to the minor key of the *richi* mode. The tone of the instrument was exceptional, and so he played a little.

"For months I have been disgruntled with you, questioning whether or not you were inclined to like music. When the moonlight is cool on an autumn evening and you have come out from your chambers near the veranda, the sound of a Japanese koto played to the accompaniment of chirruping crickets can feel very intimate and stylishly modern. Of course, the instrument is not suited for the more florid styles used when playing in concert, but it is extremely flexible, harmonizing and balancing the tone and rhythm of other instruments. Some may look on the Japanese koto with contempt, but its construction shows considerable ingenuity—really a perfect instrument for women who know nothing of the great cultures of other lands. You should practice it diligently in concert. It may not take deep understanding to learn, but neither is it easy to master if you want to play it well. As it turns out, no one at present plays it as well as the Palace Minister ... it seems as if the sounds of all instruments are contained in the tone he produces with his *sugagaki*² technique. The resonance is astounding."

Tamakazura had a vague grasp of what he was describing, and because she thought she would like to master the instrument in imitation of her father, she

wanted to hear more and more of the music.

“Will there be concerts on occasions when I may have the opportunity to listen? Many people play the Japanese koto, even the humblest mountain peasants, and so I assume it’s easy to learn on the whole. But if what you say is true, people who master it play at an entirely different level.” She exuded an air of curiosity that showed her serious interest in the subject.

“Yes, that’s true,” Genji responded. “It’s sometimes called an *Azuma* koto, a vulgar name from the Eastern Provinces, I suppose. I’m not certain how the instrument is viewed in other countries, but because it is said to be the ancestor of all stringed instruments in our land, it is always the first one selected from the Bureau of Books and Drawings whenever there is a concert for His Majesty. If you were to learn directly from the Palace Minister, who is the best of the masters of this generation, you would no doubt become quite skilled. He will be here from time to time, but it is difficult to get him to play the Japanese koto since, like any master, he is reluctant to give away his secret techniques. That’s the case with all arts ... true masters never casually divulge their secrets. Even so, you’ll have the chance to hear him at some point.”

Genji played a little more, and his performance was superb—his style charmingly modern. *Is there really someone who plays better than this?* Tamakazura’s desire to know more about her father was stronger than ever. *When will I ever be able to hear him play at his ease?*

Genji sang in an enchanting voice: “Across the rippling currents of the Nuki River, I lie with your gentle arms as my pillow ...”³ He laughed softly at the next line: “The lover my parent rejects ...” His own use of the *sugagaki* technique, which seemed natural and unaffected, produced a tone of ineffable beauty.

“You must play now,” he insisted. “You can’t be shy in front of others when it comes to performing. I’ve heard a story about a woman who kept the song ‘The Lover I Yearn For’⁴ locked away in her heart and never played it for others, but you mustn’t be that reserved. Indeed, you should play in concert with whomever you can.”

He pressed her to play, but she wouldn’t touch the instrument, ashamed that she might make mistakes. After all, she had learned to play off in a remote corner of the provinces, her only teacher an old woman who had vaguely announced herself, without providing much in the way of details, as a former denizen of the capital. *He should play a little more ... I could learn so much just by listening to him,* she thought, frustrated that he had stopped. Though she normally tried to keep her distance from him, she was now so eager to learn that she sat right next to him. “What sort of wind is blowing⁵ that you should produce such extraordinary overtones?” Her head tilted slightly in curiosity, she looked

ravishing in the lamplight.

Genji smiled.

“Since you’re not tone-deaf, it’s obvious you’ve been pretending you cannot hear my pleas of love ... your deception cuts me like a chill blast of wind.” He pushed the koto away. She was extremely put out with him.

Because her attendants were close by, Genji could not engage in his usual banter.

“It seems our young gentlemen have left without viewing the pinks entirely to their satisfaction. Considering that nothing in this world is certain. I should very much like the Palace Minister to view this flower garden. There was a time, long ago, when he mentioned you to me. I remember it vividly, as if it had happened just now ...” The memory made him feel terribly sad.

*Were he to glimpse the ever-charming colors of wild pinks
Growing in this garden of never-ending summer blooms
Would he search the fencerow to find that very first wild pink⁶*

“The situation is complicated, because he does not know what happened to your mother ... and so, regrettfully, I’ve had to keep you hidden away, like a silkworm in a cocoon.”

Hearing him say this, Tamakazura began to cry.

*Is there anyone who would search for her
That first flower from which the wild pinks grew
In the fence row of a mountain peasant*

She looked endearingly innocent as she tried to cover up her true feelings. Genji murmured a line: “Were he not to come ...”⁷ His desire for her had reached the point where he did not think he would be able to control himself much longer.

Aware that people might see how often he went to visit Tamakazura and censure him for his behavior, Genji properly controlled himself, driven by his conscience, and began to send her letters instead. She was in his heart and mind all the time, from morning to night.

Why am I being so irrational, making myself uneasy and miserable? If, to put an end to these feelings, I did as I pleased and took as my wife a woman who is supposed to be my daughter, I would be condemned as utterly contemptible by people at the court. My reputation would be ruined, and it would be a terrible situation for Tamakazura.

He also knew very well that, though his devotion to her was boundless, he

could never think of her as equal to Murasaki; it bothered him to imagine how pathetic she would be as one of his lower-ranking wives, like the Akashi lady or Hanachirusato.

I may be at the pinnacle of society, but she would be last in line of all the women I look after. How could she thrive ... what glory could she hope for? It would be far better for her to settle down with some nice, bland Counselor who will love her and her alone and not divide his attention among several women. Such thoughts, however, made him grow even more possessive of her—feelings that at times led to very different ideas of what he should do.

I must give her to Prince Sochinomiya or to the Major Captain of the Right. But will my feelings for her cease once she has a husband? It probably won't do much good for me, but I should marry her off. So thinking, he would go over to her quarters and, seeing once again how lovely she was, be driven by his longings to speak directly to her, with no curtain between them, on the pretext that he was teaching her to play the Japanese koto.

At first, Tamakazura was put off by the lessons and found him unpleasant. But after a while, despite his being so close to her, she recognized that he was behaving in a calm and proper manner and that he was showing none of those inclinations so worrisome to her. She gradually got used to his presence, no longer finding him quite so disgusting, and would even converse with him on occasion when it was appropriate for her to do so—all without allowing him too much intimacy.

The more he saw of her, the more she enchanted him. Because he thought her lovelier each time they met, his thoughts shifted again as he knew he could not hold out much longer.

If I give her to someone, I could still take care of her here,⁸ and perhaps I could steal in to her and find comfort in our conversations whenever an opportune moment presented itself. It would be troublesome to have to win her over while she is so naive and ignorant about relationships—and no doubt I would feel bad about it—but even if her husband watches her closely, like a barrier guard,⁹ once she begins to have a better appreciation of the ways of men and women, there will be no need for pity then ... and if I put all my heart into winning her over, nothing will interfere with me, no matter how often I visit.

His train of thought was thoroughly despicable, but his heart was increasingly restless, and it was torment to be constantly yearning for her. No matter what actions he considered, the one thing he could not do was dismiss his desire as if it meant nothing. And so their vexed, complicated relationship was, to say the least, like no other in the world.

Tō no Chūjō had been hearing that the attendants at his residence were

relentlessly criticizing the long-lost daughter he had recently discovered in Ōmi, complaining that she was an out-and-out idiot. One day, when he had an opportunity to speak with his son Kōbai, he asked him what this was all about. As they were discussing the matter, Kōbai mentioned in passing that Genji had expressed some curiosity about the Ōmi lady.

“Just what I’d expect from him,” Tō no Chūjō said. “He brings some peasant girl no one had heard a thing about for years to that estate of his and treats her like she’s a legitimate daughter, a lady of distinction. He hardly ever criticizes anyone else, but when he hears something about our house, he never misses a chance to put us down. I feel so honored by his gracious attention.”

“The lady who resides in the west hall at Rokujō is, by all accounts, remarkable,” Kōbai replied. “Prince Sochinomiya and her other suitors are quite intent on pursuing her, but no matter how much they plead, it doesn’t seem to be going well for them. That’s why everyone is speculating that she must be extraordinary somehow.”

“Oh, please ... the only reason such speculation swirls around her is that she’s Genji’s daughter.” Tō no Chūjō began to disparage the Chancellor. “People are like that nowadays. She can’t possibly be as wonderful as they all imagine. If she were, we would have heard about her years ago. Unfortunately for him, in spite of our Radiant Prince’s spotless reputation and unparalleled status, the woman he regards as his beloved has not given him a daughter he could care for and regard as a flawless treasure. In general, people who have few children are anxious about their family’s future glory. Now I think that little girl of his—the one born in Akashi to the woman of lower rank—has an unusual destiny and may be headed for great things. But this older daughter we were just talking about ... well, it may be wrong of me to say this, but I doubt if she’s even his real daughter. He’s a man who certainly has his share of—how shall I say it?—*peculiar* proclivities, and so I wouldn’t be surprised if he were raising someone else’s daughter as his own. And how does he plan to deal with her? I suppose he’ll give her to Prince Sochinomiya. They’ve always been close and should make an excellent match as father and son.”

It was obvious that Tō no Chūjō was still angry and resentful over what had happened with Kumoinokari. He had wanted to do with her just what Genji was doing with his new daughter—make her a sought-after prize who would stir the passions of gentlemen suitors, tease them and make them anxious as they waited in suspense to know who would be chosen as her groom. But that was impossible thanks to Genji’s son, he thought bitterly; until the young gentleman achieved a rank and position that made him worthy of being Kumoinokari’s husband, it would be impossible for him to sanction the marriage. Tō no Chūjō

felt that if Genji were to approach him seriously about the match, then he might well go along. But because the young gentleman acted so arrogantly unconcerned about his daughter, he was too annoyed at present to give his approval.

While pondering all of these things, he suddenly decided to pay an informal visit to Kumoinokari's chambers. Kōbai accompanied his father. She was taking a nap, lying in her gauze singlet, seemingly unbothered by the heat. Her petite figure was adorable-looking, and her fine skin, which showed through the sheer singlet, was exceedingly beautiful. She was holding a fan in a most charming manner, her head resting on her arm, her hair stretched out beyond her pillow. Though not especially long, the cut of her hair, with its ends opening out into a fan shape, was quite attractive. Her ladies-in-waiting were resting just then, lying on their sides behind curtains and screens, and so they did not get up right away. Tō no Chūjō tapped with his fan to alert them that he was there, and the innocent expression around his daughter's eyes as she glanced up at him was endearing. Her blushing face was—to his doting paternal eyes—exquisite.

"How many times have I warned you," he said, "not to be taking naps. Why are you resting so carelessly where a man might be able to see you? It's unheard of that none of your women are nearby. A woman has to be always vigilant and take care to protect herself. It's undignified to just lie about looking disheveled. That's not to say that a woman has to be obsessively prim and guarded, going around chanting spells or making ritual gestures to summon Fudō¹⁰ ... indeed, people are likely to be put off by any woman who acts like that. What's more, some women think it's the height of elegance to keep their distance from people, but if such behavior goes too far, it is not at all attractive. The Chancellor is constantly impressing on his young daughter—a girl he believes will be Empress one day—that she must be flexible and learn all things in moderation. A woman should not cultivate a single great talent, which would make her stand out from others, but neither should she be vague and empty-headed. These are not particularly strict principles, I think, and there is something to be said for his way of doing things. However, each person's natural inclinations will be reflected in the ways that they think and act, and so when his young daughter grows up she will probably do as she pleases and act according to her own will. When she reaches womanhood and is sent into service at the palace, I will be very curious to see what she is like then. As for you, as things stand my hopes for sending you to the Crown Prince are now out of reach because of your relationship with Genji's son. It troubles me greatly whenever I hear about a scandal involving someone else's daughter, and I am determined that you will not become a laughingstock. Do not be tempted, even for a moment, by the

young gentleman's earnest expressions of devotion when he writes to you. I am giving the matter my consideration." He spoke with tender feelings.

Remembering all that had happened, Kumoinokari felt her chest tighten in shame.

When I was a child I didn't understand things very deeply, and at the time, when there was an uproar over our relationship, it was impudent and disrespectful of me to act so unconcerned in front of my father. Princess Ōmiya was constantly complaining that she could never see her granddaughter; but Kumoinokari, mindful of her father's warning and afraid of what might happen at the lax Sanjō residence, would not go to see her.

Tō no Chūjō was also preoccupied with thoughts about his new daughter, who was living in the north hall.

How should I handle this, given all that's gone wrong ... I went well out of my way to receive the girl, and so I would look ridiculous—insane, really—if I were to just send her back now. It's so irritating that people are talking about this, saying that I must be planning to look after her seriously just because I brought her to my residence. I shall have her go into my daughter's service at the Kokiden ... she can be her fool, a source of amusement there. Everyone's belittling her, saying she's too hideous to watch, but is she really as bad as they say?

He spoke to the Kokiden Consort about the young lady.

"So, what do you say ... shall I send her to you? If she's too vulgar to look at, have the older attendants show no mercy and strictly correct her manners." He laughed. "And don't let your younger ladies gossip about or ridicule her. The girl already has an unfortunate tendency to be rather flippant herself."

"Is she really all that strange," the Consort replied, "or is it just that she isn't quite as extraordinary as Kashiwagi's reports about her led us to believe? The reason she's acting so awkward is that she's probably mortified by all the fuss you and others have made over her." Her kind, reasonable words made her seem admirable, and her father felt a little ashamed before her.

True, the Consort did not possess exceptionally fine looks, but she did have an unsullied, aristocratic air that, when combined with her attractive, warm personality, made one think of lovely plum blossoms opening at the crack of dawn. She smiled as if she had left much unsaid, and as her father gazed at her, he realized it was the little things, like that smile, that made her special.

"Kashiwagi may have raised our expectations, but he's still young and wasn't very thorough in sizing her up." Tō no Chūjō's opinion of his own daughter made one feel sorry for the young lady.

He stepped out and immediately went over to the north hall to peek in on the

lady from Ōmi. He found her sitting at the very edge of her chambers and leaning against the blinds, which were pushed out so far that anyone could have looked in and seen her clearly. A gregarious young woman named Gosechi was attending her. Gosechi enjoyed games, and the two were playing backgammon. As Gosechi prepared to roll the dice, the lady from Ōmi was furiously rubbing her hands together in supplication, rapidly intoning in a prayerful voice: “C’mon snake eyes, c’mon snake eyes.”

Ahh ... how dreadful! Tō no Chūjō thought. He signaled to the attendant who had walked ahead of him alerting others of his presence that she was to be quiet while he peered in through the hinged double doors at the corner of the room. The sliding doors in the interior were open, and he could see his daughter’s companion, Gosechi, who was also worked up and excited, shaking the cup over and over without actually rolling the dice, and muttering: “Payback time, payback time!” They were focused so intently on the dice in the cup that their fervent prayers seemed stuck inside the stones like thoughts, unable to get out. They looked ridiculous. His daughter’s face had a fresh vitality, and she had an open, easy charm. Her hair was nicely done up, and, overall, her flaws were minor. Unfortunately, her forehead was narrow, and her high-pitched, excited voice seemed to spoil her looks. She was certainly no great beauty, but there was no way he could reject her as an out-and-out stranger—whenever he glanced in the mirror he was reminded that she was his child and that their destiny had been a regrettable one.

“How are you getting along?” he asked her. “Do you find it uncomfortable or difficult to settle into your new home? I have so many responsibilities that I’m unable to visit very often and check in on you.”

She responded with her usual breathless torrent of words.

“What’s there to be uncomfortable about, since you took me into your own home. The only thing is ... I don’t get to see your face much here, and I’d been so eager and curious about seeing you all those years ... it makes me feel like I got a bad roll of the dice.”

“Yes, quite ... I don’t have all that many attendants waiting on me personally, and so I was thinking earlier that perhaps you might serve me. That way, I could see you more often and not be so lonely. Unfortunately, that arrangement does not seem practical. You see, in the case of an average attendant, she can fit in with the others, regardless of her background, and do as she pleases because she does not attract much attention or gossip to herself. But when an attendant comes from a certain background and people know she’s the daughter of this person or the child of that one ... well, there have been many instances when the behavior of such an attendant reflects poorly on her parents and siblings. And, of course,

for a man in my position ...”

The lady from Ōmi didn’t seem to catch the look of embarrassment on her father’s face.

“But why should that matter for us? If I were to go into service for you and you flaunted the fact that I’m your daughter, then that would certainly feel very awkward. But if you want me to be one of your attendants, I’d be happy just to empty your chamberpot.”

Unable to suppress his laughter, Tō no Chūjō replied, “I don’t think that’s quite the right task for you. If you’re of a mind to serve your father, whom you came across quite unexpectedly, then as a filial daughter you should learn to speak more slowly and softly. If you do that, you’ll add years to my life.”

She smiled ruefully at her father’s teasing.

“That’s just the way my tongue works. From the time I learned to talk, my mother was always scolding me for speaking so fast. You see, there was this priest from Enryakuji Temple on Mount Hiei who was assigned to run the Myōhōji Temple back in Ōmi, and he was in the birthing room praying when I was delivered, and, well, you see, he was a fast talker too and my mother was always complaining that I got this way by imitating him. Tell me, then—how am I supposed to break this habit?”

Seeing the fuss she was making, he was touched by the realization that her devotion to him was genuine and deep.

“Yes, it must have been the fault of the priest who got too close to you. Perhaps his peculiar tic was retribution for sins in a previous life. They say that deafness and stuttering are retribution for having spoken ill of the Buddha’s Great Law, and so I would guess that talking fast must be a similar sort of thing.” As he was speaking, his thoughts were elsewhere.

Though the Kokiden Consort is my own daughter, she’s so majestic I feel humble before her. The very idea of presenting this young lady to her makes me cringe. What was I thinking to summon such an eccentric woman to my house without more thoroughly checking her out? He was reconsidering his plan, knowing that once people got a look at her, gossip about her flaws would spread like leaves scattering on the wind.

“The Consort is in residence here, and you should go see her from time to time,” he said. “Learn proper etiquette and behavior by observing her and her ladies-in-waiting. Even a woman who has nothing special to recommend her will naturally become more refined the more she interacts with such noblewomen and imitates them. Will you present yourself to the Consort with that purpose in mind?”

“Oh, I should be most happy to do so! There was nothing that I ever wanted or

thought about more day and night, year after year, than to be counted as one of the family by my siblings. If the Consort will have me, why, I'd draw water for her and carry it on my head!"

His admonition against speaking in a rush had not done a bit of good.

"You needn't draw water ... or collect firewood for that matter. You're going to serve the Consort, not the Buddha himself. Just go to her, but make sure that you stay as far away as you can from that peculiar priest who has affected your speech."

She had no inkling that he was being sarcastic, nor was she aware that her father was, among all the great ministers of state, truly the most handsomely dignified, brilliant, and august figure.

"So when should I go?" she asked.

"Let's see if there's an auspicious day coming up ... no, no, let's not make a big deal of this. If you're so inclined, why not go today?" And with that, he left.

She watched him as he departed with his splendid escort of solicitous gentlemen of the fourth and fifth ranks. His movements were at once dignified and dashing.

"My father is really something, isn't he? I was born into a noble house, yet it was just my luck that I ended up being raised by an insignificant family out in the provinces."

"He may be altogether too imposing a father," Gosechi blurted out thoughtlessly. "It might have been better had you been discovered by a father whose station in life was more suitable for you, one who would be able to look after you himself."

"There you go again ... you're so mean, always ruining whatever I say. Now that I've been recognized as a Minister's child, you need to watch your tongue if you want to stay on my good side. After all, it appears that I'm destined for great things."

Her angry face was irresistibly charming, and her playful personality was a delight that made up for her faults. Still, she was extremely provincial, having been raised among frightfully vulgar people of a lower class, and she did not know how to speak properly. Even words that have no special import may strike the ear as pleasing when they are spoken fluently in a composed voice, and even tedious discussions of poetry, where the readings of the first and last phrases of a verse are ambiguous or not clearly audible, or where the analysis may not be all that profound, may still seem fascinating and make the listener want to hear it all if it is spoken in a tone that harmonizes with the words. In the case of the young lady from Ōmi, because she spoke so quickly, her words did not seem as if they made any sense, even when she said something genuinely meaningful or

interesting. Moreover, she had a high-pitched voice with a coarse Ōmi accent, which she had learned at the breast of her proud, willful nurse, and her attitude was strangely vulgar—all of which made her appear less worthy. It must be said, however, that her way of speaking was not completely useless. She could rattle off verses of thirty-one syllables, give or take, at the drop of a hat—though the opening and closing phrases didn't always go together.

“Since my father told me to go see the Kokiden Consort,” she continued, “it might be rude of me to show any hesitation. I'll go this evening. My father may treasure me more than anything in the world, but how can I gain any standing in this house if the other women treat me coldly?”

She worried that she would be regarded lightly. So, first things first, she sent off a letter to the Consort:

Though we are as close to each other as the woven grasses used to make a fence of reed wattle,¹¹ I have not had the privilege of treading on your shadow ... is it that you have put up a barrier gate like the one at Nakoso, telling me, “don't come here”? Though I know nothing of you and don't want to seem presumptuous by mentioning the name Musashino, which tells of our relationship,

I am your most humble servant ... really most humble
" " " " " " " "

After this string of ditto marks, the letter continued on the back of the paper.

Oh yes, I almost forgot. I was thinking I really, really want to visit you this evening, and the more you dislike me, the more glorious you seem.¹² Please, oh please look as kindly on my writings as you would upon the Minase River!

Along the margin she squeezed in a poem:

*How can one from Ikaga Promontory
Overlooking grassy strands at Hitachi
Ever meet the wave that breaks at Tago Bay¹³*

To all this she added one more line:

Like a great river, my longing is not ordinary.¹⁴

She wrote all this on a sheet of blue paper, which she then laid on top of a

second sheet, using for the most part Chinese characters written in an angular, aggressive-looking cursive script. Her writing meandered across the page, and it was impossible to judge what line of calligraphers she might have come from. She had added so many long flourishes to the characters that her writing gave the impression of someone putting on airs. As the lines of prose neared the bottom of the page, they veered off on a diagonal course that made it look as if the words were about to tumble off the paper. Smiling in satisfaction, the young lady folded the pages of blue paper into a very small, thin knot and attached it to some pinks—a hopelessly mismatched color scheme. She then chose as her messenger a page girl whose duties included taking out the chamberpots. Though the girl had just recently come into service, she was adept and pretty.

The page girl went to the kitchen of the Consort's ladies-in-waiting and said, "Give this to your mistress." A low-ranking attendant recognized her. "You're a page from the north hall, aren't you?" she said, taking the letter. She then brought it to a lady-in-waiting named Taifu, who in turn unfolded it and gave it to her mistress to peruse. The Consort smiled at the outlandish writing, then put the letter down. Another lady-in-waiting, Chunagon, happened to be serving nearby and glimpsed the note. "That's a rather avant-garde style of writing, is it not?"

She seemed curious, and so the Consort replied, handing the letter to her, "I'm afraid that I don't recognize the cursive style she uses ... and I cannot see the connection between the opening and closing phrases of her poem. If I don't answer her with a poem that employs the same kind of extraordinary allusions to ancient poetry, she will likely think poorly of me. Quickly write something for me."

The younger attendants were amused, but they had to suppress their laughter, since the lady from Ōmi was the sister of the Consort. The page girl was apparently eager to take a reply back with her, and so Chunagon said, "It's difficult to come up with a proper response to such a stylishly elegant masterpiece, but it would also be a shame if it looked as though it had been written by an intermediary." So saying, she wrote the reply in a skillful imitation of the Consort's hand:

"I regret it does us no good to be as close to each other as those woven grasses
in a fence of reed wattle."

*Like the pines of Hakosaki, the wave
That breaks at Suma's strands, at Suruga
At the shores of Hitachi, awaits you*

When the Consort heard the poem, she was appalled.

“That’s terrible. What if people say I actually wrote it?”

“Anyone who hears this will know what it’s really all about,” Chūnagon reassured her. She formally wrapped the note inside another piece of paper and sent it on its way.

When the lady of Ōmi read it, she remarked, “A lovely turn of phrase! She says that she’s expecting me!” She scented, then re-scented her robes, using incense made with honey. The resulting perfume was cloyingly sweet. She applied bright rouge, carefully combed her hair, and decked herself out in her finest robes. In her own way, she was bright and gaily attractive.

One can only wonder what sorts of outrageous things must have happened when she finally met the Consort.

¹ Tamakazura has picked up on the word *ōkimi* (young lord) and alluded to the *saibara* “My House” in her reply. This song, mentioned in the *Hahakigi* chapter, is mildly risqué: “I have hung the curtains around the dais of her bedchamber, so come my lord, be my daughter’s husband, What do you desire for your wedding feast ... abalone, turban snail, sea urchin?”—all erotic associations with female genitalia. Tamakazura’s allusion stops short of the bawdier aspect of the song, but that does not prevent Genji from completing the allusion.

² It is not clear what specific technique this term refers to, but it is likely a style of plucking that produces overtones.

³ Genji sings a line from a *saibara*, “The Nuki River,” that he alluded to in the *Hana no en* chapter. There, he cites the song ironically to criticize his wife’s coldness toward him. Here, the implication of his allusion is quite different since, as the following line makes clear, he sees himself as both banishing parent and rejected lover.

⁴ A work of Chinese court music.

⁵ *Shūishū* 451 (Saigū no Nyōgo): “The soughing of the wind in the pines on the mountain peak mingles with the music of a koto ... to which mode were the strings tuned: the koto’s or the wind’s?”

⁶ This poem is marked by a complex series of wordplays. In the first two metrical units—*nadeshiko no / toko natsukashiki*—the words *nadeshiko* and *tokonatsu* are generic names for “pinks” (or, as I have translated them, wild pinks) that appeared earlier in the story during the rainy-night discussion of women, when they were used in poems by Tō no Chūjō and Tamakazura’s mother. In those poems, *nadeshiko* refers to Tamakazura (as a baby) and *tokonatsu* to her mother (Genji’s lady of the evening faces). Genji’s use of both names for “wild pinks” is thus significant, because it alludes to the deep connections among Tamakazura, her mother, Tō no Chūjō, and Genji. *Tokonatsu* also means “never-ending summer,” while *tokonatsukashiki* means “ever-charming” or “endlessly alluring.”

⁷ The source of this line is unknown.

⁸ The practice of uxorilocal marriage—meaning that the wife stayed in her family’s residence and the husband either set up his domicile with her or maintained his own household and visited—was not uncommon among aristocratic households during this period. This was the practice Genji followed with his first wife, the daughter of the Minister of the Left (later Chancellor), who lived in quarters set up in the residence at Sanjō.

⁹ *Kokinshū* 632 [also *Tales of Ise*, section 5] (Ariwara no Narihira): “Would that the barrier guard on the

road I travel secretly to see my lover fall asleep for me each and every night.”

10 Fudō (or Fudō Myōō 不動明王) is one of the Five Guardian Kings who protect Buddhism. He is the destroyer of delusion and, as the characters for his name suggest, he is “immovable” in that he is not subject to the temptations of carnal desires (which explains why Tō no Chūjō is rather ambivalent about a woman invoking him). The spells are ritual incantations, *dharani*, of lines from sutras; the gestures are mudra.

11 The lady from Ōmi is eager to demonstrate her refinement by showing off her knowledge of poetry. The letter alludes to several poems: *Kokinshū* 506 (Anonymous): “Is it because my love for you remains a secret that I find no excuse to meet you, even though we are as close to each other as the woven grasses used to make a fence of reed wattle?”; *Gosenshū* 682 (Kohachijō miyasudokoro): “I am near enough to tread on your shadow, but someone has put up a barrier between us like the one at Nakoso, whose very name tells me ‘do not come’”; *Kokin rokujō* 3507 (Anonymous): “I’ve never been there, but lament my fate each time I hear the name Musashino … the place where little *murasaki* grows.” This third poem is copied out by Genji in the *Wakamurasaki* chapter.

12 The allusions continue to pour forth in the postscript. *Gosenshū* 609 [or 608, depending on the edition; a slightly altered version of this poem appears as *Shūishū* 996] (Anonymous): “It is strange indeed that the more you dislike me the more attractive you look … how then could I ever stop loving you?”; *Kokinshū* 607 (Ki no Tomonori): “I have not put it in words, but my love is unseen like the Minase River … it flows silently like a subterranean river toward you.”

13 The poetic place names invoked are so far apart geographically that the juxtaposition of them here makes no sense. The poem simply means: “May I come and see you?”

14 *Kokinshū* 699 (Anonymous): “Would I long for you as I do if my love was as ordinary as the waves of wisteria on the bank of the great river in beautiful Yoshino?”

XXVII

Kagaribi

Cresset Fires

AT AROUND this time, Genji heard the gossip spreading at court about the Palace Minister's daughter from Ōmi. He pitied the young woman.

"All things considered, I just can't figure out what he was thinking ... to make such an absurd spectacle over taking in a daughter who really should have been kept hidden away and out of public gaze ... a daughter, I might add, who has a rather tenuous claim on their relationship. After all, she's a child he had with some low-ranking woman back when he was sowing his wild oats, and to expose her to everyone like this simply makes her an object of ridicule. Tō no Chūjō has always been given to snap judgments, and so he brought her out of Ōmi without properly checking her background ... then, when she doesn't meet his expectations, he treats her like this, sending her off to serve the Kokiden Consort. It just goes to show that in all cases one needs to handle matters calmly and with due deliberation."

When Tamakazura heard the rumors, she felt a sense of relief.

As it turned out, what Genji said was right—it was best for me not to go to the Palace Minister's household. I may call him Father, but had I gone without knowing anything about his past or his character, I would likely have ended up humiliated as well.

Ukon had often insisted to her that having Genji as her father was the much better choice; while his lewdly suggestive behavior was distressing, at least he did not force himself on her, as he so clearly desired. Indeed, his kindness was growing deeper and deeper so that Tamakazura was beginning to open up and behave more warmly toward him.

Autumn arrived. The first chill breezes of the season began to blow, and Genji, feeling a lonely desire to see his beloved's robes fluttering in those

breezes,¹ could not bear it and would often go over to the northeast residence to practice the koto with Tamakazura. On the fifth and sixth nights of the seventh month the moon set early, the skies were slightly overcast, the wind rustled through the reeds, and gradually the mood of the season turned melancholy. They lay down together, the koto at their heads. Genji sighed. *Has there ever been a relationship like ours, where we lie together and do nothing else?* He was aware that people might disapprove if he stayed too late, and was about to return to his own quarters when he noticed that some of the cresset fires in the garden were dying out. He summoned one of his retainers, a Master in the Right Imperial Guard, and ordered him to relight them.

The man neatly arranged small pieces of pine inside the cressets, which had been placed beneath a spindle tree gracefully spreading its branches out over the cold waters of the stream flowing from the garden spring. When he stepped back to relight the fires, the garden was soon bathed in a chill, soft light that heightened the beauty of Tamakazura's figure. Her hair was elegantly cool to the touch, and Genji found her proper, modest bearing most endearing. He was reluctant to go back. "You should always make sure that one of your servants keeps the fires lit. It is eerie and unsettling when the garden is dark on moonless nights in early autumn."

*The smoke from my passionate heart smolders
Rising from an eternal flame of love
To mingle with the smoke from cresset fires*

"How long must my hidden love smolder inside me?² It may not be apparent to you, but deep inside a painful fire burns."

Tamakazura found his attitude rather queer.

*If, as you say, the smoke of your smoldering love
Rises together with the smoke from cresset fires
It will surely dissipate in the boundless skies*

"People will likely be getting suspicious about us." She seemed anxious.

"Oh ... so that's how it is?" Stepping out of her chambers, he caught the delightful sound of flutes and a thirteen-string koto coming from the east hall. "As usual, I suppose my son and his companions are amusing themselves ... that is probably Kashiwagi on the koto. He seems to be playing to impress!" He stood there, listening.

He had a servant deliver a spoken message: "I am over here, by the chill light

of the cresset fires.”” Soon three young men arrived. “Your flutes,” Genji said, “were like the sound of the wind that announces the arrival of autumn.³ I couldn’t stand being left out of your concert.” He pulled out a seven-string koto and played it softly and sweetly. His son played the flute magnificently in the melancholy *banshiki* mode—a perfect choice for early autumn. Kashiwagi was nervous, knowing that Tamakazura was nearby, and he was finding it difficult to sing, which led Genji to prod him, saying, “We’re waiting.”

Upon hearing Genji’s words, Kashiwagi’s younger brother, Kōbai, took up the clappers to beat rhythm and sang in a low voice that was as lovely as the cry of a bell cricket. Genji had him repeat the song, then passed his koto over to Kashiwagi. He was every bit as skillful as his father, and his style of playing was lively and dazzling.

“There is a lady behind those blinds who has discriminating tastes in music. I must take care not to imbibe too much tonight. A man like me who is past his prime is likely to start crying in his cups and blurting out all sorts of secrets.”

Tamakazura was truly moved to feelings of joy and trepidation to hear Genji speak so. She secretly listened to and carefully observed her two half brothers, since she shared a lasting bond with them that was in no way ordinary—though of course her brothers had no inkling of their connection to her. Because Kashiwagi was so smitten with Tamakazura, he worried that he might not be able to conceal his feelings on an occasion like this. Nonetheless, he maintained his composure—his behavior was flawless, he kept himself calm and at ease, and he did not try to show off by playing any song straight through without stopping.

¹ *Kokinshū* 171 (Anonymous): “Fluttering the hems of my beloved’s robe, revealing its lining ... how fresh and appealing are these first breezes of autumn.”

² *Kokinshū* 500 (Anonymous): “When summer comes, incense smolders in my abode to keep the mosquitoes away ... how long must my hidden love burn inside me?”

³ *Kokinshū* 169 (Fujiwara Toshiyuki): “Though I see no clear signs that autumn has arrived, I am startled by the sound of the wind.”

XXVIII

Nowaki

*An Autumn Tempest*1

THE AUTUMN flowers and foliage in the garden of Umetsubo's residence were more spectacular than in previous years. Every type of autumn plant had been set out, weaving in and around the low rustic-looking fences made of a wattle of different types of branches, some stripped of their bark, some left natural. The shapes of the trimmed branches were lovely, and even though the flowers were varieties that could be found anywhere, the plants in this garden were so astonishing that when they were covered by dew in the mornings and evenings, sparkling as if covered with pearls, they did not seem to be of this world. Observing the patterns of fall colors here made one forget the mountains in spring, as if one's spirit had gone wandering off into this bracingly cool, marvelous landscape.

Most people, when they debate the relative merits of spring and autumn, have from ancient times shown a preference for the autumn. Those who had been so attracted to the renowned spring garden at Murasaki's residence now seemed to waver as the leaves changed color² and began to favor the autumn again—a fickleness that mirrored the mutable nature of this world.

The Umetsubo Empress chose to stay in residence at the Rokujō estate to enjoy the pleasures of her autumn garden. She very much wanted to entertain with music and other diversions, but because the eighth month marked the anniversary of the death of her father, the Crown Prince who passed away so many years ago, such amusements would not have been appropriate. So, instead, she spent her days there taking in the views of the autumn colors from morning to evening. The foliage seemed to turn ever more glorious day by day, and she wondered anxiously when they would finally pass their peak and fade. Then, one day, the skies clouded over and an autumn tempest more startlingly powerful

than the usual storm began to blow. Even those who did not care all that much about such things as the fading of flowers in the fall were perturbed that a storm would wreak havoc like this; for someone as sensitive as Umetsubo, the situation was a source of considerable anguish as she watched the wind sweep pearls of dew from the clusters of grass in her garden, reminding her of the fragile impermanence of all life.

She recalled a line of verse: “If only I had sleeves wide enough to cover the heavens.”³ She wanted to cover the skies of autumn. As evening wore on, the wind and rain blew so violently that she could see nothing outside, and because the atmosphere was so frighteningly eerie, she had the shutters lowered. Anxious and upset beyond endurance, she fretted over what was happening to her beloved garden.

The storm struck at the time of year when Murasaki’s garden was being groomed in preparation for the coming season, and it was far more violent than the breeze that the forlorn-looking bush clover—its twigs now shorn of leaves all the way down—had been expecting.⁴ Murasaki was watching the bush clover from her seat near the veranda as the wind twisted twigs and branches and completely scattered the dew. Genji was with the Akashi Princess in her rooms when his son arrived at the main hall and casually glanced over a low one-panel wooden screen in the passageway leading from the east hall to the main quarters. Looking through the open double doors, he could see a large number of women congregating inside, and he stood there silently observing them. The wind was so fierce that the folding screens had all been put away, and so there was nothing to obstruct his view of one particular woman sitting in the narrow outer room near the veranda. There could be no mistake about it ... the woman he was looking at was Murasaki. Her refined grace and radiant beauty put him in mind of a cherry tree off in the mountains, its wild profusion of blossoms dimly visible through the mists of a spring dawn. Her gentle allure was like a fragrance that seemed, almost cruelly, to waft over his face as he stared at her in hopeless longing. She was more splendid than any woman he had ever seen before. The wind was blowing the blinds open, and her women were struggling to keep them pulled down when, for some reason he could not fathom, she smiled—an expression that made her unbearably attractive. Concerned about her flowers, she could not stop watching the storm and would not retreat into the main room. The ladies-in-waiting near her were also very attractive, each in her own way, but he couldn’t take his eyes off Murasaki. His father had always kept him far away from her, knowing that her beauty could not help but stir the passions of any man with eyes to see, and he realized how prudent his father was to keep her hidden. Afraid that someone might catch him standing there, he was about to

withdraw when his father opened the sliding doors that led off to the Akashi Princess's rooms and went out to where Murasaki was sitting.

"What a nasty, restless wind," Genji said. "Put the shutters down. With the blinds fluttering about, any men who might be around could get a clear view of you."

Genji's son drew back and looked in again. He could see the two of them talking, then saw his father smile. He could hardly believe that such a youthfully handsome man at the peak of his splendor was actually his own father. Murasaki was also in her prime, and the way the two of them looked together—a flawlessly ideal couple—was deeply moving. He wanted to continue observing them, but the shutters along the passageway were rattling in the wind, and his own position was exposed to view, so he withdrew lest he be spotted. He walked out toward the veranda, cleared his throat, and signaled his presence, as though he had just arrived.

"You see what I mean—anyone could have seen you!" Genji realized that the double doors in the corner had been left open, and he looked at his own son with suspicion. For his part, the young gentleman was thinking, *Nothing like this has ever happened in all these years. The wind truly has the power to lift boulders! They're always so composed ... it's a rare delight to see both of them thrown into a tizzy like this.*

Several members of the household staff came by with reports.

"This wind is going to bring a severe storm with it. It's blowing in from the northeast, and so it should be a little less severe in the garden here."

"The pavilion on the riding grounds and the fishing pavilion at the northeast residence may end up suffering some damage."

Men loudly hustled about preparing the buildings and grounds.

Genji turned to his son. "And where have you been?"

"I was at the Sanjō residence, but when I heard a major storm was brewing, I grew concerned and wanted to check on how you were doing. Grandmother is far more nervous than anyone here ... she's so scared of the storm that she's acting like a child. I feel bad for her, and I'm going to go back there now."

"You'd better hurry then," his father urged him. "After all, when people reach their dotage they tend to regress to childhood ... a shame, really, but that's the way things are." Genji gave his son a message expressing his concern for Princess Ōmiya: "My son will see you through this turbulent storm. I'll leave you in his care."

Though buffeted by the wind as he made his way along the road, Genji's son possessed a strong sense of filial duty; apart from those times when his movements were constrained by some taboo or prohibition and he had to remain

at the palace, he never let a day go by when he did not call on his father at the Rokujō estate and his grandmother at her Sanjō residence, no matter how busy he might be with his public duties and ceremonies. He cut a touching, admirable figure as he made his visits beneath such threatening skies, looking as though he were outracing the wind itself.

Princess Ōmiya, nervous and impatient for him to return, greeted his arrival with joyful relief. “In all my years,” she said, trembling all over, “I have yet to see such a violent autumn tempest.” The crack of large tree limbs snapping was frightfully unpleasant, and the wind was blowing away so many roof tiles that it seemed there could be none left.

“It was good of you to brave the danger of the storm to come here,” Princess Ōmiya continued, her voice quavering. As a sign of the mutable nature of the world, the former glory of her household—when the late Chancellor was at the height of his power—was gone, and she considered her grandson the only person on whom she could rely. Her public reputation had certainly not faded, even though her own son, the Palace Minister, was now somewhat estranged from her.

Her grandson spent the night listening to the howling wind. Lost in a hazy reverie of yearning, his thoughts wandered from Kumoinokari, the young lady for whom he was always anxiously longing, to Murasaki, whose image he could not get out of his head. *How can I have such feelings? They are utterly reckless ... and terrifying.* He tried to distract himself, to think about other things, but the vision of Murasaki would quickly return. *I can't imagine that there has ever been or ever will be anyone as beautiful as she. With someone like her as his companion, how could my father count Hanachirusato as one of his wives? Ahh, I feel sorry for her ... in no way can she be compared to Murasaki.* It occurred to him just then how gracious his father was for being so loyal to Hanachirusato. Because he himself was a serious young man, he was not usually drawn to outrageous desires, and yet such thoughts kept coming. *I want to find a wife as beautiful as Murasaki and spend my whole life with her. Life is short, but if I could find someone like her, I'm sure she would add a few years to mine.*

Just before dawn, the winds calmed a little and a heavy rain began to fall. He heard some attendants talking: “They say some of the detached outbuildings at the Rokujō estate have been damaged.” Genji’s son was startled. *My father's residence has a grand, lofty feel to it, and there would have been numerous people in and around his quarters while the winds were raging. But Hanachirusato must have felt alone and abandoned in her residence.* Worried about her, he made his way back to the northeast residence in the faint light of dawn. Along the way the wind was so fierce that the cold rain was blown almost

parallel to the ground. It poured into his carriage. The skies were threatening, and he had a strange, restless feeling as if his spirit had left his body. *What's happening to me? Am I to suffer yet again the sorrows of hopeless love?* When he realized that he was indeed in the throes of passion, he reminded himself that such desires were wildly reckless. His thoughts were all over the place. *This is utter madness!*

He went first to Hanachirusato's quarters, where he found her frightened out of her wits. After calming her down with soothing words, he summoned her staff and gave them instructions to make various repairs. He then went on to his father's residence, and when he arrived, the shutters had not yet been raised. He leaned against the veranda railing just outside Genji and Murasaki's chambers and gazed off into the garden. Trees on the hill had been toppled or bent by the wind, and numerous broken limbs were strewn all around the area. Needless to say, plants and grasses had been ravaged throughout the garden, and debris was scattered everywhere—cypress bark shingles, trellises and latticework screens, pieces of bamboo wattle fence. The skies were covered in a billowy mist and, as the wan morning light filtered through the clouds, the dew on the mournful face of the garden glittered. He didn't know why, but he shed tears as he looked at the scene, quickly wiping his eyes to hide them. He cleared his throat to announce his presence.

"That sounds like my son ... has dawn broken yet?" It sounded as though his father was just getting up. He heard Murasaki say something, but he couldn't quite make out her words. Then came the sound of his father laughing. "This is what 'parting at dawn' means ... something you never experienced when we were first together. It hurts me that you should be learning about the custom now." Though he could catch only fragments of their conversation, he was curious and intrigued. He could not clearly make out Murasaki's replies, but their playful banter created the impression that they were an intimate, relaxed couple.

Genji raised the shutter from the inside, and his son, embarrassed at being so close to the room, stepped away and waited to serve his father.

"How were things at Sanjō? Was Princess Ōmiya delighted to have you there last night?"

"Yes, she was ... but she melts into tears over the most trivial things. I feel sorry for her, but it can be a nuisance."

Genji smiled.

"She doesn't have many years left. You should do your very best to serve and look after her. She finds it depressing, I imagine, that Tō no Chūjō does so little for her. He is by nature oddly flamboyant and manly, always wanting to impress

others by making solemnly grand displays of his own filial piety ... but that suggests he lacks depth of character. Still, for all his faults, he does have his hidden depths—he's wise and clever, a man of learning and talents—really the type of man who is all too rare in this degenerate age we are entering.⁵ While it's true that he can be annoying, it is hard to find a man with as few flaws as he. Be that as it may, the wind last night was terrible, and I wonder if the Umetsubo Empress had any responsible members of the palace staff assisting her." He gave his son a message to take to her. "Ask her what she made of the howling wind last night. And tell her I seem to have come down with some sort of malady as a result of that raging tempest and am quite indisposed. I've been lingering here, trying to get myself ready, but I will not be calling on her today."

Genji's son stepped down into the garden, passed through a door into the covered passageway connecting the southeast and southwest quadrants, and made his way to Umetsubo's residence. In the faint early morning light, he cut a dashing handsomely figure. He came out of the passageway close to the south end of the east hall and looked across the way at Her Majesty's quarters. He could see that two shutters there had been raised, the blinds behind them had been rolled up, and several ladies-in-waiting were sitting inside, leaning against the veranda railing. He wasn't sure how to interpret their relaxed, unguarded behavior, but as it slowly grew lighter, he was able to get a clearer view of the women in their robes of different hues and felt that each of them, irrespective of her background or family, was a delight to behold. Page girls had been sent into the garden to put dew in the cages holding bell crickets. Their thin formal robes perfectly matched the season—some in the maidenflower⁶ style, yellow lined with bud green, over *akome* robes, others in the aster style, light purple lined with blue-green, and still others in the pinks style, a pale shade of maroon lined with blue-green. One group of four or five girls was moving among the grasses, carrying their cages of different colors and plucking stems of pinks and other flowers that, sad to say, had been flattened by the wind. They had an elegant glow to them as they took the flowers over to Her Majesty, their figures fading in and out of the mist. When the breeze shifted in his direction, it was redolent with the fragrance of flowers—even the asters, which do not have a natural scent. Had the asters brushed against the perfumed sleeves of Her Majesty? He was greatly moved by the splendor and, reluctant to intrude on the scene, he hesitated to step forward. However, he at last quietly signaled his arrival and walked out toward them. The ladies on the veranda did not seem startled or perturbed in any way, but they all slipped back inside. When he served the Umetsubo Empress as a page at the palace, he had been permitted inside her blinds, and, for that reason, the ladies-in-waiting there were not at all put off by

his presence. After delivering his father's message, he spoke privately with the attendants Saishō and Naishi about certain private matters. He was on familiar terms with them, and the women in this residence were noble and refined—admirable qualities that reminded him of those women for whom he had harbored melancholy longings.

By the time he returned to Murasaki's residence, the shutters had been raised, and she was staring out at the flowers she had found it so difficult to abandon the night before. It was hard for her to look at them, as they were now flattened and withered, changed beyond all recognition. Genji's son sat down on the steps of the south entrance and conveyed the reply from the Umetsubo Empress: "Like a child, I was waiting fearfully, hoping you might somehow protect me from those violent winds, but at least now I have the comfort of your sympathy."

"Her Majesty is peculiarly timid," Genji remarked. "But the storm last night was certainly violent enough to have frightened any woman, so naturally she's put out and considers me inconsiderate for not looking in on her." He decided he would drop by the southwest residence presently.

Genji raised the blinds and went inside to change into a court cloak for his visit, and when he did so, his son caught a glimpse of a sleeve and realized that it had to belong to Murasaki, who was pulling a low standing curtain closer to her. He felt his heart pounding and, disconcerted by the possibility that others might hear it beating, looked off in another direction to calm down. Meanwhile, his father groomed himself in front of a mirror and spoke quietly to Murasaki.

"My son was looking especially handsome this morning. He may be an adolescent ... he's only fifteen, after all ... but he's certainly not bad-looking. Of course, I may be biased, I suppose, lost in the darkness of a parent's heart." He seemed quite taken with his own splendid looks, which somehow resisted the ravages of age, and since he wanted to make a good impression today he was taking extra care with his morning toilet.

"I always feel anxious for some reason whenever I go to meet Her Majesty," Genji continued. "On the surface she may not seem all that extraordinary, but you get the feeling with her that she is a woman of hidden depths. She may be gentle and feminine, but there is more to her than that ... a strength and steadiness."

He stepped out from behind the blinds and was about to leave when he noticed his son staring off absently into space, lost in thought, not responding right away to his father's presence. To Genji's keen eyes it looked as if something was preoccupying his son. Stepping back inside, he asked Murasaki about it.

"Yesterday, when the wind was blowing the blinds open, did my son catch sight of you? Those doors over there were left wide open."

She blushed and replied, “How could he have seen me? I didn’t hear a sound coming from that passageway.”

“Well, it’s still a bit odd,” Genji muttered as he left to go visit Umetsubo. As soon as he arrived, he went straight in behind Her Majesty’s blinds, and his son, who had been escorting him, spotted several ladies-in-waiting near the entrance to the passageway between the residences. He went over to them and began bantering playfully—though his sad preoccupation with Kumoinokari and now Murasaki made him less gregarious than usual.

After finishing his visit with Umetsubo, Genji went on to the northwest residence to see the Akashi lady. He did not see any trusty, experienced staff there, only some lower-ranking servants moving about in the garden. Her page girls were prettily decked out in *akome* robes. The latticework trellises where twining gentians and bellflowers had been specially planted for the Akashi lady had been knocked over and scattered by the wind, and the page girls were looking around for them and setting them back up. Their mistress was in a pensive mood, sitting near the veranda and absently picking at her thirteen-string koto when she heard the voice of one of Genji’s escorts alerting her of his arrival. She was dressed casually in soft, unstarched robes, and so in deference to him she quickly pulled a formal outer robe off a rack and slipped it on. Her action was a mark of her fine sensibility—altogether admirable. Genji sat lightly on the very edge of the veranda and asked her briefly how she had got on during the storm. He then rather coldly left after only a brief time. The lady seemed agitated by this and murmured the following to herself:

*Restless, you hurry off, more a passing breeze
That rustles these reeds than an autumn tempest ...
Left alone, I feel a chill, piercing sorrow*

In the west hall of the northeast residence, Tamakazura had slept late, having spent the night in wakeful terror, and she was now sitting before her mirror getting herself ready for the day. Genji told the men in his escort not to give any signal that he had arrived, and he entered silently, unannounced. With sunlight streaming into her room, the screens had been folded up and set aside, and the furnishings were in disarray. She was sitting in the light looking startlingly beautiful. Genji sat down next to her and, as usual, began making suggestive remarks—this time using the topic of the violent storm as his opening. Tamakazura always found this habit of his unpleasant.

“Your lewd persistence is upsetting me,” she told him. “Last night I wished that the wind might carry me off somewhere.” She was in a foul mood.

Genji merely laughed, amused by her complaints.

“You wanted the wind to carry you away? You’re being rash, are you not? And no doubt you have a particular destination in mind. You’ve gradually come to hate me so much that you want to leave ... well, that’s not so unreasonable of you.”

Having blurted out exactly what was on her mind, she had to smile in spite of herself, and the blushing glow that suffused her face seemed dear to him. Peeking out from under the strands of her cascading hair, her full, blushing face was as adorable as a *hōzuki* cherry.⁷ The expression around her eyes when she smiled was a bit excessive and made her look less refined. Apart from that, she was flawless.

While Genji was conversing on such close terms with Tamakazura, his son was thinking that he had long wanted to find some way to catch a glimpse of his half sister’s face. Because the standing curtain was not lined up properly with the blind in the corner of the room, he now had his chance, and he stealthily pushed open the blind a little and peeked inside. The furnishings and screens had been set aside because of the storm, and so he had an excellent view of the interior. What he saw, however, disturbed him—there was his father blatantly flirting with Tamakazura! They may have been father and daughter, but she was much too near him in age for him to be caressing her and holding her so tightly to his breast. He was afraid that he might be caught peeping like this, and yet he was mesmerized by the strangeness of the scene and continued to watch. She was partially hidden behind a pillar and turned a little to the side, and when his father pulled her over to him, her hair fell like a tumbling wave, then swayed to one side. She looked most uncomfortable and distressed by his behavior, but then she leaned against him, pliant and yielding, which suggested that their relationship, by all appearances, was an intimate one.

This is shocking. What is going on here? I know that Father is predisposed to explore every possible variation in his relationships with women, and so perhaps he’s sexually attracted to a daughter he had absolutely no hand in raising when she was a little girl. I suppose that if she does not seem like a real daughter to him, his feelings might be natural. But they’re also disturbingly repulsive.

It made him feel defiled and ashamed just to be thinking about these things. She was so seductive in appearance he wondered if he himself might not be tempted as his father was—after all, he might be her sibling, but their family relationship was somewhat distant, since they had been born of different mothers. She was not quite as perfect as Murasaki, the woman he had glimpsed for the first time yesterday, but anyone who saw her would have to smile, since her beauty was certainly of an order comparable to Murasaki’s. As he gazed at

Tamakazura, he was suddenly put in mind of mountain roses at their peak, blooming in wild profusion, covered in dew and glowing in the twilight. He was comparing her to a flower out of season, but that was the image that came to him. A flower's beauty has limits, of course; it must fade eventually, and it has ragged and frayed parts such as pistils and stamens that make it a less than ideal metaphor for a woman's lovely face.

None of the attendants came in to interrupt, and they continued to engage in their intense, whispered conversation. Then, suddenly ... *what was happening?* His father's expression turned serious and he stood up. Tamakuzura composed this verse:

*In the face of unruly winds
The maidenflower surely knows
That she will soon wither away*

He hadn't been able to hear her poem clearly, but then his father repeated the verse in a murmuring voice. He felt disgusted, but the scene was so intriguing that he wanted to watch till the end. With his father standing up to leave, however, he did not want to be discovered so close to Tamakazura's chambers, and so he withdrew. Genji replied:

*If only the maidenflower would yield
To the gentle dew that drops from the tree
She would not wither in rough autumn winds*

"Look to the example of the supple, pliant bamboo." Did his son hear Genji's poem correctly? In any case, he felt uncomfortable eavesdropping on such things.

Genji next went to the east hall to visit Hanachirusato. He entered to find a number of the older ladies-in-waiting sitting around their mistress, sewing clothes. Were they engaged in such casual activity because of the morning chill this day, or because they were not expecting any guests? The younger women were stretching cotton cloth over what looked like long, narrow linen chests. Thin cloth of an exquisite pale dried-leaf tan and a stylish plum red fabric, which the fuller had beaten to an incomparably brilliant sheen, had been taken out and spread on the floor.

"Are these for my son's formal under robes?" Genji asked. "The celebration of the garden at His Majesty's residence in the Seiryōden will likely be canceled. With the damage done by this storm, what else can they do? It seems that we are

in for a dreary autumn." *Something about these colors ...* Genji thought. *The dying of these bolts of cloth is wonderfully accomplished.* He then realized that Hanachirusato was every bit as skilled at this craft as Murasaki. The women were making court robes for him dyed with a floral design on a cloth faintly tinted with the colors of recently picked flowers.⁸ The color scheme was ideal. "You should give these to my son instead ... they would look more appropriate on a young man." Genji chatted with them for a while longer, then made his way back to his own residence.

His son was now tired and on edge from acting as an escort on these visits to women he himself had to treat deferentially. On top of everything else, he wanted to send a letter to Kumoinokari. As he fretted that the sun was already high and that it was getting late, he arrived at the chambers of his half sister, the Akashi Princess.

"She is still with Lady Murasaki," her nurses informed him. "She was frightened by the storm, and we were unable to get her up this morning."

"It was such a terrible storm. I thought I should be on watch for her, but I felt so bad for my grandmother that I stayed with her at Sanjō. How did the Doll Palace fare?"

The ladies-in-waiting all smiled. "She gets worried if there is breeze from a fan ... afraid it might blow over one of her dolls. She was anxious last night that the tempest might sweep it away entirely. The guard for this palace had to go to extraordinary lengths to protect it."

"May I have some paper," he requested. "Nothing special ... ordinary paper will do. And an inkstone?" One of the women went over to a cabinet and took a roll of paper from the shelf, placed it on the lid of an inkstone case and presented the items to him. "Oh, this is much better paper than I expected. I certainly don't want to seem presumptuous using your mistress's writing stock" He hesitated for a moment, but then considered the status of the Akashi Princess's mother in the northwest residence and concluded that he didn't really have to be all that deferential. He went ahead and composed his note on the thin, purple-tinted paper. He carefully rubbed the inkstone, examined the tip of his brush, and wrote with great deliberation, pausing now and then as if in thought. All in all, he cut a magnificent figure—unfortunately, the poem he produced was oddly formulaic, almost like an academic exercise, and thus not much to boast about:

*Even last night with the tempest raging
And dark clouds swirling madly through the skies
I might have forgotten you, but did not*

He attached his letter to a tufted stalk of thatch grass⁹ that had been blown about by the storm. The ladies told him, “The Lesser Captain of Takano¹⁰ would have made sure the paper and plant were a proper match!”

“When it comes to colors, I suppose I’m not very discriminating. So, pray tell, what plant from what field would you recommend?” He never spoke much with women he considered ignorant—after all, they had no idea what the thatch grass alluded to—and he never behaved in a casual, familiar manner around them, preferring to remain aloof and high-minded.

After writing a second letter, he gave both to an Assistant Commander of the Right Mounted Guard, who then in turn gave the letter intended for Kumoinokari to a pretty little page girl and the other one to a reliable guard who served in the escort for Genji’s son. The Assistant Commander whispered instructions to both, which made the ladies-in-waiting there extremely curious to learn what the letters were all about.

Informed that the Akashi Princess was returning, her women began scurrying about, tidying up the quarters and repositioning the curtains and screens. Normally, Genji’s son was not all that curious about such things, but he wanted to compare the flowerlike faces of Murasaki and Tamakazura with that of his little half sister, and so he deliberately withdrew behind the blind at the double doors. Crouching down and peering through an opening in the standing curtain, he was able to catch a brief passing view of the Akashi Princess from that vantage just as she entered the room and emerged from behind a nearby screen. He found the constant comings and goings of her ladies-in-waiting a little irritating because they made it hard for him to get a clear view. From what he could make out, her robe was a pale purple and her hair, which spread out like a fan at its ends, did not yet stretch completely down the length of her body. She was thin and small of stature—achingly adorable.

The last time I saw her was two years ago, when she was just six, and I’ve had only glimpses of her since. She does seem to be growing up very nicely. I can just imagine what she will be like when she is a mature woman in her prime. Murasaki seemed to me like the cherry blossom, while Tamakazura is a mountain rose. And the Akashi Princess? She’s like a cluster of wisteria blooms. Yes ... her beauty is identical to that of wisteria blooms hanging from a tall tree, swaying in a gentle breeze. What I wouldn’t give to be able to spend my life around women such as these, gazing on them from morning to night to my heart’s content. It should be possible ... they are all part of my family. But my father forbids it and keeps me at a distance. Such thoughts revealed the restless spirit of this serious young man.

When he arrived back at the chambers of Princess Ōmiya, his grandmother

was peacefully performing her religious devotions. Many noble-looking young women were attending her at that moment, but not one of them resembled in bearing, looks, or dress the splendor of the women he had seen at his father's Rokujō estate. The handsome older attendants who had followed their mistress's lead and taken vows as disciples were dressed in spare, elegant dark robes, imparting a unique, indefinably dignified atmosphere that was profoundly moving.

Tō no Chūjō, the Palace Minister, came by, and oil lamps were brought in. Princess Ōmiya talked quietly with her son. "I have not seen Kumoinokari in such a long time ... it's really too much for me." She couldn't help breaking down and crying.

"I shall send her over for a visit in the near future. She seems to be moping about some heartbreak of her own making and, I regret to say, has lost so much weight it is painful to look at her. When it comes right down to it, it's better not to have daughters. You have to fret and fuss over everything ... it's really too much trouble." The expression on his face suggested that he was still nursing that old grievance. Princess Ōmiya, sensing his coldness and hurt by his attitude, did not press him any further about her granddaughter.

"And now I have a daughter who is completely uncouth and unruly," he continued. "I'm at my wits' end and have no idea how to handle her." He smiled bitterly.

"Come now," said his mother, "if she's *your* daughter, then how in the world could she have possibly turned out like that?"

I have been told that Tō no Chūjō replied, "Well, you see, that's just it ... it's hard to watch her, she's such a mess. I'll arrange to let you have a look for yourself."

¹ Nowaki is often translated as "typhoon," specifically a typhoon that hits in the autumn between the 210th and 220th days of the year. However, the word has a broader seasonal connotation and may refer more generally to winds of autumn (or early winter) that are strong enough, as the word's characters (野分) suggest, "to part the grasses of the fields."

² Kokinshū 797 (Ono no Komachi): "The thing whose colors change unseen is the flower of the heart of people in this world!"

³ Gosenshū 64 (Anonymous): "If only I had sleeves wide enough to cover the heavens, I would not leave spring blossoms to the mercy of the wind." Also cited in the *Miotsukushi* chapter.

⁴ Kokinshū 694 (Anonymous): "Just as the bush clover in Miyagino awaits the breeze to lift the weight of dew from its delicate leaves, so I await you." Also cited in the *Kiritsubo* chapter.

⁵ Genji is speaking about the Buddhist doctrine of *mappō*, the final stage of Buddhism when the Law (the Dharma) itself will be corrupted and lost.

⁶ Maidenflower is a common translation for *ominaeshi* (女郎花), otherwise known in English as patrinia. I have stayed with the common translation because the Japanese name contains the character for “woman” and suggests a traditional appreciation of the modest beauty of the flower.

⁷ The outer petals that cover and protect the *hōzuki* cherry form a thin, reddish, paperlike structure that looks like a lantern. Thus, common names for *hōzuki* include Chinese lantern and Japanese lantern (the plant is also called bladder cherry and winter cherry).

⁸ The text does not specify which flowers were used, but the likely choices are dayflowers (for blue) and safflowers (for red or scarlet).

⁹ The grass named in the text is *karukaya* (*Anthistiria arguens*), a plant considered one of the traditional seven grasses of autumn. *Kaya* is a more general name for reeds and grasses used for thatching, and given the circumstances of the story, it is likely that the stalk was blown off a roof. The choice of this grass by Genji’s son also has poetic significance in that it alludes to *Kokin rokujō* 3785 (Anonymous): “Sober though I am, my reputation does not rise in the world ... how I long to lie with you in passionate abandon, like thatch reed blown wildly in the wind.”

¹⁰ The romantic hero of a lost tale, mentioned at the beginning of the *Hahakigi* chapter.

XXIX

Miyuki

An Imperial Excursion

GENJI CONTINUED to deliberate over the best course of action for Tamakazura, and he considered every possibility. However, his own desires, which were so distressing to her, continued to stir quietly inside him like “Silent Falls”¹ and would give him, Murasaki predicted, a reputation for irresponsibility. Tamakazura’s father, Tō no Chūjō, was an ambitious man who preferred doing things openly, who made sharp, quick judgments and couldn’t abide leaving things unfinished. Thus, if Genji followed his desires and took the young woman for himself, her father would likely accept him as a son-in-law without hesitation. The problem was that such an arrangement—having the Palace Minister as the father-in-law of the Chancellor—would engender outrage at the court and make Genji a laughingstock. And all this was irrespective of Murasaki’s reaction. He had no choice but to reconsider.

In the twelfth month of that year, Emperor Reizei decided to go on an excursion to the shrine at Ōharano in the suburbs west of the capital.² Everyone at court was excited by this event, and all of the women at Rokujō went out to view the imperial procession. It set off at around six in the morning, during the Hour of the Hare, moving south along the main central road, Suzaku Avenue, then turning west onto Gojō Avenue. Carriages filled with spectators were packed all along the route right up to the Katsura River. An imperial procession was always a grand event, but there had never been any quite like the one held that day. Princes of the blood and high-ranking officials all went to considerable lengths to caparison their horses with the finest saddles and trappings and to select men who were all roughly the same height for their escorts. These men were also decked out in the finest outfits that made them look exceptionally grand. The Ministers of the Left and Right, the Palace Minister, and other

officials of note served as part of the Emperor's escort. All of the courtiers, right down to men of the fifth and sixth ranks, wore yellow-green cloaks over layered singlets of reddish-purple. A few flakes of snow drifted down, and the cloudy sky took on an elegant glow along the way. Those princes and officials who were to participate in falconry at Ōharano had prepared striking hunting outfits, and the falconers from the Guards Headquarters were each individually dressed in their unusual, distinctive *surigoromo* robes which, with their rubbed-dye patterns,³ made for a wildly colorful spectacle.

Because the procession promised to be a rare and remarkable event, there was competition to secure choice spots from which to view it—and this competition was not limited to ladies of distinguished rank. A number of shabby carriages with fragile-looking shafts ended up with broken wheels, which made for a rather pathetic sight. Rafts had been lashed together across the Katsura River and planks laid down across them to form a temporary floating bridge, and many fine carriages were lined up along the approaches at both ends—an altogether elegant scene.

Tamakazura had come to see the spectacle. Observing the many noblemen participating in the procession, each one of them vying to outdo the others in the splendor of his appearance, it seemed to her that none of them could compare with Emperor Reizei, who looked handsome and resolute in his crimson cloak. She had come with the secret intention of seeing her father, the Palace Minister; though he was, to be sure, radiantly handsome and at the very peak of his dignity and power, he was still a commoner, which meant that he was subject to sartorial restrictions that limited his appearance. Nonetheless, she had to admit that he cut the most impressive figure among all the eminent personages and commoners in the imperial party—apart, of course, from the Emperor in his palanquin. She could hear the younger ladies around her practically swooning over this Middle Captain or that Lesser Captain or some certain gentleman-in-waiting, their words of praise gushing forth.

“Oh, isn’t he splendid-looking!”

“My, what a charming young man!”

The more Tamakazura observed, however, the more she realized that none of the men could hold a candle to His Majesty. The truly radiant splendor of his face was a mirror image of Genji’s—though perhaps His Majesty’s face seemed to her a little more dignified because she was conscious of his august position. There could not have been another man like him in the world. Up to this time she had simply assumed that all noblemen were good-looking and refined, but that assumption was based on her experience at the Rokujō estate, where she had grown accustomed to being around Genji and his son. Thus, she was overcome

with disappointment that none of the noblemen in the procession matched her expectations—indeed, they were so inferior in looks that she could scarcely believe they had the same human eyes and noses as the men she was used to seeing. Prince Sochinomiya was in the procession, as was the Major Captain of the Right, who was looking as stout and proud as ever. His uniform today bristled with martial dignity, a quiver strapped across his back, but his dark complexion and hirsute face were not at all pleasing to Tamakazura. Of course, there's no reason at all why a man's face has to resemble the powdered refinement of a lady's, and yet her youthful heart could not help but feel disdain for his suit, which she dismissed as out of the question. Then again, she was unhappily aware of her difficult situation. *How will Genji's plans for me turn out? Sending me to wait on His Majesty will be quite unpleasant, since both the Umetsubo Empress and the Kokiden Consort are already there. Under such circumstances, I can expect nothing to go according to my wishes.* Despite such misgivings, the more delightful aspects of service at the palace were tempting, especially if she could avoid the most intimate sexual duties while waiting on His Majesty.

When Emperor Reizei reached Ōharano, his palanquin halted, and the high-ranking officials enjoyed a meal inside curtained-off spaces covered with awnings. They also used these spaces to change into court dress or hunting robes, and while they were doing so, rice wine and refreshments were delivered from the Rokujō estate. Genji had earlier indicated that he intended to participate in the excursion, but a prohibition that day prevented him from traveling, and he had to miss out on the event. His Majesty selected a member of the Left Gate Guard serving in the Chamberlain's office to deliver a letter to Genji. He had a male and female pheasant taken from the hunt tied to a branch and sent with the letter. It would be much too presumptuous of me to record every little detail of the letter here, since the excursion was a formal event, but Reizei included this poem:

*Long ago we viewed the tracks of pheasants
Across the deep snows of Mount Oshio ...
Now once more I search for them, and for you*

Had there ever been an example of a Chancellor participating in an excursion to Ōharano? Genji humbly received the messenger and sent a reply:

*On the pine-covered slopes of Mount Oshio
Where lovely snow⁴ piles deep, how could pheasant tracks
match the depth of your glorious accession*

Within the depths of your glorious procession

I may have made mistakes in setting down these poems, since I can recall only vaguely what I heard at the time.

Genji sent a note to Tamakazura's quarters the following day: "Did you see His Majesty yesterday? Does the idea of going to the palace appeal to you now?" It was a very casual note written on plain white paper, but because it avoided any suggestive remarks reminding her how he felt, Tamakazura was pleased. She smiled and asked aloud, "What could he be referring to in speaking of His Majesty?" It would have been presumptuous for her to show interest in going into the Emperor's service, but she marveled all the same at how well Genji had gauged her feelings. So she sent a reply:

"Yesterday ..."

*It was a hazy morning and yet amidst
Lovely snow and a glorious procession
I observed a radiant light in the sky*

"Nothing seems clear to me yet."

Genji showed the reply to Murasaki.

"I've tried encouraging her to go into Reizei's service," he remarked, "but there are several complications. For one thing, the Umetsubo Empress resides here as well, and since she is my adopted daughter, the situation could prove awkward. And then there's Tō no Chūjō. When he finds out about this, he is going to be torn because his other daughter, the Kokiden Consort, is still in attendance at the palace. Those considerations aside, now that the young lady has had a glimpse of His Majesty, I doubt if she would be all that reluctant to serve him intimately ... of course, she cannot be too aloof."

"Really, how shameful of you for assuming that she feels that way," Murasaki responded with a smile. "No matter how attractive His Majesty may be to her, it would be far too presumptuous to dream on her own of going to the palace."

"Be honest, now," Genji answered, "if you were in her position and saw him, you would be just as smitten and singing his praises as well." He sent another note to Tamakazura:

*With that eternal glory in its crimson radiance
Illuminating all the heavens, how is it your eyes
Were clouded amidst the lovely snow and the procession*

"You really must decide ..." he added, as he continued encouraging her.

Whatever was decided—marrying one of her suitors or going to the palace—Genji first had to take care of the ceremonial donning of her train. In his mind, every ceremony, even those he did not consider all that important, had to be conducted in a properly solemn, magnificent manner; because he was thinking of using this ceremony as the occasion to finally tell Tō no Chūjō about Tamakazura, he was anxious to make it especially impressive. To that end, he put a great deal of effort to ensure that she had the finest, most intricately wrought furnishings.

He decided to schedule the event in the second month of the following year. Many things had to be considered.

Even a woman who has achieved high repute in society and reached an age and status that requires her family name to be announced when she is presented at a shrine does not necessarily have to formally announce herself to her family's ancestral gods—at least not while she is still being treated as a daughter within the household. But this case is ambiguous. Her father is a Fujiwara, while I am a Minamoto ... if she agrees to serve the Emperor, as I suggest, it would offend the gods at the Fujiwara ancestral shrine at Kasuga to present her at the palace as a Minamoto. The truth about her is going to come out anyway, so if I don't announce her I would be left with a deplorable reputation as a duplicitous schemer. If she were of lower status, it would be easy to change her name, as is the modern custom; but the bond between parent and child is everlasting, and, all things being equal, I must take the initiative myself and tell Tō no Chūjō.

Having made his decision, Genji sent a letter to Tō no Chūjō offering him the honor of tying the waist cords for the train at the ceremony. He declined, however, on the grounds that this was not a propitious time for him to take on such a role—his mother, Princess Ōmiya, had been ailing since the previous winter and was not improving. He had to be vigilant. The timing of the ceremony was bad for Genji's son as well, since he was constantly going to Sanjō and devotedly looking after his grandmother.

Genji was torn, wondering what he should do. *The world is an uncertain place, and if Princess Ōmiya were to pass away, it would be deeply sinful of Tamakazura to fail to observe the prescribed five months of mourning as if she had no connection to her grandmother. I must reveal her identity while Princess Ōmiya is alive.* And with that, he set off to the Sanjō residence to pay his respects.

Because of his current status as Chancellor, going out even on a private matter took on the trappings of an imperial procession. It was now a rare event for Princess Ōmiya to meet him, and when she saw him after such a long absence,

she couldn't help feeling he was more radiant than ever, that he was a being not of this world. She was so honored and happy by this visit that her condition seemed to improve, and she rose from her sickbed to receive him. She looked frail and weak as she leaned on her armrest, but she spoke with great energy about all sorts of topics.

"You don't appear to be as ill as I've heard ... my son has been telling me how alarmed he is about your condition, and so I've been concerned as well, wondering how you were getting along. I mainly stay at my estate and don't attend the palace much these days except for special occasions. Since I no longer serve His Majesty, court duties are quite beyond my capabilities, and I have retired from them. I know that there are examples, both past and present, of men older than I who continue to serve the state as they go hobbling about, their backs bent with age ... but for some strange reason, quite apart from my natural tendency to be a little slow about things, the world strikes me as too tiresome to deal with any more."

"I have been suffering the infirmities of old age for several months, and at the beginning of this year I was feeling forlorn, knowing I have very little time left to me and that I might not get the chance to see you and talk with you again. But your visit today makes me feel as though my life has been extended a little. I have reached an age where I no longer have any regrets. People find it painful to look upon those who linger in the world after their loved ones have passed away, and so I feel the urgency of preparing to leave this life sooner rather than later. Yet I remain anxious about your son, the Middle Captain. He has been so wonderfully kind, looking after me with astonishing devotion, but his heartaches keep me attached to this world and so I continue to live on." She looked a little foolish blubbering like this, her voice quavering, but because she had just cause for her tears, Genji was touched.

The two of them talked about events and people past and present until finally Genji said, "I presume your son, the Palace Minister, never lets a day go by without visiting you. I'd be extremely delighted if I could meet him on this occasion. I need to speak with him about a pressing matter, but given my current circumstances it has been difficult to find an appropriate opportunity to talk, and I'm rather anxious about this."

"Perhaps he has been busy with affairs of state ... or perhaps his sense of filial duty is not really that deep. Whatever the reason, all I know is that he doesn't come here so often. What do you wish to say to him? Do you want to talk with him about the incident that has made your son so visibly resentful? I've spoken to my own son about it and told him I don't know how all these rumors got started, but now that gossip is spreading, there's no way to stop it, no matter how

distasteful it may be. The more the situation continues on like this, the more foolish he looks. But, you know Tō no Chūjō ... he's so stubborn, he won't take back anything he's said or done and he simply won't admit that what I'm saying is true."

Genji smiled at her assumption that he wanted to speak to Tō no Chūjō concerning the relationship between their children.

"I had heard that since what's done is done, he might give up his opposition and let them be together, and so I casually mentioned the possibility of their marriage. But after he harshly accused my son and ignored my request, I regretted having raised the subject with him and felt that I may have gone too far in interceding. Muddy waters will always eventually settle and clear, and I believed this dispute would be resolved and things would return to where they once were. Alas, it is the way of the world that even though one expects things to clear up, it is more difficult for them to do so when the waters are turbid all the way to the bottom. In all cases, the longer a resolution is put off, the easier it is for things to fall apart. I feel sorry for him to hear about all of this.

"Still, that situation is not in fact what I want to discuss with him. I have mistakenly taken charge of a young woman who really should be your son's responsibility. I discovered her unintentionally, but at the time I found her, she and her attendants did not disabuse me of my misapprehension. Because I did not go out of my way to question her background—after all, I have so few children of my own—I set aside my doubts over her claim that she's related to me. I have not been treating her in any way as a close member of the family, but after she had been with me for some time, a request came from the Emperor, who somehow or other heard reports about her. His Majesty sent me a message, saying, 'I have no one currently serving as my Principal Handmaid, and as a result the administration of the staff is in total disarray. My attendants cannot be relied upon to perform public functions, and because everything ends up so confused, nothing is handled properly. Two elderly Assistant Handmaids are currently serving at the palace, and a number of women who might be suitable as Principal Handmaid have expressed an interest in the appointment. Unfortunately, none of them completely matches my request that the choice be someone of high rank and proper qualifications. It was customary in the past to appoint a woman from a noble household of impeccable reputation who is not merely concerned with her own family's fortunes. If a candidate of exceptional talent and wisdom cannot be found, then a woman who has served for many years may be promoted to the position, but there is currently no one on the staff with the requisite qualifications. Thus, I am looking more broadly in court society to find a woman of good repute.'

"This is what His Majesty conveyed to me privately, and so what objections could Tō no Chūjō have to sending the young woman to the palace? Serving an Emperor is an aspiration for women of both high and low status and a high honor. Some people look down on the public responsibilities of the Handmaid's office as unappealing, since they may include intimate relations with the sovereign, but I wonder why that should necessarily be so? His Majesty reminded me that a woman's disposition was the crucial factor in making the choice, and so in response to his command, I began checking more deeply into the young woman's age and background and discovered that she was the daughter that Tō no Chūjō had been searching for all these years. Thus, I have been wanting to have a frank discussion with him about how to handle her future, but apart from official state events, I have had no chance to meet with him recently. I did come up with a plan that would let me reveal all of this to him and sent a letter asking him to accept the honor of tying the waist cords at her upcoming ceremony. However, he declined my request, citing concerns over your health as his excuse. Thinking the moment was not propitious, as he said, I put the ceremony off; but now that I see that you are doing better, I feel this is the time to make a decision. Please send him a note conveying my request to meet."

"How ... how can this be?" Princess Ōmiya was incredulous. "From what I've heard, my son has willingly taken in a number of young women who have come forth claiming to be his child, but how could it possibly happen that the young woman you're talking about should have mistakenly believed she was your daughter? Is it possible that, years ago, she heard you were her father?"

"There's an explanation for all this," Genji responded, "and Tō no Chūjō will no doubt want to hear all the details for himself. Because the situation involves an affair with someone of no consequence, exposing it would stir noisome gossip at the court, which is why I have never mentioned this even to my son ... and I don't want this to get out to anyone else." He secured a pledge of silence from her.

Tō no Chūjō was surprised to learn that Genji was at his mother's Sanjō residence. "How can they properly receive a guest as exalted as the Chancellor at a place that has fallen into obscurity and has such a small staff? They probably have no one to look after his escort or to prepare a space for him. I assume that his son is with him." He dispatched his own sons and some trusted courtiers to help his mother. "Make sure that wine and refreshments are served. I really should go as well, but that would cause a fuss."

Just as he was giving his orders, a letter from Princess Ōmiya arrived: "The Chancellor has graciously called on me from his Rokujō estate, but I feel

ashamed that the atmosphere here seems deserted and must look rather pathetic. Please come over as well ... though do so discreetly, and be sure not to mention this letter as your reason for visiting. Apparently, he has something he wishes to discuss with you."

What does he want to talk about? Tō no Chūjō wondered. His son's complaints about my handling of Kumoinokari? My mother doesn't have many years left, and she has been urging some sort of reconciliation. How could I refuse if Genji himself were to make a clear, humble plea for his son. The young man's attitude is irritating ... he's so coldly arrogant, acting as if he has no interest in my daughter anymore. But, given the right moment, I would yield and let the two of them be together on the pretext that I'm merely acceding to Genji's request.

Just then, however, it occurred to him that perhaps his own mother and Genji had conspired to make this appeal, which would be impossible to refuse. This thought gave him pause as he asked himself why he was the one who would have to yield, as he always did, and his competitive instincts took control. *In any case, my mother has asked me to visit, and Genji is waiting for me, so I have to show deference to both of them. I must go and at least find out what they want.* Though he took extra care in dressing and grooming himself, he did not make a big show of his escort, which was rather small. He then quietly made his way to his mother's residence.

He looked at once grandly solemn and dashing when he arrived with his sons and a few select noblemen in tow. Tall and slender, weight in perfect proportion to height, calm and dignified, everything about him—his features, his stride—created a presence that announced to all that here indeed was a Minister. His dark purple-red trousers, cinched at his ankles, and his layered robes in the cherry-blossom style of white lined with red all trailed out behind him. His unhurried movements gave off a special brilliance.

Genji wore a white Chinese-style cloak in a patterned weave lined with red over layered robes of plum red lined with a darker shade of the same color. He was extraordinarily handsome, his figure like that of an imperial prince at leisure; but while Genji's innate radiance was superior to all other men, Tō no Chūjō's appearance this day was extraordinary and, on the surface at least, incomparable in dignity and splendor.

The presence of the Palace Minister's sons made for a remarkable-looking family gathering. His half brothers—the Fujiwara Counselor and the Master of the Crown Prince's Household Staff—had accompanied him as well, and they, like his sons, were men of high reputation and achievement. He had chosen ten or so suitable men for his escort—distinguished courtiers of upstanding character

and striking appearance: among them the Head Chamberlain, a Chamberlain of the fifth rank, a Middle and Lesser Captain of the Palace Guard, and a Controller in the Council of State. Together with a number of other lower-ranking retainers, they were a solemnly impressive escort. As the winecups went around and everyone grew pleasantly inebriated, each of the men toasted Princess Ōmiya's magnificence and glorious destiny as the mother of the Palace Minister and the mother-in-law of the Chancellor.

A long time had passed since Tō no Chūjō had last seen Genji, and meeting him now brought back memories of events long ago. They had grown apart, to be sure, and his competitive nature had led him to vie with Genji over even trivial matters, but by speaking face-to-face like this and mutually reminiscing about shared events that had once moved them both, the old sense of closeness returned. They passed the day in conversation about things past and present, and Tō no Chūjō plied his guest with wine.

"It was bad of me not to be here when you called on my mother. However, I was reluctant to intrude on you, since I had not been summoned. On the other hand, had I let your visit pass without acknowledging it, I would have incurred greater censure from you."

"I'm the one who deserves censure. I have done much to give you offense," Genji replied, suggesting that he was about to open up to his friend.

Tō no Chūjō naturally assumed that Genji was about to broach the subject of the relationship between his son and Kumoinokari, and because he was aware of how troublesome this matter had become, he assumed a humble, deferential posture.

"In the old days," Genji began, "nothing came between us whenever we discussed public and private affairs, matters great and small. We were serving my father like two birds flying wing-to-wing.⁵ Since that time, things have occurred between us that were not as I wanted or intended, but at least those were private in nature, and in general my feelings toward you remain unchanged. I realize that your exalted status limits your time and activities and that you must behave with the dignity and propriety your office demands, but as I grow older, I feel increasingly nostalgic for the past. Because I'm able to meet you so very rarely nowadays, I find myself constantly resenting the distance that has opened up between us and, insofar as we are intimate friends, would hope that you might set aside the pomp and power of your position and come visit me."

"As you say, we were very close in the past. I was granted the privilege of being in your presence with no barriers between us and on such familiar terms that I fear I may have been a nuisance. When we reached the rank that put us into service at the palace, I never considered myself on the same level as you ...

as a companion flying wing-to-wing. Instead, I could only be grateful for the support you gave me, which raised an insignificant man like me to my current post and allowed me to serve His Majesty. Even so, as you said, there have been many things that have naturally strained the bonds of our friendship as we have grown older.” Tō no Chūjō spoke with respect and humility.

Genji took this very moment to discreetly broach the subject of Tamakazura. After hearing the details of the story, Tō no Chūjō wept.

“So sad and touching ... and so remarkable. Ever since she and her mother disappeared, I have been searching for them, wondering what happened, unable to assuage my grief. There was that one occasion—you remember, don’t you?—when I felt I had to unburden my heart and confide in you. Now that I have achieved some small station in life and am obliged to gather my family around me, some of my children, who were born to mothers of lowly status, have come wandering in from all over ... one daughter in particular is dim-witted and difficult to even look at. But all that aside, there are times when I think lovingly of all of them; when I do, the first child I think of is this daughter of my lost love.”

At the mention of that rainy night long ago, the two men recalled how they had shared intimate secrets of their youthful affairs and made their judgments of women. As those memories elicited both tears and laughter, the two of them set aside all formalities. It was late now, and so they prepared to make their way back to their respective villas.

“Meeting you like this,” Genji said to Princess Ōmiya, “and talking about the distant past makes me feel so nostalgic that I don’t want to leave.” In a sentimental mood, he was blubbering now—perhaps the effects of all the wine he had drunk.

Princess Ōmiya couldn’t help thinking about her late daughter, how she was not able to witness the radiant looks and glorious fortunes of her husband. Lamenting her loss and disappointment, a torrent of tears poured forth. Truly the nun’s robes⁶ she wore were, like a fisherwoman’s robes, drenched in salty water.

Genji did not use this occasion to bring up his son’s complaints, for he had gathered that his friend was not yet prepared to give in and that to bring up the topic now might cause bad feelings. As for Tō no Chūjō, it was difficult for him to discuss the situation without some indication of Genji’s intentions, and so the two of them continued to feel constrained.

“I really should escort you back to Rokujō,” Tō no Chūjō said, “but my sudden arrival might prove to be too much of a bother for your household. In humble gratitude for your visit today, I shall make a special visit to you.” Since Princess Ōmiya’s condition seemed to have improved, Genji took him at his

word and made him promise that he would, without fail, attend the ceremony for Tamakazura.

Both men were in high spirits as they left amidst the noise and pomp that accompanied their parties. Some of the escorts for the Palace Minister's sons noted the atmosphere.

"Did something happen here tonight?"

"They haven't met in a long time, but they seem to be in an excellent mood."

"Did the Chancellor cede more powers to our lord?"

They tried to guess what took place, but they were all off the mark, since what was discussed went beyond their wildest imaginings.

Tō no Chūjō felt suspicious and uneasy about this sudden turn of events. *It would be awkward to abruptly assume the role of father*, he thought. *Considering the reason Genji was looking for her in the first place, I very much doubt that his relationship with her has not been intimate. Of course, he can't openly treat her as his lover—he has to be mindful of his more distinguished women, after all. Perhaps he opened up about this now because he's worried about the problems that would arise if gossip spread.* He was troubled by such thoughts.

Still, for all that, how damaging would it be to her if they have had an affair? Why would her reputation be any less if I were to insist that she remain with him as one of his wives? In fact, such an arrangement might be preferable to sending her to the palace—the option that Genji is considering. After all, it would be unfortunate if the appearance of a new rival at court added to my daughter's troubles. He considered all contingencies, but whatever was to be decided, he couldn't very well go against the stated wishes of the Chancellor, whose decision it was to make.

All of these things were discussed at the beginning of the second month. The sixteenth day of that month marked the start of the Festival of the Equinox and, as it turned out, the days of the festival happened to be extremely auspicious according to the yin-yang masters at the court. Since the days before and after the festival period were not auspicious and Princess Ōmiya's condition had improved a little, Genji hurried with preparations for Tamakazura's ceremony. He continued to call on her at her quarters. Because he told her in detail what he had said to Tō no Chūjō and explained to her all she would need to know when she finally met her father, she now felt grateful to him for his extraordinary kindness, which was more than most fathers would have shown. At the same time, she was elated that her real father was recognizing her.

Following Genji's meeting with Tō no Chūjō, he privately told his son the truth about Tamakazura. *What an incredible story! So, that's what it was all*

about, the young gentleman thought, piecing together the various things he had observed. He was now recalling the lovely figure of Tamakazura with greater yearning than he felt for Kumoinokari, who had caused him so much suffering, and he felt like an utter fool for failing to figure out the truth sooner. In the end, however, he had second thoughts and concluded that it would be improper of him to shift his affections toward Tamakazura. He was genuinely serious and honorable.

Princess Ōmiya discreetly sent a message to Tamakazura on the day of the ceremony. Although she had had little advance notice of the event, she had managed to arrange a set of comb boxes and other presents, to which she attached a letter:

Having taken vows as a nun, it is not altogether appropriate for me to communicate with you on this day, and so I remain shut away in my residence. In spite of this impropriety I might perhaps be forgiven for hoping that you will be moved by the example of my long life. I was deeply touched to learn about the circumstances of your life ... but I hesitate to speak of such matters. Since I do not want to give offense, I shall leave the decision to reply entirely up to you.

*It does not matter whose child you are
I will hold on to and cherish you
Like a precious comb box with two lids*

The style of the calligraphy was old-fashioned and the writing showed the effects of her trembling hands. Genji happened to be in Tamakazura's quarter overseeing the details of the preparations for the ceremony when the letter and presents arrived. He looked them over.

"Her style is from an earlier age, but the hand itself ... what a pity! She was once a gifted calligrapher, but her writing has deteriorated as she has aged. See how the brushstrokes waver unevenly." He read the letter over several times. "She's certainly attached to her *precious comb box*, isn't she? She manages to work in a play on those words in just about every syllable of her poem, which is no mean feat." He smiled wryly to himself.

The Umetsubo Empress sent a unique, exquisite white train, a Chinese-style jacket, robes, and hair ornaments, all to be worn by Tamakazura during the ceremony. She also sent the customary incense jars as well as incense from China that gave off an intriguingly deep, rich fragrance. The other women at the Rokujō estate also provided items of clothing, each one reflecting the individual

taste of the sender, and they sent presents of combs, fans and the like to Tamakazura's ladies-in-waiting. Everyone put a great deal of effort into the selection of gifts, competing with each other to demonstrate their refinement, and the result was a remarkable array of items, all equally elegant.

The Hitachi Princess and the nun who had been his lady of the molted cicada shell remained in the east annex at Nijō. They heard about the bustling activities at the Rokujō villa, but since their circumstances did not require them to send any formal congratulations, they were to simply let the occasion pass. The Hitachi Princess, however, had always been peculiarly obsessive when it came to matters of protocol; her sensibility had been nurtured according to standards of an earlier age, and she could not ignore a formal occasion like this, standing aside like a complete stranger and offering no assistance when everyone was so busy. So she sent presents that were selected strictly according to form. Certainly her intentions were admirable, but her gifts included a single long robe in a dull, blue-tinged gray—rather more suitable for a wake than an auspicious event—and a set of lined trousers in some sort of dark chestnut color that evidently people in ancient times found pleasing. She also sent a formal gown in a fine checkerboard pattern that was mismatched in color with the other items and useless for the ceremony. All of these items had been neatly wrapped and placed in a fine clothing chest. She had attached a note as well: "Since I am not worthy enough to be recognized by you, I feel hesitant to write. However, I also find it difficult to stand aside and do nothing on this occasion. My gifts are paltry, but perhaps you might consider presenting them to your attendants?" The tone of the letter was gentle and informal.

Genji blushed when he saw it, dismissing it as just another faux pas typical of his Princess Safflower.

"She is so weirdly old-fashioned. Someone as introverted as she would be better off withdrawing from the world and remaining in quiet seclusion. But no, here she goes, embarrassing me again ... oh well, you must reply to her. She'll be miserable if you don't. I remember how beloved she was to her father, Prince Hitachi, and so it makes me feel bad whenever anyone looks down upon her." He noticed that she had attached one of her mannered poems to the sleeve of the formal robe:

*O, how I resent my fate
Knowing that my Chinese robes
Will never lie next to you*

A lover's complaint instead of a congratulatory verse ... he was exasperated. The

style of the calligraphy was out of date, her characters were unbelievably small and cramped, and her writing was so stiff and angular that the words seemed to be practically chiseled into the paper. For all his irritation, however, he could not help but be amused.

“Composing this must have been a trying experience for her. She has fewer women to help her with this sort of thing now than she had in the past, and I imagine it was a struggle to manage this.” His voice had a tone of pity. “You are so frantically busy I shall write the reply for you.” In a fit of pique he composed the following:

*O Chinese robes, again I say
O Chinese robes, my Chinese robes
Over and over, Chinese robes*

“Here, take a look,” he said, showing his reply to Tamakazura. “As you will see, I’ve written this with great sincerity, since this is a favorite phrase she is always trotting out.”

Tamakazura laughed, her face beautiful and lambent, then chastised Genji. “I feel sorry her ... you’re wicked to make fun at her expense!”

I seem to be dwelling on too many frivolous things.

Tō no Chūjō had been reluctant to attend the ceremony at first, but after he listened in disbelief to the story of his long-lost daughter, he was anxious to meet her as soon as possible and arrived a little early on the appointed day. The event was spectacular, far surpassing what would normally be expected of such an occasion. It was obvious that Genji had gone out of his way to make this day special. Tō no Chūjō, knowing he was the real father, felt humbled and grateful, and yet it hardly seemed credible that Genji would go to so much trouble for a woman who was not his daughter.

At ten in the evening, as they entered the Hour of the Boar, Tō no Chūjō went inside Tamakazura’s blinds to tie the waist cords. The customary furnishings had been arranged, but the setting inside the blinds was remarkable. Food and drinks were served, the lamps were trimmed so that the rooms were a little brighter than usual, and the host looked after everyone in a most charming manner. Tō no Chūjō was extremely eager to see his daughter’s face, though he knew it was too soon to do so. When it came time for him to tie the cords, she remained hidden behind a ceremonial fan, and he looked as if he could barely contain himself.

Genji spoke to him.

“I do not intend to say anything this evening about what happened in the past, and it would be best at this stage to keep the truth about your daughter from the

others. Just keep up appearances in front of those who do not know, and simply perform the ceremony in the normal manner.”

“I will do as you say … but in that case, I’m not sure that I’ll have anything to talk about.” When the winecup was offered to him, he added, “I am humbled and grateful beyond measure for your kindness and generosity, the likes of which are unparalleled in this world. Yet I must also express my resentment at your having kept her hidden from me until now.” He turned toward Tamakazura.

*How cruel that you hid yourself till you donned this train
Like some fisherwoman on a rocky shore, concealed
Until she goes out and dives for seaweed in the bay⁷*

He could no longer hold back his tears.

Tamakazura, daunted by the presence of two such eminent noblemen, was unable to reply. Genji composed a response for her:

*I washed up here with no support
Drifting into shore like seaweed
That no fishermen would gather*

“Your complaint is not fair.”

“Yes, you are quite right,” Tō no Chūjō admitted, and with no way to respond further, he withdrew.

The whole court was in attendance—everyone from princes down to gentlemen of lower rank. The crowd included a large number of Tamakazura’s suitors, who envied the Palace Minister’s prolonged stay behind her blinds. His sons, Kashiwagi and Kōbai, now had a rough sense of what was happening, and their secret yearnings for Tamakazura brought them both joy and pain.

“It’s a good thing that I never confessed my feelings about her to anyone,” Kōbai whispered.

“It appears that the Chancellor’s proclivities tend—how shall I say?—toward the eccentric.”

“I imagine that he wants her to follow the same path as the Umetsubo Empress.”

Overhearing comments such as these, Genji turned to Tō no Chūjō and advised him as follows: “We must continue to take extra precautions for a while longer to make sure she does not become a target of criticism at the court. People of a lower station in life do not have to worry so much about their reputations and can get away with certain things regardless. You and I, on the other hand,

stand to have our reputations besmirched if malicious gossip about this situation were to start circulating. The best course, I think, is for us to introduce her slowly and let people get used to her presence in order to avoid such difficulties.”

“I shall follow your lead scrupulously,” Tō no Chūjō assured him. “You have looked after her so well, keeping her hidden and protected while sparing me the trouble of educating her, which you have done so wonderfully . . . all of this indicates that you must share a strong bond with her from a previous existence.”

The gifts and emoluments for Tō no Chūjō and for the guests were prescribed by custom, according to the respective rank of each recipient, but Genji added to them so that they were truly peerless. He remained mindful of Princess Ōmiya’s condition, however, and chose not to indulge in any lavish musical diversions.

Prince Sochinomiya used the ceremony as an opportunity to advance his courtship of Tamakazura.

“Now that this is out of the way,” he said to Genji, “there are no longer any obstacles that you can use as an excuse to put me off.”

“I have already declined an expression of interest in her from His Majesty,” Genji explained, “but he is likely to ask me again, and so I must defer all requests for her until after I deal with the request that she go into service at the palace.”

Tō no Chūjō had caught the briefest glimpse of his daughter, and he wanted to get a clearer look at her face. After all, Genji would not treat her as extravagantly as this if he had detected any imperfections in her. The thought made him more anxious than ever to see her. He now understood the diviner’s interpretation of his dream. It really was true that someone had been looking after a long-lost daughter of his. The only person in whom he confided about this situation—including the possibility that Tamakazura might go to the palace—was his daughter, the Kokiden Consort.

Genji did his best to keep everything private so that the story would not reach the ears of people at court until a later time, but gossip naturally has a way of getting around, and it wasn’t long before rumors leaked and gradually made their way to the ears of Tō no Chūjō’s other long-lost daughter, the lady from Ōmi. As soon as she heard, she rushed over to see her sister, the Consort. As it happened, Kashiwagi and Kōbai were in attendance at that moment.

“It seems that Father has gained another daughter,” the lady from Ōmi huffed. “Ahh, how wonderful for him. I wonder what she’s like . . . she must be special to have two important men looking after her. If you ask me, her mother was no more distinguished than mine.” The Consort found her blunt, uncouth words offensive and did not respond to her.

Kashiwagi replied, “They have their reasons for looking after her so attentively. In any case, you have no reason to go blurting out something someone else said. What if an attendant who is fond of spreading rumors were to overhear your outburst!”

“Oh, don’t be silly! Everyone has heard about this! She’s to be the Principal Handmaid. And here I jumped at the chance to serve my mistress, doing things that no normal lady-in-waiting would do, all in hopes of receiving the same kind of support. Yet even my own sister treats me harshly!” As she was venting her resentments, they all smiled.

“Principal Handmaid, you say?” Kashiwagi retorted. “Why, I may as well have hoped for that position myself, for all the good it would do. You’re aspiring to something for which you are not properly qualified.”

His words angered her.

“I know I don’t belong in your august company. And you, *Captain Kashiwagi* ... you’re the worst of the lot. You go meddling in other people’s lives to find me and bring me here, then you laugh at me and treat me with scorn. A noble house indeed—one no normal person would dare set foot in! You’re all horrible ... just horrible!”

She retreated, still in a seated posture as she slid to the back of the room, and glared at them from a distance. In spite of her bluntness, she was not at all detestable, but her sidelong glances did give the impression that she was furious. Kashiwagi agreed with her that he had made a mistake, and so he assumed a more serious expression.

“Your mistress would never look down on anyone who serves her as diligently as you,” Kōbai said, smiling and trying to calm the waters. “Please control your emotions. The expression on your face could easily pulverize boulders. The time will come when your aspirations are realized.”

“Yes ... if you’re going to smash boulders,” Kashiwagi added, “then please confine yourself to Amaterasu’s rocky cave.”⁸

He withdrew, and she began to sob and cry. “Even my own brother despises me. If it weren’t for my mistress’s kind heart, I wouldn’t be allowed to attend her at all.”

It was true: she did put everything she had into serving the Consort, running around eagerly, cheerfully doing all sorts of duties that not even lower-ranking servants and page girls would perform. Even so, when the lady from Ōmi pleaded for help, saying, “Please recommend me for Principal Handmaid,” the Consort was taken aback, shocked that her sister could even be contemplating such a thing. She said nothing.

When Tō no Chūjō heard about her wild dreams, he laughed merrily. One day

when he was visiting the quarters of the Consort's ladies-in-waiting, he took the opportunity to summon her. "Where can she be, my lady of Ōmi? Come hither!"

"Over here," she replied, appearing rather too energetically before her father.

"Well now," he began, "you seem to be working conscientiously and would be a good fit for any public position. Why didn't you speak to me sooner about your desire to be the Principal Handmaid?" He was speaking in such a serious tone of voice that she was overjoyed.

"I've been wanting to ask you about it, but here I was, really counting on my mistress to convey my wishes to you, when I heard that some other lady is to be given the post. Now I feel like someone who made a fortune only to find out it was all just a dream ... it's like I have to put my hand on my chest to keep my disappointment under control." As always, she was speaking at breakneck speed.

Careful not to laugh, Tō no Chūjō replied, "It's this peculiar habit of yours of not saying clearly what's on your mind. Had you told me what you wanted, I would have recommended you to His Majesty before anyone else. The Chancellor's daughter is an exceptional young woman, but if I were to sincerely plead your case, I'm sure His Majesty might reconsider. You must compose a petition at once ... make sure that you employ all of your most florid rhetorical skills. Since you are a woman, you can't be expected to write the petition in Chinese, which is what is normally called for in a case like this ... but the petition *must* be formal. May I suggest you write it as a long poem?⁹ Once he reads such an elegant work, His Majesty will not likely disregard your request, since he is especially gracious and kind." He was very skilled at leading her on in this way, but he was not acting like a good father at all.

"I'm not very good at court poetry,¹⁰ but I'll do my very best. If you could speak with His Majesty officially, I will follow up with a few words of my own, and I'm sure he will then bestow his gracious favor on me." She was rubbing her hands together in anticipation as she spoke. Some attendants were listening to them from behind a screen, and they thought they were about to die. Unable to stifle their mirth, they had to slip outside to release their pent-up laughter.

Tō no Chūjō used her for his own amusement, and later merely laughed the whole thing off. "Whenever I'm feeling upset, I just look at my lady from Ōmi, and all is right with the world."

Some people at court, however, were heard to disapprove of his behavior. "It's only because the Palace Minister himself is embarrassed that he treats her the way he does."

¹ The name Silent Falls (*Otonashi no Taki*) is written with characters that mean “no sound” (音無). Some early commentaries give several possibilities for the location of this waterfall, but no satisfactory identification has been made.

² Murasaki Shikibu very likely based her account of this event on the historical excursion to Ōharano by Emperor Daigo in the twelfth month of 928.

³ This technique involves rubbing dyes derived from various plants directly onto cloth.

⁴ The poem plays on the word *miyuki*, which can mean either “imperial excursion” (or “progress”) or “lovely snow.” This wordplay is carried on in the two poems that follow below.

⁵ Genji’s comparison of their relationship to birds flying wing-to-wing loosely echoes a poem *Tō no Chūjo* composed about their friendship when Genji was in exile in Suma.

⁶ The word for “nun’s robes,” *amagoromo*, is a homonym for “fisherman’s / fisherwoman’s robes.”

⁷ There are a series of associative wordplays in this poem: *urameshiya* (“how bitter it is / how I resent”) and *ura* (“bay”); *mo* (“seaweed” and “train”); and *kazuku* (“to put on” and “to dive”).

⁸ Kashiwagi is alluding to the famous myth of the dispute between the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu, and her wild younger brother, Susano-o. After suffering several outrages at her brother’s hands, Amaterasu withdraws to the Celestial Rock Cave, plunging the world into darkness.

⁹ A long poem (*nagauta* or *chōka*) is a work of indeterminate length that rhythmically alternates between phrases of five and seven syllables, usually ending with two phrases of seven syllables each. The form does not have a set syllable pattern like the short poem (the *tanka* or *waka* that follows the pattern of 5-7-5-7-7 syllables), which is the dominant form that appears throughout the narrative.

¹⁰ The word I have rendered as “court poetry” is *Yamatouta*. It suggests that the lady from Ōmi is self-conscious about her regional dialect, since Yamato refers to the province of the imperial household (and, by extension, to all of Japan). However, since the Yamato dialect is the dialect of the court and thus the cultural standard, I have translated it as “court poetry” to stress the lady’s outsider status.

XXX

Fujibakama

Mistflowers¹

WITH BOTH Genji and Tō no Chūjō pressing her to go into service at the palace, Tamakazura, who was mature enough to understand the treacherous situation she would be facing, was privately struggling with the decision, her mind torn and unsettled by all sorts of considerations as she wondered what the future would bring. She knew that she could never let her guard down with any man while serving Emperor Reizei, not even with Genji, whom she thought of as her father, for if she engaged in an improperly intimate relationship both the Umetsubo Empress and the Kokiden Consort would be estranged from her. Given her precarious circumstances, she would then find herself in an untenable position with no one to turn to for support. After all, neither Genji nor her real father had such a deep attachment to her that they would protect her if something untoward occurred; and since her reputation at the court was not yet established, people would gossip, saying that her behavior was not normal, while spiteful women, of which there were many at court, would look down on her and treat her as an object of scorn.

My present circumstances aren't all that terrible, but Genji's affections for me are disturbing and unpleasant, she fretted. There must be some way I can get away from him and dispel the perception that we're having an affair. My real father is deferring to Genji's plans and has given no clear indication that he intends to openly acknowledge me. Thus, no matter what happens—going to the palace or staying here at the Rokujō estate—I will be troubled by the appearance of engaging in a sordid sexual relationship and end up the target of malicious rumors.

She had expected that once her real father was informed of her existence, Genji would be more circumspect in his behavior; but to her dismay, he seemed

to feel that nothing was holding him back any longer and was increasingly forward with her—advances that she had to endure in secret.

She had no mother, no female relative with whom she could talk and unburden her heart, or at the very least give some small hint of what she was going through. And it was of course impossible to discuss such matters with Genji or with her father, who were so glorious and powerful that she felt small and daunted in their presence. Lost in melancholy thoughts about her strange fate, so unlike that of any other woman, she presented a stunningly beautiful sight as she sat on the edge of her veranda gazing up at the sad, lonely patterns of the autumnal sky of the eighth month.

She was dressed in attractive mourning robes of pale gray—not a color she normally wore, but one that set off her lovely features to good advantage. Her beauty brought a smile to those ladies-in-waiting who happened to be in attendance at that moment. Just then, Genji's son, who had recently been promoted to Consultant in the Council of State, arrived wearing mourning robes of a slightly darker gray, symbolizing his close relationship with his late grandmother, Princess Ōmiya. The pendant of his cap, which normally would have hung down his back, had been curled up in a loop to honor her passing. The outfit set off his youthful, handsome features to good advantage as well.

He had treated Tamakazura with dignity and kindness from the beginning, and once she had grown accustomed to his presence, she did not treat him in a distant or aloof manner. Thus, she could not bring herself to radically change her attitude toward him, even after he had learned that they were not siblings. She continued to speak directly to him, without the use of an intermediary and with only a standing curtain set out in front of her blinds. He had been sent as a messenger from his father, and she gathered from his report what His Majesty was expecting of her as Principal Handmaid.

From what the young Consultant could gather from her clever reply, which was calm and gentle, she was intelligent and warmly considerate. A vision of her face, which he had glimpsed that morning a year ago after the autumn tempest, floated up in his mind. His father's disturbing desire for Tamakazura, which he had considered so outrageous, had grown even more troubling to him after the truth about her background was revealed. *I doubt if he will simply give her up once she's in service to His Majesty, but since he already has so many distinguished women, her beauty and charm will almost certainly lead to trouble.* He could feel his chest constricting as a result of his own powerful emotions, but he kept himself cool and under control in her presence. “I would like to say something to you that is not for the ears of others. May I do so?” His implication being clear, her women withdrew a short distance away, moving

behind curtains further inside the quarters and averting their faces.

He proceeded to detail in a heartfelt, convincing manner a message that was supposedly from his father but which was in fact a complete fabrication on his part. The gist of the message was that His Majesty's desire for her was anything but ordinary and that she should be wary. Tamakazura had nothing to say in response, and when she sighed in distress, he found her so alluring that he could hardly bear the ache of his passions.

"Our period of mourning is up and we must change out of mourning robes. Because there haven't been any days this month auspicious enough to do so yet, my father says you are to go the banks of the Kamo River² and undertake ritual purification on the thirteenth. I shall accompany you then."

"Won't we make a spectacle if we go together," Tamakazura replied. "Wouldn't it be better to go there more discreetly?" Her question demonstrated real shrewdness, for if anyone were to see them together both in mourning robes, they might well make the connection between her and Princess Ōmiya ... and thus her real father.

"It hurts me that you have to be so cautious about guarding the secret of your relationship to my grandmother. My own mourning robes are a memento of her, reminding me of how hard it is to accept my loss ... I shall be very sorry when I have to change out of them. This strange bond we share is one I still don't comprehend, and if it weren't for the mourning robes you wear, I doubt I would be able to discern anything that binds the two of us together."

"It is even more difficult for me to make sense of things, since I lack the wisdom to do so, but I feel that the custom of wearing these colors is strangely melancholy." She was more subdued than normal, and the mood suited her, making her seem endearingly attractive.

Apparently, he had been waiting for just such an opportunity as this, for he now passed to her around the edge of her blinds a bunch of elegant mistflowers that he had brought with him. "I have a reason for wanting you to look at these," he explained. "Their color symbolizes our relationship."³ He held on to the flowers and did not release them right away; she failed to notice that, however, and when she moved over to take them, he grasped her sleeve and tugged on it.

*Like mistflowers from the same dew-drenched field
Our robes are damp from the same loss ... please say
If only for show, that you pity me*

Is he alluding to "the end of the road"?⁴ The insinuation that he had strong feelings for her was awkwardly unpleasant, but she pretended not to catch his

meaning and slowly, quietly, slipped back toward her chambers.

*If it's true that this dew comes from a distant field
Then these flowers' light purple is merely for show
And does not tell the truth of our relationship*

“It doesn’t mean we share a deep connection just because I speak directly to you.”

He gave a faint smile.

“Regardless of the depth of our connection, whether deep or shallow, I believe you understand my meaning perfectly well. If I may speak forthrightly, I know His Majesty is conferring his gracious favors on you, yet I still wonder how you can take no notice of my feelings, which I’m unable to suppress. I have suffered so, fretting that you might be put off if I told you how I feel, but I kept my emotions locked away inside me. Now I lament that I am ‘lost and forlorn’⁵ ... Have you observed Kashiwagi—do you know how he feels? How could I have remained indifferent toward you all that time I was acting as his go-between, saying for him all the things I could not say for myself. And all that time I clearly realized that I was making an utter fool of myself, undermining my own chances with you. He may have had to give you up, but I envy and resent him now that he can at least be near you as your brother. Will you not show at least a measure of pity for me?” He expressed his heartfelt complaint to her at some length, but I will not record all that he said here, since the details are rather embarrassing.

Tamakazura, the presumptive Principal Handmaid, continued to creep slowly back into her chambers, feeling quite anxious. “Your attitude is deeply hurtful,” he called to her. “You know very well that it is not in my nature to violate you.” He had so wanted to use this moment to confess to her a little of what was in his heart, but she excused herself. “I’m not feeling well,” she said, retreating to the back of her chambers. He departed with a sigh that expressed his pain.

He was filled with remorse, wondering why he had ever decided to open up to her like that. As he was heading over to Murasaki’s residence to report to his father, he continued to have unsettling thoughts, longing for some sign of Murasaki’s presence. Her beauty had made an even more powerful impression on him than Tamakazura’s, and he held out hopes of hearing the sound of her voice through the blinds, however faint it might be. However, when he arrived, Genji was careful to come out to greet him, and so all he could do was relay Tamakazura’s reply.

“She does seem reluctant to go to the palace, doesn’t she?” Genji mused.

“When I think about her suitors ... how men like Sochinomiya who are experienced in matters of love would have pleaded with her, fully displaying their deep sensitivity and care and eventually winning her over ... well, I can’t help feeling sad for her. And yet, she did observe His Majesty during the procession to Ōharano and found him magnificent. There is no way a young woman like her could turn down an opportunity to serve Emperor Reizei after catching even the briefest glimpse of him. It was with that thought in mind that I planned things out for her as I have.”

“That may be, but neither option is very attractive. The Umetsubo Empress has no equal, and then there is the Kokiden Consort, who has a most distinguished reputation. So, no matter how fond of her His Majesty may be, she will likely have a difficult time competing for his attention. On the other hand, Prince Sochinomiya seems to have his heart set on her, and if she goes to the palace, even in a position that does not require her to be intimate with His Majesty, he might well feel betrayed and dishonored, and your relationship with him could be severely strained.” He was just sixteen, but he spoke in a most mature manner.

“Yes, you’re right, this is all very delicate. It is not for me alone to decide her future, and yet even the Major Captain of the Right holds a grudge against me now. I suppose it was rash of me to be so concerned about her unfortunate circumstances, for it has brought me nothing but outrage and resentment from others. Still, I cannot forget how movingly her mother talked about her. When Tamakazura complained to me that her real father ignored her pleas when he heard she was off in some desolate mountain village, I felt sorry and began looking after her. It seems that only after Tō no Chūjō heard that I was raising her with such care and attention did he begin to think of her as a legitimate daughter.” His story was a complete fabrication, but he made what sounded like a reasonable defense of his actions. “Her personality,” he continued, “would make her a suitable wife for Sochinomiya. She’s stylishly up-to-date, bright and lovely, intelligent and not prone to scandal. They would make a wonderful-looking couple. And yet I’m convinced that she would succeed at the palace as well. She has attractive features, is talented and reliable, and will be efficient in handling her official duties. She will never disappoint His Majesty, no matter what he demands of her.”

The young man wanted to learn more about his father’s feelings for Tamakazura, and so he continued to press the issue.

“You’ve been looking after her for almost two years, and rumors are circulating, criticizing your behavior as perverse. The Palace Minister implied as much himself when he replied to the Major Captain’s request for Tamakazura.”

Genji smiled.

“People say a lot of things that have no basis in reality. Regardless, whether she ends up at the palace or married off to someone, I must defer to her father and follow his preferences. A woman’s virtue is obedience to her father, her husband, and her son, and it would be a serious breach of ethics if that order was disrupted and everything left to me.”

“I heard confidentially from someone that the Palace Minister has spoken of his appreciation for the clever plan you devised to give her to His Majesty. Since you already have many splendid women, you would find it hard to count her as one of your wives, but by sending her to the palace you can have her go through the pretense of service, since she will not have the status of an imperial wife, while you pretend to have given her up even though you intend to keep her for yourself.” He spoke with as much circumspection as he could.

Genji felt sure that what his son had told him was true, that Tō no Chūjō really did believe he was scheming in this way, and it made him feel sorry.

“He’s imagining some rather detestable things. I suppose he can’t help it ... it’s second nature for him to think too much about things. No matter which way the matter is decided, her future will work itself out of its own accord. Really ... sometimes his thinking can be rather shallow and one-sided.” He laughed.

Genji’s expression was dismissive of all speculation about him and Tamakazura, but his son continued to harbor doubts.

So, rumors are swirling about us? Genji was unnerved. *It would be unfortunate if I were to do anything to confirm people’s speculations. I must make sure that Tō no Chūjō understands that my intentions are honorable.* Despite Genji’s efforts to present Tamakazura’s move to the palace openly and officially, Tō no Chūjō had cleverly surmised that the plan was ambiguous enough that Genji could still keep her for himself anyway.

Tamakazura could not move during the eighth month because she was to change out of mourning clothes and undergo purification. “You cannot go next month either,”⁶ Genji calculated, “and so that leaves the tenth month.” Reizei was frustrated, and the suitors who had been courting her all this time were disappointed. Each of them sadly pleaded with Tamakazura’s closest ladies-in-waiting to intercede on his behalf and take a message to her before she left and it was too late. However, to try to change things at this point would have been as hopeless as trying to dam Yoshino Falls,⁷ and so her ladies stiffly replied, “That is quite out of the question.”

As Genji’s son was bustling about helping with preparations for her move, he continued to regret that he had confessed his feelings to Tamakazura and wondered anxiously what she thought of him now. He set out to make it up to

her, doing his best to assist her in every way he could. He no longer spoke to her so freely of his feelings, but controlled himself in order to look more respectable in her eyes.

Her real brothers now refrained from coming to the Rokujō estate, and they were each feeling impatient, looking forward to assisting her when she came to the palace. One evening, however, Kashiwagi arrived with a message from his father. Tamakazura's attendants were amused that the young man, who had just recently been moping, acting lovesick over their mistress and pleading for her with all his heart, should have so suddenly and easily given her up. Even now, however, he did not fully reveal his attitude, and since he had previously sent messages in secret, he waited beneath a katsura tree in the garden, which was brightly illuminated in the moonlight. Tamakazura summoned him, giving no indication that she had once ignored everything he had written or said to her and had him sit in front of her blinds on the south veranda. She remained reluctant to speak directly with him and had her lady, Saishō, act as intermediary.

"Since I have been sent as a messenger by our father," he began, "I would have thought we might dispense with the intermediary. I myself am a man of no significance, but it is said that the bond between brother and sister is eternal and unbreakable ... and, while it may sound old-fashioned of me, I hope you might trust me as your brother." He felt aggrieved by her aloofness.

"I agree that the bond between us is unbreakable and would like to talk with you about all that has happened over the years. But recently I've been suffering from a strange malady that makes it hard for me to even rise from my bed. That you should reproach me in this way makes me feel all the more like an outsider." She was speaking in a grave tone of voice.

"If you're not well, then why not allow me to approach your curtains? Ah, but never mind ... as you say, it is unfeeling of me to speak to you as I did." He then quietly, in a hushed voice, conveyed his father's messages to her. His discreet, considerate demeanor was in no way flawed and was in fact quite pleasing. "Our father has not heard many details of your planned move to the palace, but he thinks that it might be best if you were to convey your wishes to him in private. He is wary of the possibility that people might see him if he were to call on you himself, and yet it bothers him that he cannot speak with you." Kashiwagi then took this opportunity to add, "Well, then ... I promise to say nothing frivolous to you any more, though I can't help feeling increasingly resentful over the way you ignore my sensitivities—first as a suitor, then as your brother. Take your behavior toward me this evening, for example. I would just as soon have used the north entrance at the rear of your residence and spoken with some of your lower-ranking servants, though I know that might have offended Saishō. In any

case, I have never experienced such treatment as this ... our relationship is certainly peculiar in every conceivable way!"

Saishō was amused by his habit of tilting his head back and forth while he was complaining, but she conveyed his messages to her mistress, who replied, "Like our father, I must be wary of gossips who might note that you and I have suddenly grown closer. Because I have to be so cautious, I cannot divulge at this time all of the regrets and mortifying events that have accumulated over so many years, even though remaining silent has become an increasingly painful burden to bear." She spoke so honestly that Kashiwagi felt ashamed before her, and he held back from saying all the things he wanted to tell her.

*Never tracing the path deep into Imoseyama
Brother-and-Sister Hills, I wandered on the path of love
My letters going as far afield as Odae Bridge⁸*

The regrets that he felt were of no one's making but his own, and so Tamakazura replied as follows:

*I was puzzled and concerned when reading your letters
Not knowing that you who wandered on the path of love
Were unaware of the road to Imoseyama*

After conveying her mistress's poem, Saishō explained, "She simply did not understand your letters. My mistress could not reply to you directly because she is cautious about everything that has to do with the court ... perhaps to an excessive degree. Of course, she won't always be in this situation."

Kashiwagi realized that Tamakazura's attitude was reasonable, and so he rose to leave.

"Very well then, I understand," he said to Saishō. "This is not the proper time for a lengthy visit. However, once I have accumulated some merit by my service to your mistress, I shall certainly air my grievances to her then."

The moon lit up every corner of the room, and his strikingly handsome features and his figure, clad in court robes, were attractively dashing and charming against the lovely glow of the night sky. He was not as good-looking or as refined as Genji's son, but Kashiwagi was remarkable all the same, and the younger women gushed and swooned as usual, amazed that there could actually be two such splendid cousins in the world.

Because Kashiwagi was a Middle Captain in the Right Palace Guard, he was a subordinate of the Major Captain who had been such an ardent suitor of

Tamakazura. The Major Captain was constantly summoning Kashiwagi and entreating him with all his heart to convey his wishes to the Palace Minister. For his part, Tō no Chūjō considered the Major Captain a man of sterling character, the kind of courtier who provided a solid foundation for His Majesty's state, and thus saw no reason why the man would not make a good match for Tamakazura. Unfortunately, there was no way he could go back on his promise to support Genji's plans. On top of that, he had privately gleaned information about the relationship between Genji and Tamakazura that seemed to justify those plans, which is why he deferred to the Chancellor.

Now, this Major Captain was the brother of the Shōkyōden Consort, who had served Retired Emperor Suzaku and given him a son, the current Crown Prince. Excluding Genji and Tō no Chūjō, the reputation of the Major Captain as a distinguished courtier was second to none. He was about thirty-two or thirty-three, and his principal wife was a princess, the daughter of Prince Hyōbu and thus a half sister to Murasaki. She was three or four years older than the Major Captain and had no serious imperfections to speak about. Still, for some reason —perhaps it was her personality—he was no longer fond of her. He had taken to referring to her as “Granny” and was considering an annulment of their marriage. Apparently, it was this behavior that led Genji to conclude the man would not be a good match for Tamakazura and to consider his suit a nuisance. The Major Captain was in no way wanton or given to unseemly sexual escapades, but he was nevertheless extremely ardent in his pursuit. Kashiwagi secretly kept him abreast of the situation and let it slip out in the course of their conversations that “my father is not unkindly disposed toward you, and the young woman herself is uneasy about Genji’s plans to send her to the palace.” Upon hearing this, the Major Captain continued pressuring one of Tamakazura’s ladies-in-waiting, a woman called Ben no moto who had been acting as his go-between, to assist him. “The Chancellor is the only one who is opposed to me,” he said. “Your mistress’s real father has no objections.”

It was now the ninth month. On a glistening morning when the first frost had settled, each of those attendants who had served as a go-between for their mistress’s various suitors discreetly brought in the usual letters professing love. Tamakazura would not look at them herself, but had the women read them to her. The Major Captain had written, “I still have fervent hopes that this month will be the month when I win you. Yet I feel time slipping away as I observe the autumn skies.”

*People normally detest the long ninth month ...
Is it futile then for me to stake my life*

On hopes that it will keep you from the palace

It was obvious that he had heard about the decision to send her to His Majesty in the tenth month.

Prince Sochinomiya also wrote: “I am helpless to act and can say nothing about a decision I must accept. And yet ...”

*You bask in the Emperor’s gracious light, as radiant
As the morning sun you gaze upon ... but do not forget
The frost that clings to the underside of the bamboo grass*

“If you at least understood my feelings, that would be some comfort to me.” Everything about the messenger and the letter, which had been attached to a sadly withered stem of frost-covered bamboo grass, bespoke courtly elegance.

Another of Tamakazura’s many suitors was the Commander of the Left Palace Guard. He was the son of Prince Hyōbu, and because he was related to Murasaki, he often called on her at her southeast residence. He was thus well apprised of the plans for Tamakazura and was upset at what was going to happen. He sent a note of complaint that included this poem:

*I long to forget about you and yet
I wonder sadly how things will turn out
How I will ever get by without you*

The color of the paper, the ink he used, and the fragrance that permeated the letter were so refined that her attendants were prompted to remark, “How dreary and lonely things will be once our mistress has gone off to the palace and the pleadings of these splendid gentlemen come to an end.”

For some odd reason, Tamakazura decided to reply—and briefly at that—to Prince Sochinomiya alone:

*Does the sunflower bending to the course of the sun
Melt the morning frost beneath it of its own accord ...
I do not choose to go, so how could I forget you*

He looked at her faint brushstrokes as a rare wonder, and since her poem hinted that she understood his sorrow, he was happy, even though her regard for him was as fleeting as the dew. There were many other letters like these expressing the unhappiness and complaints of various gentlemen, but nothing came of any of them.

It has been said that both Genji and Tō no Chūjō were determined that Tamakazura would become an exemplar for how women should conduct themselves.

¹ *Fujibakama*, which literally means “wisteria [i.e., purple] trousers,” is one of the seven traditional flowers or grasses of autumn. There is no exact equivalent name in English for this particular species (*Eupatorium fortunei* or *Eupatorium japonicum*), but there are several common names used to identify various species of the genus *Eupatorium*—boneset, thoroughwort, ague weed, or mistflower. I have chosen to go with mistflower. Some species identified as mistflower (e.g., *Eupatorium coelestinum*) have recently been reclassified under the *Conoclinium* genus, but it is in the same tribe as *Eupatorium* and in fact looks much like *fujibakama*. So, while I recognize that my choice is slightly arbitrary, I also believe the use of mistflower is in keeping with the aesthetic of the narrative.

² The text does not specify which river she is to go to, but it is almost certainly the Kamo.

³ While the color purple signified relationships in general, the name of the flower, *fujibakama*, also suggests their connection as cousins (through Princess Ōmiya) and members of the Fujiwara family.

⁴ *Kokin rokujō* 3360 (Anonymous): “I long to see, if only briefly, the obi clasp they use at Hitachi at the end of the road to the Eastern Provinces so that I may voice my complaint to you.” The poem plays on the word *kagoto*, which can refer to a complaint or to a clasp or fastener used to bind an obi. When used in the phrase *kagoto bakari*, it can also mean “if only briefly / if only for show.” Binding an obi with a clasp was a symbol of marriage at the Kashima Shrine in Hitachi.

⁵ *Shūishū* 766 [also *Gosenshū* 960] (Prince Motoyoshi): “Being lost and forlorn, I must give all I have, following my heart’s destiny, as I follow these channel markers to meet my love now, in this very city of Naniwa” (first alluded to in the *Miotsukushi* chapter).

⁶ A number of events were prohibited at the palace during the first, fifth, and ninth months. These included marriages and moving in to begin service there. One reason for these prohibitions may be the large number of official ceremonies, festivals, and ritual services held during these months.

⁷ *Kokin rokujō* 2233 (Anonymous): “Trust in the human heart? One might as well try to dam Yoshino Falls ...”

⁸ Imoseyama (literally, “man/woman mountains,” but here “sibling mountains”) are across from each other on the Yoshino River. Odae Bridge was in the Mutsu region of far northern Japan. The word *odae* means “to cut” or “to break” a string or cord, and so Odae Bridge was often used in poetry to refer to a love that is broken off.

XXXI

Makibashira

A Beloved Pillar of Cypress

“THE SITUATION will be most awkward once His Majesty hears about this. So, for the time being, I’d rather you not say a word to anyone.” Genji admonished the staff at his Rokujō estate, swearing them to silence, though it was highly unlikely that the Major Captain would feel the need to keep quiet about the affair. Several days had passed since his successful conquest of Tamakazura, but she gave no indication that she was ready to warm to him even a little or to come out of the funk she was in, utterly lost in sad contemplation of her strange, uncertain destiny. The Major Captain found her reaction hard to take, but he was also moved and overjoyed at the realization that their karmic bond had not been a tenuous one after all. His chest would tighten at the very thought that such a face and figure as hers, which seemed more resplendent each time he saw her, had been on the verge of belonging to someone else, and he felt that he should give thanks to both the Kannon at Ishiyama Temple and his go-between, Ben no moto, for answering his prayers. The latter had incurred Tamakazura’s deep displeasure, and she was no longer permitted to serve in her mistress’s presence, but had to remain secluded in her chambers. As for the former, one thing was certain—in the end, out of all those many love-struck suitors, the Kannon at Ishiyama had bestowed her blessings on a man for whom Tamakazura felt no deep attraction.

Genji was disappointed and vexed, but there was nothing he could do now that the Major Captain had initiated sexual intimacies with her. Since everyone, including Tō no Chūjō, had begun to accept the situation, he thought it would be absurd and unkind to the Major Captain to oppose the marriage now. Instead, he took care to make sure that the preparations for celebrating the Third Night¹ would be second to none.

The Major Captain was impatient as he eagerly made plans to move Tamakazura to his residence as soon as possible. Genji, however, stalled him, pointing out that resituating Tamakazura abruptly and thoughtlessly would be hurtful to the principal wife, who would not be expected to welcome a younger rival. “Please do not rush this, but act prudently—and don’t make a spectacle that would invite criticism or resentment from anyone,” Genji advised.

Tō no Chūjō privately expressed relief at this turn of events.

“This strikes me as a far better outcome for her. She doesn’t have a patron who would be especially devoted to her at court, and I was worried that if her service at the palace required even the slightest intimacy with His Majesty, then she might end up suffering some terrible tribulations. Of course, I’m sympathetic to her, but even setting aside the situation with my other daughter, the Kokiden Consort, how could I have done anything for her?”

It was true, what he said—for while it would no doubt have been an honor to serve Emperor Reizei, she would almost certainly end up being scorned and derided if His Majesty were to treat her with less consideration than his other women and see her only on rare occasions. Tō no Chūjō heard from various sources about the exchange of poems between Genji and the Major Captain during the celebrations for the Third Night, and he felt deeply touched and grateful that Genji had, after all, treated Tamakazura honorably and kindly.

Genji had wanted to keep the relationship a secret for a while, but people naturally gossip about such things. Because the circumstances were especially fascinating in this case, word of the marriage eventually leaked out, and people whispered about how wonderful it was. His Majesty finally heard about it as well.

“I’m disappointed,” he said, “since I had hoped she would be my Principal Handmaid, but she was destined to be with someone else. Even so, I wonder if she might still consider serving here, so long as her duties did not involve anything of an intimate nature?”

It was now the eleventh month. In the end, it was agreed that Tamakazura, though now married, would serve as Principal Handmaid. There were many sacred rituals and festivals during this time of the year, and so the staff of the Handmaid’s office, which was in charge of the chamber of the Sacred Mirror,² was extremely busy. As a result, a steady stream of people from the Handmaid’s office as well as other attendants from the palace called on Tamakazura’s residence at Rokujō, and their comings and goings created a bustling, cheerful atmosphere. Tamakazura was so preoccupied with her responsibilities that she was annoyed when the Major Captain chose to discreetly seclude himself in her chambers even during the daytime.

Prince Sochinomiya and other former suitors were even more disappointed and vexed at the way things had been handled. One of them, the Commander of the Left Palace Guard, was especially upset—not only because his hopes had been dashed, but also because his sister, who was the principal wife of the Major Captain, would likely become an object of ridicule. He held a grudge against his victorious rival, but he chose not to do anything rash, since it would have done no good at this point. People were amused at the sight of the Major Captain, whose temperament had changed utterly. Having abandoned all traces of the gentleman who, over the years, had built a reputation for seriousness by never indulging in wanton behavior, he instead began to reveal a romantic side not seen in the past, behaving like some elegant lover furtively visiting his beloved's chambers at night and slipping out just before the dawn.

Tamakazura's naturally lively, cheerful disposition receded as she fell into a severe depression. It was obvious to everyone that she herself had not wanted to be married this way, but that didn't stop her from imagining what Genji might be thinking or from recalling the kindness and consideration shown by Prince Sochinomiya. As a result, she was overcome by feelings of shame and remorse, and it was clear from the expression on her face that she now found everything tedious.

Tamakazura's marriage had dispelled suspicions about her relationship with Genji, and, as he looked back over his conduct, he convinced himself that he had never seriously entertained any lewd or perverse desires. He even chided Murasaki. "There, you see ... and you suspected me!" Yet even now he was struggling to control his usual proclivities, and there were times when he found the idea of giving her up difficult to bear. Because he would contemplate the possibility of finding some way to keep her for himself, it was obvious his longings remained strong.

One day, around noon, Genji went to see her when the Major Captain was not there. These days she seemed always to be out of sorts, depressed and listless, but she stirred herself to rise and meet him. Now that she was married, she concealed herself behind a standing curtain, and Genji too was more distant and formal as he chatted with her about everyday public affairs. Having grown accustomed to being with a stolid, ordinary man, she was now struck by how inexpressibly superior Genji was in bearing and looks. Feeling uncertain and ashamed of her strange destiny, she broke down and wept. Genji, who was leaning on an armrest and peeking in at her through the curtains, gradually turned his conversation toward private matters. Yes, by any objective measure she was beautiful, and her face, now thin and drawn, had taken on a sweetly endearing quality that would make anyone want to gaze lovingly at her. He

regretted the frivolous games that he had played, using her to tempt other men, for in the end he had lost her to someone else.

*Because I dared not test the waters of our bond
And make us man and wife, I failed to seal the vow
To carry you across the River of Three Fords³*

“I never imagined this would happen.”

She could hear him wiping his nose and was warmly touched that he was shedding tears for her. She hid her face and replied:

*How I so want to disappear like foam
On the channel of my river of tears
Long before I ever cross the Three Fords*

“Such childish thinking,” Genji said, smiling, “to hope that you might disappear before death. There is no way to avoid that crossing, and I so wanted to be able to take your hand and help you over when that time came. In reality, there is something you should realize. I trust that you have the maturity to understand that both the foolish emotions I displayed and the peace of mind you enjoy because I did not act on those feelings have no equal in this world.”

Thinking it might be unbearably painful for her to hear such things, Genji took pity and changed the subject. “I feel sorry to hear His Majesty has expressed his disappointment. Perhaps you should go to the palace after all, even if only for a temporary stay. Of course, the Major Captain seems to be claiming complete possession of you, and I suppose that your marriage would make it awkward to interact with Emperor Reizei in your public role as Principal Handmaid. Things have not gone as I had originally planned, but your father seems satisfied, and so I am relieved about that.”

He continued talking with her at some length, telling her many things that alternately moved and embarrassed her, but she continued to cry and said little in response. It made him feel bad that she should be in such a state, and so he did not let his desires get the better of him, but acted properly, instructing her on what she would need to know to carry out her duties and conduct herself as Principal Handmaid. In doing so, Genji was indicating his disapproval of the Major Captain’s plans to quickly move Tamakazura to his residence.

For his part, the Major Captain was uneasy over the prospect of his bride going to the palace, but he agreed to allow the move, provided it was a temporary one, since he had hit upon the idea that her time at the palace would

give him the opportunity, when she withdrew from service, to move her straight to his own household. It bothered him that he had to act so furtively, sneaking in and out of her residence at Rokujō—behavior he was not accustomed to, having always acted so forthright—and so he had his residence renovated, scrambling to make over every aspect of rooms and furnishings that had grown dusty and dilapidated over the years.

The Major Captain was completely insensitive to the misery that his principal wife was experiencing, and he turned a blind eye to the reactions of his beloved children. A man who is flexible, who is kind and disposed to be sympathetic, will take into account various considerations and thus be able to understand how his actions might bring shame to another person. The Major Captain, however, was not a man to make such allowances, and he had often behaved in a manner that rubbed people the wrong way. His principal wife could in no way be thought an inferior woman. Her distinguished father, Prince Hyōbu, had reared her with extraordinary care, she was highly regarded at court for the depth of her character, and she was also quite attractive. However, an eerie malignant spirit, which proved stubbornly persistent, afflicted her, and she suffered spells off and on over the years during which she seemed possessed and no longer human. Her condition strained her marriage and estranged her from the Major Captain. Despite their problems, he still considered her an incomparably distinguished woman. Nonetheless, the young woman who had prompted his unusual change of heart was herself no ordinary woman. Moreover, she was a lady of surpassing beauty, and once she had dispelled all doubts surrounding her relationship with Genji, about which everyone had been speculating, it was natural that he would be increasingly drawn to her.

When Prince Hyōbu heard about all of this, he declared, “The Major Captain will expose my daughter to the shame of idle gossip and make her look even more pathetic if he shunts her off to a corner somewhere just so he can set up his stylish young lady. So long as I’m alive I’ll do everything in my power to make sure she is not subjected to ridicule.” He had the east hall of his own villa cleaned and refurbished and made arrangements to move his daughter there. However, she was torn by his decision, for while she knew that she would be sheltered by her father, she couldn’t help feeling troubled by how it would look for someone whose status as a principal wife had long been established to have to return to her father’s house. The more she dwelled on such a mortifying prospect, the more her mental condition deteriorated, until finally she collapsed in prostration. She was by nature quiet, loving, and childlike, but whenever she suffered from the derangement brought on by spirit possession, she would blurt out things that made people feel uncomfortable.

Her chambers were weirdly disordered and untidy, and her own appearance was unkempt. She was so painfully gloomy that it is hardly surprising the Major Captain was drawn to Tamakazura's residence, which looked like a polished jewel in comparison. Yet his affection for his wife had not faded over the years, and her condition elicited both sorrow and pity from him.

"A woman of truly noble status," he told his wife, "will tolerate even those affairs that last but for a few days and remain devoted to her husband. You have been so ill of late that I was reluctant to broach the subject, but now we must discuss this matter. Have I not kept my vows with you all these years? I have dedicated myself to doing all that I can to care for you in spite of your strange affliction, yet now you have taken a dislike to me because you cannot abide living in my household. You need to think about not just our marriage but our children as well. I have reassured you over and over that I will do nothing foolish, but you let your womanly nature lead you astray and persist in nursing your resentments. I understand that your anxieties are not unreasonable, since you have seen no proof that I will remain loyal to you after she moves here, but please trust in me, and in the end you will see how honorable my intentions are. I gather that your father has heard rumors about us and is now estranged from me. He abruptly announced that he intends to take you back once and for all, but that would be a very rash course of action on his part. Can he really be serious, or is he just disowning me on a temporary basis?"

He smiled at this last comment—an expression his suffering wife found hateful. Even some of the women who served the Major Captain as his sexual intimates—especially the attendants Moku and Chūjō no moto—felt uneasy and, to the extent their status permitted, expressed displeasure at the plans he was making.

His principal wife, who happened to be lucid at that moment, was brokenhearted and her weeping evoked sympathy.

"You may be justified in shaming me, saying that I am not in my right mind, that I am weird, but it makes me sad to think that my father should be dragged into this, for it would damage the honor of his house to be associated with someone as ill-favored as I. It doesn't matter so much for me ... this isn't the first time I've heard such words from you, and so I'm used to it."

She turned her back to him, which gave her figure a sweetly pathetic aspect. She was slight of build to begin with, but her malady had wracked her body for so long that she was thin, wasted, and frail. Her hair, which had once been luxuriantly thick and long, had begun to fall out and looked as if it had been thinned. It was also a tangled mess, since she hardly ever bothered to comb it any more, and matted from all the tears she shed. Her appearance was painful to

behold. Though she had never been a great beauty, she had inherited her father's best qualities: his courtly elegance and soft refinement. Still, how could anyone who had so neglected her appearance be appealing to others?

"I would never disrespect your father ... why would I? You mustn't say such things!" He tried soothing her to win her over. "The estate at Rokujō is spectacular, a veritable jeweled palace, and it makes me self-conscious to be the object of the gaze of others, to feel so stiff and ill at ease whenever I come and go there. It's for my own peace of mind that I have decided to move the young woman here. I hardly need mention the peerless reputation the Chancellor enjoys at court. He is a man of dauntingly profound sensitivity; if he were to hear reports that you were not kindly disposed to her, it would make you look bad and show disrespect to him. You may choose to go back to your father's house, but know that I will never forget you. No matter what you do, there is no way that I could ever feel completely estranged from you ... but in spite of all that, if our relationship is subjected to ridicule by malicious gossips, it will damage my reputation. That's why I believe we should support each other and not dissolve the vows that we have kept for so many years."

"I couldn't care less about your selfish behavior ... I'm not concerned for myself," she answered. "But I do feel sorry for my father, who worries so much about my strange affliction and is beside himself over the possibility that I will become a laughingstock. Given the way he feels, how can I show my face to him? I would remind you that the Chancellor's principal wife, his Lady Murasaki, is my half sister and thus hardly a complete stranger to me. My father can't get over the fact that one of his daughters, a woman whom he lost track of until she grew to adulthood, would later take on the role of mother to a young lady who is now a rival to his other daughter. As for me, I couldn't care less about such things ... all I can do is stand aside and watch how you choose to deal with this matter."

"You are in your right mind and speaking quite sensibly now, but given the history of your seizures, who can say that you won't have similar terrible episodes in the future? In any case, the Chancellor's wife has nothing at all to do with this. He treats her like some precious daughter, keeping her locked away from everyone—how could she know anything about a young woman who is so far beneath her? Your father is not acting in a filial manner when he suspects such things about one of his own daughters. If the Chancellor were to get wind of this, he would be most offended."

The two of them spent the entire day discussing their situation, but when evening came, the Major Captain grew distracted by his thoughts of Tamakazura. He felt as though his spirit was drifting up to the sky, and he

longed to go to her if he could. However, a heavy snow was falling; to go out in the face of such a storm would make anyone who witnessed him leaving feel sympathy for his wife, since his departure would leave the impression that he would do anything to get away from her. If only she showed signs of jealousy and resentment, he could then let his own anger flare up, creating a backfire and giving him the break he needed to make his escape. Instead, she confounded him by behaving in an unusually calm, collected manner, and he was at a loss.

His wife, observing him as he sat near the veranda with blinds raised and stared out at the snow, urged him to be on his way. "If you wait any longer you won't be able to make it through this weather ... besides, it's getting dark outside." Her sad, pathetic-looking figure signaled her resignation, her acceptance that their relationship was over, that there was nothing more she could do to keep him from leaving.

"How could I go out in weather like this?" the Major Captain responded. "Even if I do, it's only for a little while. People talk about me without knowing anything about my intentions, and I worry what the Chancellor and the Palace Minister might think should they hear rumors coming at them from all sides. I can hardly stop seeing her now ... the consequences for her would be too painful to contemplate. Please stay calm and you will see that everything will turn out fine in the end. When I finally bring her here, it will be easier for me to manage things. Besides, whenever I see you in this condition, in control of your faculties, my desire to divide my affections between you and another woman fades, and I feel very close to you."

"Though you may choose to stay with me tonight," his wife insisted, "your thoughts will be elsewhere. That would be more painful to me than if you leave. Should you think of me while you are with her, that might at least melt the ice on my sleeves."⁴ She spoke in a tender tone of voice.

Calling for one of her women to bring a censer, she had it set beneath a filigree basket over which she draped her husband's robes to perfume them before he set off. She seemed thin and wasted in her worn, rumpled robes, which had not been starched in ages. It was hard for him to look at her, depressed and listless as she was. Her eyes, red and puffy from weeping, were a little repulsive, but at a moment like this when he was feeling great sympathy toward her, he considered her blameless. He pondered over and over how changeable his own heart had proven, how easily his affections had shifted to Tamakazura without leaving a trace of all the months and years that he had somehow managed to remain with his principal wife. In the end, his passion for Tamakazura won out, and for all the sighs he let out as he feigned his reluctance to leave, he continued to tend carefully to his clothes and appearance. He pulled over a small censer

and placed it inside his sleeves. He was, of course, no match for the peerless looks of the Radiant Prince, but he possessed a splendidly masculine beauty all the same, dressed as he was in soft, warmly appealing robes. This was no ordinary man, and his magnificent presence made people feel diffident before him.

The voices of the retainers in his escort were audible.

“The snow is letting up ...”

“It’s getting late ...”

They coughed and cleared their throats, urging him as discreetly as possible to set off, aware that their lord’s principal wife was there. Chūjō no moto and Moku were lying down, conversing and lamenting the sad state of their lord and lady’s marriage. Their mistress was reclining on an armrest, exuding an air of extreme calm and sweetness. As they lay there observing her, she suddenly rose, pulled out the censer from beneath the filigree basket used to perfume her husband’s robes, walked up behind the Major Captain, and dumped the ashes on his head. It happened so fast that no one had time to react. He was shocked and stunned. The fine ash got into his eyes and nose, blinding him so that he did not know where he was. He tried to brush it away, but because it worked its way into everything, he had to remove his robes. The women in attendance looked on in pity. If they thought she had done this while in her right mind, they would have been so repelled that they would no longer have had anything to do with her. However, they knew this was the working of that malignant spirit that was always assaulting her and doing all it could to drive a wedge between her and the Major Captain. During the ensuing chaos, they managed to bring him a change of clothes, but because the ash covered the hair along the sides of his head and seemed to have penetrated everywhere, he could not very well go off in this condition to a place that was immaculately clean.

While he might excuse his wife on the grounds that she was mentally disturbed, he found her repulsive all the same, and nothing remained of the sympathy he had been feeling for her just a few moments earlier. Flicking his thumb and fingers together in exasperation, he tried to stay calm. He reminded himself that if things got out of hand at this point, so soon after he had married Tamakazura, he would be blamed for his wife’s madness and subjected to harsh criticism. Though it was late at night, he summoned priests, and the house was thrown into an uproar as they began performing an exorcism. The voice of the malignant spirit shouting and cursing was naturally offputting to the Major Captain.

His wife wailed insanely all through the night as she was struck and pulled about by the exorcists. She finally calmed down a little when dawn came, and he

took the opportunity provided by this respite to send a letter to Tamakazura: “Last night someone here suddenly collapsed, and that incident, combined with the heavy snow, prevented me from going to you. I am now chilled body and soul. What must you have thought about my absence? And how have your attendants reacted to this?” The tone of the letter was earnest.

*My spirit seemed to be blown wildly skyward
Amidst the swirling snow as I spent the night
Sleeping by myself in these cold, fragrant sleeves⁵*

“The situation is intolerable.”

The letter was written in a dignified manner on thin white paper—though there was nothing especially charming about the presentation. His calligraphy had a clear, forceful beauty that showed he was a man of learning and fine sensibility. For all that, Tamakazura had not given a thought to his absence and didn’t even deign to recognize the agitation in his heart. She did not reply, and he spent the day in abject misery.

His wife was still in agony, and so he had the priests perform a more formal esoteric rite of exorcism. The Major Captain prayed in his heart that she might be able to temporarily regain her faculties, at least until Tamakazura could be moved. Had he not known that his wife was actually a woman of kind, upstanding character, he would never have been able to endure her uncanny behavior as he had up to now.

At dusk that day he hurried off to his usual rendezvous with Tamakazura. He was always complaining that his wife never properly prepared his clothing, that nothing matched and he looked odd and inelegant; now, having not yet changed into fresh, clean court robes, he cut a very sad-looking figure. The outer cloak he had been wearing the night before was singed in spots, and the unpleasant, charred aroma from the ashes created a weird impression. The odor had penetrated the layers of his under robes, and this clear sign of the extent of his wife’s fiery jealousy would surely alienate Tamakazura’s affections. He removed his robes, took a bath, and focused on getting himself ready.

Moku was scenting fresh robes for him.

*It seems the flames that singed your robes
Flared from a surfeit of anguish
That smoldered in a lonely heart*

“How could anyone remain unmoved when it’s clear that not a trace remains of

your old feelings for your wife?" She was covering her mouth with her sleeve as she spoke, but the expression around her eyes was at once accusing and alluring.

His attitude, however, was cruel, since the only thing that occurred to him at that moment was to wonder how he could have ever been attracted to a woman like Moku.

*When with unsettled heart I contemplate
Her doleful actions, more and more anger
Billows up like smoke from flames of regret*

"I shall be in a terrible bind if word of her outrageous behavior reaches the Chancellor and Prince Hyōbu."

He had been away from Tamakazura for only a single night, but she now looked more precious and lovely to him than ever before. Because his displeasure with his wife made him all the more reluctant to divide his affections between them any longer, he remained secluded in Tamakazura's quarters for a long period of time.

Hearing that his house was still in an uproar, what with the exorcism continuing and the malignant spirit hurling curses and abuse as it was forced to show itself over and over, the Major Captain chose not to go anywhere near the place for fear that something dreadful might happen to bring him shame and hurt his reputation. When he did finally go back home, he stayed away from his wife's quarters and summoned his children. He had a daughter, who was about twelve or thirteen, and two younger sons. Even though his marriage had been strained and distant in recent years, he had once accorded his wife the dignity and respect due a woman of her distinguished status. Thus, her attendants were devastated to see the marriage now on the verge of dissolution.

Her father, Prince Hyōbu, learned what was happening and sent a message: "Now that he has abandoned you like this, it only invites dishonor and ridicule for you to continue tolerating his behavior. Why should you go along with his absurd plans while I'm still alive to support you?" He abruptly sent for her.

She had regained her faculties a little and was grieving in despair over her marriage when her father's message arrived. After hearing his words, she made up her mind. "I would certainly be considered a fool if I were to try to stay on here and see it through, only to be utterly rejected in the end."

When the time came, the move was carried out discreetly with only three carriages. It would have been too conspicuous for her oldest brother, the Commander of the Left Palace Guard and thus a high-ranking official, to accompany her, and so three younger brothers—a Middle Captain, a gentleman-

in-waiting, and an Assistant Minister of Public Affairs—escorted her in his place. Her ladies-in-waiting had long ago resigned themselves to this inevitable break, but when they were confronted with the reality that the marriage was ending today, they wept openly, tears streaming down their faces. They had discussed among themselves how they would handle the situation. Because their mistress was returning to a house no longer familiar to her after so long an absence, a place where she would be occupying smaller, cramped quarters, she would be able to bring only a few attendants with her. Some of her women had no choice but to return to their family homes until things settled down and they could be brought back; as a result, many of them scattered, taking their scant belongings with them as they left to face uncertain futures.

The process of preparing the furnishings and accessories she would need to take with her reminded everyone there of a wife clearing out a house following the death of her husband. People of both high and low status wept to see it. Her children were wandering about innocently unaware of what was happening, and so she called them together.

“I am resigned to my unhappy destiny,” she announced, “and will now cast myself adrift with no lingering regrets about my marriage. How sad it is that you will be separated now and have to grow up apart. You, my daughter, will remain with me no matter what. As for you, my sons ... you will not be able to avoid meeting your father, but he certainly will never treat you with any consideration, and you may well feel anxious, as if you too have been cast adrift. As long as your grandfather is alive and well, you’ll have some support and will be able to make your way in the world. But the court bends to the will of the Chancellor and the Palace Minister, and because they are wary of this house, they are unlikely to look favorably upon you and you will find it hard to get ahead. If that happens, you will have no choice but to take religious vows, as I plan to do, and withdraw to the mountains and forests. No doubt I shall suffer painful regrets even in worlds to come.”

She was crying as she spoke, and though her children did not have a deep understanding of what was taking place, their lips quivered and they sobbed and cried as well. She gathered her children’s nurses and spoke to them of her grief and worry.

“There are many instances in the old romances of fathers who, even though they love their children deeply, undergo a change when they take a new wife. In their attempts to please her, they grow cold and distant toward their own offspring. My husband has gone even further than that. He behaves like a father in name only, and it’s plain to see the change in his attitude ... there is nothing left of his old affection for his children, and he has no intention of supporting

them."

The sun went down, and the evening skies that day, which threatened snow, had an especially dreary, forlorn appearance. "The weather is taking a turn for the worse. You must hurry up," her brothers said, pressing her to be on her way. She was staring outside, lost in reverie, wiping tears from her eyes. Her daughter, who had always been the Major Captain's favorite, was lying prostrate, deeply distraught. *How will I ever get by without seeing Papa? I might never have a chance to see him and say farewell.* Knowing that the girl did not want to leave, her mother tried coaxing her: "It makes me sad to think that you don't want to go with me." The girl was waiting, hoping that her father might return any moment now. However, as daylight faded, so too did the likelihood that he would stir himself to leave the side of his young wife.

There was a pillar of cypress wood on the east side of her room that she had always used as a place to lean against—it was her favorite spot. It made her sad to think that she would be giving it up to someone else. She folded some pieces of reddish-brown paper, a color similar to cypress bark, and wrote down a few words. She took a small daggerlike hair ornament and thrust it through the papers, then stuck the ornament into a crack in the pillar.

*Though the time has come to leave you
O beloved pillar of cypress
I pray you will not forget me*

She broke down before she could finish writing her note.

"That's enough ..." her mother replied.

*Though you may consider it precious now
This pillar of cypress beloved of you
That is no reason to stay behind here*

Her women grieved, each for her own particular reasons, sniffling and staring out at trees or grasses they had never given much thought to before but would miss once they had left.

Moku was to remain behind to serve the Major Captain. Chūjō no moto composed the following:

*It seems as shallow as clear water amidst the rocks
Your relationship with our lord ... yet you remain here
While the one who should protect this house must go away*

“I never thought things would turn out this way ... that I would have to part from you under these circumstances.”

Moku replied:

*You say these clear waters are shallow, but they are silent
Their flow dammed by the rocks ... I too am silent, my heart choked
At the prospect of a destiny I did not desire*

“It is too much for me ... ,” she said, bursting into tears.

The wife gazed back as her carriages were drawn away. Realizing that she would not likely see this place ever again, she was struck by the evanescent nature of life. Her gaze was fixed on the treetops around the home, and she looked back at them over and over until they disappeared from view.⁶ Her beloved may not have resided there, but how could she not have had lingering affection for the place where she had spent so much of her life?

Prince Hyōbu was feeling vexed and disconcerted as he waited to take in his daughter. His wife was crying and making a scene.

“You thought it was so wonderful and all having your daughter married to Genji, but it seems to me that he’s always been an enemy to this house. Just take our daughter, the Consort ... he did everything he could to keep her from His Majesty and hinder her advancement, but you were convinced that he was motivated by his lingering resentment of your behavior during his exile, that he just wanted to get back at you. I know there was gossip to that effect going around the court, but I have to wonder if that’s necessarily true. I mean, I don’t understand it ... if Murasaki is really so precious to him, you would expect him to share his good fortune with her relatives as well. And now his recent actions have gone way beyond anything he’s done before. He takes in that so-called stepdaughter of his—who knows what connection he has to her?—and after he’s used her for his pleasure, their relationship goes stale, and he feels sorry for her. So he holds court and makes a big fuss over her to draw in an upright gentleman, someone who isn’t likely to do anything wanton, to take her as a wife. He’s spiteful and cruel!”

“That’s enough,” Prince Hyōbu interrupted. “I can’t listen to this! Genji’s reputation at court is above reproach. You can’t just go rashly blurting out criticisms of him. He’s an intelligent man ... he plans things out well in advance, which means that he’s been thinking for some time about getting back at me. It has been my unfortunate destiny to be despised by him. He has acted quietly behind the scenes, coldly taking his revenge on all those he believes betrayed him during his exile, and he has cleverly manipulated the court, promoting his

allies and frustrating his enemies. Still, he considers me a close relative ... why else would he have arranged that celebration for my fiftieth birthday the year before last? That event became the talk of the court and was more than our house deserves. It was the honor of my life, and it looks as though I will have to be satisfied with that."

His words only served to enrage his wife all the more, and she spewed curses aimed at Genji. She was not a woman who could be easily placated.

When the Major Captain heard that his principal wife had gone back to her family home, he was caught off guard. *Completely inexplicable ... she's putting on a show of jealousy as if we were some young married couple. It's not like her to act so impetuously. This is her father's doing, rashly encouraging her to leave me.* His mind was in turmoil. There were the children to consider, and the whole affair would look sordid in the eyes of society.

"This is too bizarre," he told Tamakazura as he prepared to leave, "but it may make things easier for you. She's always been passive, and so I confidently assumed that she would simply withdraw to a corner of my residence once you moved in. Her father is the one who orchestrated this abrupt move. I'm worried that gossip about this could harm my reputation, so I must go out for a short while ... but I'll be coming back soon."

He was dressed in a formal black cloak that designated his status as a courtier of the third rank,⁷ layered robes in the willow pattern of white lined with green, and light gray trousers cinched at the hems. He cut a remarkably dignified figure. Tamakazura's women observed him and thought him a perfectly appropriate match for their mistress. The lady herself, however, would not so much as glance at him. Having heard what had happened with the Major Captain's other wife, she realized just how cruel her own fate had been.

Before going to Prince Hyōbu's residence to voice his complaints, the Major Captain first dropped by his own house on the way. Moku came out to meet him and reported on all that had taken place. He had shown manly self-control up to that point, but it was deeply moving to see how he broke down and wept after hearing how unhappy his daughter had been.

"So, in the end, she refused to acknowledge the affection I had for her all those years when I overlooked her eccentricity and her uncanny malady. If I'd been a truly selfish man, would I have put up with her for so long? Oh well ... she was probably beyond recovery, whether she stayed here or left, and so I suppose it's all the same either way. But what will become of my children?"

Sighing, he looked at that "beloved pillar of cypress" where he had found his daughter's letter. As childish as her writing was, the tender feelings it expressed touched him so deeply that he was wiping tears from his eyes all the way to

Prince Hyōbu's residence. Once there, however, he was refused a meeting with his wife.

"What? He wants to see you? Look ... he's a man given to fawning and currying favor depending on who's in power," Prince Hyōbu advised his daughter. "This isn't the first time he's had a change of heart. I've been hearing reports for some time now about how he lost his head over that young thing the past couple of years, and I'd been waiting for the moment when he would finally come to his senses again. But that moment never arrived, and staying with him now will only expose your miserable situation to the whole world." Considered from that point of view, it was entirely reasonable for him to want to keep his daughter from seeing her husband.

"I feel as if we are some young, immature couple," the Major Captain replied when he heard of Prince Hyōbu's attitude. "It was thoughtless of me to be so complacent, to assume that she would never be able to abandon our children ... but I suppose there's no way for me to apologize or make up for that now. All I ask is that you remain calm and patient and give me a little more time with her. After that, if society judges that I'm to blame, then you can take your daughter back." It was difficult for him to have to plead in this manner. "I would like to see my daughter," he added, but the girl was not permitted to come out and meet him.

His older son, who was ten, served as a page at the palace. He was a sweet-looking lad, highly praised by courtiers; though his features weren't exceptionally fine, he was capable and had a sharp, quick mind. The younger son was still only eight, and he was so cute that he put the Major Captain in mind of his beloved daughter. Crying as he caressed the little boy, stroking his hair, he said, "I shall look on you as a memento of your sister, whom I miss so much!"

He then asked if he might speak directly to Prince Hyōbu, but received this reply: "I have caught a cold and am indisposed." He left feeling awkward and peeved.

He had his little boys board his carriage and talked to them on the way. He couldn't very well take them to the Rokujō estate, and so he stopped at his own house first. "You must stay here for the time being. I will feel more at ease knowing that I can come and see you." Their little faces looked up at him blankly, since they did not understand what was going on, and they seemed devastated as they watched him leave. Their expressions touched him greatly, and he felt as though he were being burdened with yet another care. He was able to find comfort, however, in his young bride, who was so beautiful compared to the haggard, wasted appearance of his older wife that just looking at her made him feel better.

The Major Captain no longer bothered trying to contact Prince Hyōbu's residence. His excuse was that he had been offended by the refusal to meet with him. For his part, Prince Hyōbu was further aggrieved at what he considered shocking behavior.

Murasaki was upset when she heard about this.

"It's distressing to think this will give them a reason to resent me."

Genji sympathized.

"This is a trying situation. I certainly did not decide on my own that Tamakazura should marry the Major Captain, but now Emperor Reizei is displeased with me. I've heard that Sochinomiya and her other suitors are angry as well, but the Prince is at least a man of sensitivity and understanding—after I explained what happened, he was satisfied that none of this was my intention and his resentment faded. People always want to try to keep their relationships secret, but such affairs cannot be kept hidden; word of them will naturally get around. In this case, I feel we've done nothing that merits anyone's resentment."

Tamakazura was increasingly stressed by the uproar caused by her marriage, and the Major Captain, who felt sorry for her, wanted to change her mood. *The plan to send her to the palace has been put off*, he reflected, *and I gather that His Majesty is unhappy with me for that. I can only imagine what the Chancellor and the Palace Minister must think. Has there ever been a case of a man entrusting his wife to His Majesty's service?* After considering these factors—his wife's mood, his own reputation—he decided to send her to the palace right after the New Year.

It so happened that this particular year *otokotōka* was to be performed, and this festivity provided the perfect opportunity to bring Tamakazura to the palace. She made her way there amid incomparable splendor and pomp, enjoying the combined support of Genji, Tō no Chūjō, and her husband. Genji's son, the Consultant, also assisted her devotedly as he had promised, and it was wonderful to see her half brothers doing all they could to be of service.

Her quarters were set up on the east side of the Shōkyōden. Prince Hyōbu's daughter, who was the Consort in those chambers, resided on the west side, so only a corridor separated the two women—though the emotional distance between them was much greater. The women of the palace were all in competition with one another, and that made for an especially fascinating and delightful period at court. His Majesty kept very few lower-ranking concubines—the sort of women most likely to cause trouble. Instead, he had the Umetsubo Empress, the Kokiden Consort, the Consort in the Shōkyōden, and the Minister of the Left's daughter, who was also a Consort. The only lower-ranking concubines he kept were the daughter of a Middle Counselor and the daughter of

a Consultant.

Members of the families of the Emperor's concubines and consorts gathered for the performance of songs and dances at the *otokotōka*; because the celebration promised to be an exceptionally lively spectacle, everyone took special care in primping for the occasion, making sure that the many-layered sleeves that draped out from behind the blinds were as gorgeous as possible. The Crown Prince's mother, the former Shōkyōden Consort and sister of the Major Captain, was especially brilliant-looking. The Crown Prince himself, though still quite young, was in every respect stylish and up-to-date.

The performers made their rounds, appearing before His Majesty, the Umetsubo Empress, and the Retired Emperor Suzaku. By this time it was late at night and, given the party's pressing schedule, Genji decided it would be too much trouble for the performers to have to come all the way over to the Rokujō estate on this occasion. Instead, he had them return directly to the imperial palace, where they made further rounds singing and dancing for the ladies of the Crown Prince.

The party continued its drunken revelry in the faint, elegant light of early dawn. As they sang the *saibara* "Bamboo River,"¹⁸ the sonorous voices and outstanding looks of the several sons of Tō no Chūjō in attendance stood out from the other men. Tō no Chūjō's eighth son, born of his principal wife, was a young page. This boy, who was his father's favorite, looked strikingly beautiful as he stood next to the Major Captain's oldest son. Tamakazura's gaze naturally settled on her husband's child, since she could no longer think of him as a stranger.

Compared to the sleeves of the great ladies who were accustomed to court service, those of Tamakazura's women, which spilled out from beneath the blinds as they were viewing the performance, seemed especially fresh and lively, even though they displayed the same color schemes as the others. Tamakazura and her women all wanted to spend more time at the palace, where the atmosphere was bright and gorgeous. They had carefully prepared the customary gifts of cotton cloth, which had an exceptional luster, draping them in equal portions across the shoulders of all the participants. Though the performance Tamakazura was viewing was meant to be no more than a passing stop to allow the singers and dancers to refresh themselves, the Major Captain had gone out of his way to make sure that the setting was interesting and that everything for the reception surpassed expectations.

The Major Captain remained in his palace offices during the festivities, but all through the day he pressured Tamakazura over and over with the same message: "We must withdraw from the palace when evening comes. I am worried that an

occasion such as this may bring a change of heart and that you will wish to remain in service here.”

She did not respond to him, and he was put out when her attendants tactfully parried him: “The Chancellor has told us we should not feel rushed. Because we come to the palace so rarely, we should stay until His Majesty is satisfied and gives us permission to leave. Given what he has told us, don’t you think it would be much too early to leave this evening?”

The Major Captain sighed. “It doesn’t seem to matter what I say to her. Our relationship is not what I had hoped for.”

Prince Sochinomiya was performing music for His Majesty following the *otokotōka* celebrations, but his heart was agitated after learning that quarters had been set up for Tamakazura. Unable to contain his emotions, he sent her a message. The Major Captain was still in his offices at that moment, and because Tamakazura was told that the message was from her husband, she looked at it reluctantly.

*Has there ever been a more hateful spring
When, deep in the mountains, birds flit about
In the branches of some nondescript tree*

“I hear the constant twittering of those birds ... ,”⁹ Sochinomiya added. She blushed out of shame and pity for him and was trying to figure out how she should respond when His Majesty arrived.

Emperor Reizei’s face in the moonlight was fair beyond description. He looked just like Genji, and Tamakazura was amazed to think that two such men should exist in this world. Genji’s deep desire for her had been nothing more than a source of unpleasant anxiety, and she found it hard to understand why His Majesty would also be so drawn to her. When he began to tell her in a warm, gentle tone of voice how disappointed he was that his wish to have her at the palace had been thwarted, she was so mortified that she could not face him. Because she was hiding her face behind a fan and refusing to reply, he remarked, “How strangely quiet and reserved you are ... I would have thought that your good fortune at being granted a promotion to the third rank would have made you aware of my feelings. I can only surmise that your habit of pretending not to notice such things is now wholly ingrained in you.”

*How can it be that my feelings should be colored
By purple dye that has not yet set on the robes
Of one who remains aloof and untouched¹⁰*

“Was that color never meant to deepen?”

She felt humbled before his dashing, youthful presence, but she gathered herself—perhaps encouraged that he was identical to Genji in looks—and replied with a poem intended to express her gratitude for receiving the promotion despite not having served at court:

*Though I do not know the meaning of this hue
Or with what intent these robes were dyed purple
The dyer's special feelings seem clear to me*

“From now on I will serve, always thankful for your gracious favors.”

His Majesty smiled at her words, but then he said, “It does me no good if that color has only just now set. If there is anyone to hear my complaint, let her judge whether or not it has any merit.” The serious expression on his face as he gave vent to his resentments made her feel terribly uncomfortable, and yet she also found his advances awkward and unpleasant. She did not want to come across as encouraging his feelings and wondered if it was common for all men to act in such a troublesome way. Consequently, she was so prim and serious as she waited on him that His Majesty had no opportunity to speak suggestively about his feelings—though he was longing to do so. Still, he assumed that eventually she would come around little by little and grow closer to him.

Upon learning that His Majesty had called on Tamakazura, the Major Captain felt very uneasy and in a near panic pressed her again to withdraw. Tamakazura herself was feeling ill at ease and depressed that her circumstances practically ensured that something untoward would happen between her and His Majesty. Thus, she devised an appropriate excuse for withdrawing and, thanks to the clever intervention of her father, was granted permission to leave.

“So, that’s how it is,” Emperor Reizei said to her. “It appears that someone has learned his lesson ... he knows that if you were to stay on, you might not be allowed to leave again. This is a bitter pill to swallow. After all, I expressed my intentions regarding you before anyone else, but now I’ve fallen behind and must follow after trying to fawn and flatter you. It reminds me of that incident from ancient times when Taira no Sadafun lost his beloved to Fujiwara no Tokihira.”¹¹ He looked genuinely displeased.

Even though he had not been interested in her at the beginning, now that he had seen her up close and realized she was even more attractive than reports had suggested, he didn’t want to let her go. His sense of frustration and resentment grew all the more intense. However, he did not want to give the impression that he was shallow and unreasonable, and so, with utmost sincerity and sensitivity,

he vowed to remain devoted to her. His promise moved and humbled her. She was all too aware of her own lowly station, and in her heart she wanted to stay with him.

He did her the great honor of summoning a carriage drawn by servants. The escorts and attendants from both Genji's and Tō no Chūjō's houses were waiting impatiently to leave, and the Major Captain was restlessly fretting over preparations and making a nuisance of himself by remaining beside Tamakazura.

His Majesty was irritated. "Your bodyguard seems quite dedicated, staying so near to you like this. It's most annoying."

*If the ninefold clouds enveloping the palace
Must keep us apart, have I no reason to hope
That a breeze might bring me the scent of plum blossoms*

Not an exceptional poem by any means, but since Emperor Reizei was composing it in person for her, it must have been delightful. "I find the fields so precious that I long to spend the night there¹² ... but, of course, a certain someone would resent me for doing so. And when I think about the situation from his point of view, I do feel bad for him. But tell me, how shall I get in touch with you?" Once again, his apparently troublesome thoughts were both gratifying and humbling to her.

*The plum blossom's fragrance does not compare
With that of flowers on other branches ...
May your fragrance waft to me on the breeze*

In this way she implied that she would not stay away from him permanently. Reizei, moved to pity by her circumstances, glanced back over and over as he left.

The Major Captain had been secretly planning all along to take Tamakazura back to his own residence that evening because he knew Genji would never have given permission if asked. "I'm not feeling well ... I think I'm coming down with a cold," he told her in a rather offhand manner. "I must go rest where I can feel comfortable, but I would be very anxious to do that while you are staying somewhere else." And, with that excuse, he went straight off to his house. Tō no Chūjō considered his action not only rash but also a breach of etiquette, since he did not take Tamakazura past the Rokujō villa first. However, he did not want to irritate the Major Captain by unnecessarily butting in with an unsolicited opinion. "Well ... what's done is done," he remarked. "I suppose that under the

circumstances I was never free to do anything about it anyway.”

Back at the Rokujō estate, Genji was taken completely by surprise and deeply frustrated. But what could he do about it? Tamakazura felt as if she were a trail of smoke from a salt-making fire that the wind had carried off in an unforeseen direction,¹³ whereas her husband was genuinely happy and self-satisfied, like a man who had managed to steal a precious bride. She, on the other hand, considered his absurd jealousy over His Majesty’s visit to her at the palace to be disgusting and vulgar. She was more out of sorts than ever and would not warm to their relationship.

The people at Prince Hyōbu’s residence had no idea what to do now. Having been criticized so harshly, the Major Captain no longer dropped by to see his wife. Instead, he passed his days and nights leisurely looking after his bride to his heart’s content.

The second month arrived. *No matter what his excuse may have been, it was an insensitive thing to do*, Genji mused. He never imagined the Major Captain was capable of such audacity, and he was annoyed that his own carelessness made him look bad. Not a moment went by when he wasn’t anxiously thinking about Tamakazura, and memories of her stirred fond longings. A person’s karmic destiny may be unpredictable, but there was no denying that he had only himself—not the actions of another—to blame for what had happened. Whether he was awake or asleep, a vision of her was always in his mind.

Since the Major Captain was a humorless and insipid man, Genji thought it would not do for him to engage in even the most trivial sort of playful banter with Tamakazura. He restrained himself and did not write to her for some time until a rainy period that spring when everything was quiet and peaceful—just the kind of idle time when he might have sought diversion from the tedium by going to Tamakazura’s quarters and talking with her. Because he missed her terribly, he broke his silence and sent a letter, which he had delivered discreetly to one of her attendants, a woman called Ukon.¹⁴ Worried about what Ukon might make of his message, Genji did not express his feelings explicitly, but used rather bland language that left it to Tamakazura’s imagination to figure out his true intent.

*During this quiet, melancholy time
When the spring rains are constantly falling
Do you recall the one you left at home*

“In my idleness, many memories bring bitter resentment ... but how can I tell you about them?”

Ukon brought the letter to her mistress in a private moment when the Major Captain was not around. Tamakazura wept to see it. Though he had been a father to her, she could never let on how much she longed to see him, and the memory of his figure grew ever more dear to her as time passed. However, now that the identity of her real father had been revealed, it made her sad to realize the truth of the question he put to her, for how would she ever be able to see him again? Certainly she had detested his occasional unwanted advances, but she could hardly share with Ukon the intimate details of her relationship with Genji. She kept them locked inside her heart, where she dwelled on them in secret. Ukon sensed that there must have been something between her mistress and Genji, though it was hard to fathom the nature of the relationship.

Tamakazura wrote out her reply: "I feel embarrassed communicating with you, but I fear I might give offense if I don't respond."

*In pensive mood I stare at endless rain
Dripping off the eaves to dampen my sleeves
How could I not feel sad, secret longings*

"Just as you said, the melancholy I feel in my idleness deepens with the passage of time. But I'm afraid I must stop here ..." She was careful to maintain a sense of decorum and not write anything that would give her emotions away.

Genji spread open her letter, feeling as though his own tears might fall like raindrops from the eaves. He checked his emotions, however, worried that it might be awkward if anyone saw him react, and read the letter with feigned indifference. In spite of his efforts at self-control, his heart was full as he remembered that time, in days long past, when the Imperial Mother of Retired Emperor Suzaku—the former Kokiden Consort who had been his implacable enemy—resolutely kept hidden away from him another Principal Handmaid he loved, Oborozukiyo. Of course, that was all in the distant past, while his relationship with Tamakazura was in the here and now; for that reason, he felt a sadness like nothing he had ever experienced.

Men who are given to the pursuit of amorous affairs always act according to the dictates of their hearts and thus bring misery on themselves. Why must my own heart be in such turmoil? After all, she's no longer an appropriate object of my affections. He tried to put her out of his mind, but he simply could not give her up. Pulling his seven-string koto over in front of him, he began to pluck the strings, the music bringing back warm memories of the two of them playing together. His instrument was tuned to the native *Azuma* mode, and he produced sweet overtones with his *sugagaki* technique as he sang a line from the folk song

“Mandarin Ducks”¹⁵ in a low, murmuring voice: “Cut not the glistening water plants ...” If Tamakazura, who missed him so much, could have seen him at that moment, she would have been deeply moved.

Emperor Reizei had caught only the briefest glimpse of Tamakazura’s face and figure, but they had made a deep impression on his heart. “Her figure, with that crimson skirt trailing behind ...”¹⁶—a line from an old, unsophisticated verse, but one that Reizei found himself murmuring over and over as he stared off, lost in reverie. He secretly sent letters to her, but she had by now resigned herself to her woeful lot in life and considered such playful diversions improper for a woman in her position. So as not to encourage any further interest, she always answered in a cool, formal manner. In comparison, she found it harder to forget Genji, since the gracious kindness he had shown to her in all sorts of ways had made a lasting impression.

It was now the third month. Viewing the exquisite evening light that bathed the wisteria and mountain roses in Murasaki’s garden, Genji was reminded of the time when Tamakazura’s lovely figure was sitting here taking in a similar scene. Moved by the memory, he went to her former quarters in the northeast residence to view the garden there. The color of the blooms of the untended mountain roses twining naturally about the low rustic fence made of a wattle of Chinese bamboo was exceptionally appealing. He whispered a line from a poem —“the silent color of gardenia that dyes my robes”¹⁷—then composed his own:

*We parted on the road that runs through Ide
Famed for mountain roses ... I yearn in silence
For those beloved yellow flowers, and for you*

“My face gives away my emotions ... ,” he added, though there was no one there to hear him. Just then, he was struck by the reality that they were indeed separated. It seemed that his heart had been playing strange tricks on him. He noticed a clutch of wild goose eggs and had them prepared as a present in simple fashion, as one might wrap up small tangerines or mandarin oranges, and sent to Tamakazura. He attached a letter, written in a serious tone so as not to attract attention or give the impression that it was a love letter. He wrote:

Days and months of anxious concern for you accumulate, and though I want to give vent to my resentment at your outrageous treatment of me, I have heard that you did not leave entirely of your own volition. In any case, I am disappointed that, unless some special occasion arises, I will not be able to meet you.

He added this poem:

*What good did it do for me to incubate
All these eggs in the same nest ... for one is gone
And I'm left to wonder who snatched it away*

“It troubles me that things turned out this way.”

The Major Captain saw the letter and smiled.

“A wife cannot just go off frivolously to see someone, not even her real father, without a good reason,” he muttered. “So, why is it that the Chancellor continues to send you letters complaining that he cannot give you up?” Tamakazura thought his words were spiteful.

“I simply cannot respond to him,” she said, finding it hard to write what she wanted with her husband there.

“Then let me answer for you.” Tamakazura was apprehensive at the idea that her husband would act as her proxy.

*The hatchling off to the side of the nest
Not counted among the brood of young geese . . .
Who would think to take it, and take it where . . .*

“I am startled by your inappropriate attitude. My reply may seem suggestive, but do not take it that way.”

“I’ve never seen the Major Captain so witty before. What a rare treat!” Genji smiled, but in his heart he was vexed that he had been bested and that the man had taken his lovely garland from him.

As time went by, the former principal wife of the Major Captain fell into a deep depression, shocked at how things had turned out. Her mental condition grew increasingly unstable, but her former husband continued to see to her welfare in every way he could. His feelings for their children had not changed at all, and so he could never be completely estranged from her. He dutifully provided financial support, but despite his generosity he was still not allowed to see his daughter at all, even though he missed her terribly. To the girl’s childish heart, it was sad and devastating that everyone was bitterly condemning her father and trying to drive a wedge between them. Her younger brothers had gradually grown accustomed to the new arrangements at their father’s house, and, whenever they visited her, they of course spoke about Tamakazura. “She treats us kindly and lovingly,” they would say, “and she passes the time from morning to evening enjoying all sorts of delightful diversions.” The girl was

very envious of her brothers and lamented that she had not been born a boy so that she might also behave as she pleased.

It was truly uncanny how Tamakazura's presence could stir such yearning in people, both men and women.

In the eleventh month of that year, Tamakazura gave birth to an exceptionally fine boy. The Major Captain, rejoicing that this was a sign of the good fortune for which he had been hoping, did absolutely everything in his power to look after the baby. Though I have not provided details about her pregnancy and the birth, the reader may well imagine everything that happened during the intervening months. Tō no Chūjō also rejoiced that his daughter's destiny had unfolded as he hoped it would. As it turned out, she was in no way inferior in looks and bearing to those daughters he himself had gone to such great effort to rear.

Kashiwagi grew closer to Tamakazura, treating her as a beloved sister—though once in a while there were signs that he continued to harbor feelings for her that were difficult to abandon. Her little boy was so cute that Kashiwagi believed it would have been preferable had she gone to serve at the palace and had a son by the Emperor instead. He perhaps overstepped the bounds of propriety when he gave voice to that opinion. "His Majesty is always lamenting the fact that he doesn't have a son. Had she given him a prince, it would have brought great glory to our house."

Tamakazura continued to carry out her responsibilities as Principal Handmaid, but with her life having taken the turn it did, she had to give up going to the palace. This was, no doubt, an unavoidable decision.

OH YES ... before I forget, I have something to relate concerning the Palace Minister's other daughter—the lady from Ōmi who had aspired to be Principal Handmaid. She had a flirtatious personality, as is often the case with women of her ilk, and this trait was a source of considerable anxiety for her father. Her sister, the Kokiden Consort, was also in a constant state of dread, fearing that the lady would end up entangled in some disgraceful affair. The Palace Minister ordered his uncouth daughter not to mingle in public with the other ladies-in-waiting, but she would not heed his command and would appear before the Consort anyway.

Once, on an especially lovely autumn evening—it must have been during some festival or celebration—a large number of distinguished noblemen had gathered in the Consort's presence and were playing music in a warm, gentle tempo. Genji's son, the Consultant, was bantering with the women in a teasing

manner not typical of his behavior. The Consort's women were all amazed by this and were singing his praises, saying, among other things, "He's certainly an extraordinary young gentleman." Just then, the lady from Ōmi came pushing her way through the group. They tried to restrain her, saying, "Oh my ... this won't do at all!" Despite their efforts, she struggled mightily, glaring defiantly at them. In consternation, they all braced themselves for the worst. "She's bound to say something embarrassing."

"Yes, he really *is* special, isn't he?" she said, further praising Genji's son. Her excited whisper was clearly audible, to the utter mortification of the attendants. She then went on to compose the following, speaking in a clear, ringing voice:

*O little boat adrift on waves in the offing
If there is no harbor to shelter you, tell me
Where you anchor so that I may row out to you*

"I hear that you always return to the same harbor—that Kumoinokari. How unfortunate," she added.

Genji's son thought her poem peculiar and was puzzled. Who, of all the women here, would speak so brazenly? He then remembered the lady of Ōmi. Amused, he composed this reply:

*Even a boat with no harbor
Buffeted by powerful winds
Will not draw near a craggy shore*

It is said that she was crestfallen by his rejection.

¹ A brief description of the Third Night celebration, when a couple formally finalizes their marriage, is provided in the *Aoi* chapter.

² The Sacred Mirror was one of the three imperial regalia (the sword and the curved jewel being the other two). It was in some ways the most important in that it signified the imperial family's divine lineage as a symbol of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu.

³ The River of Three Fords is the place where souls cross over to the realm of the dead. It was believed that a woman's first lover would assist her across the river.

⁴ *Gosenshū* 481 (Anonymous): "As I lie awake on this winter's night longing for you, crying until dawn, the ice from the frozen tears on my sleeves will not melt away."

⁵ The word *hitori* ("by myself" or "alone") could be read as a homonym for the word meaning "censer." The wordplay here is not exact, but because *hitori* carries at least an echo of the incident with the censer the night before, I have tried to convey that echo by describing the sleeves as both cold *and* fragrant.

⁶ *Shūishū* 351 (Sugawara no Michizane, on going into exile): "I gaze back as the tops of the trees around

the house of my beloved move further and further away until they disappear from view.”

⁷ As we saw in the *Miotsukushi* chapter, the designation of rank by color was somewhat fluid throughout the Heian period: by the latter half of the period, black was coming to replace purple and dark purple for the highest ranks.

⁸ This song is mentioned in the *Hatsune* chapter above.

⁹ *Kokinshū* 28 (Anonymous): “Though spring, when birds are constantly twittering, is the season when all the world is renewed, I alone feel that I am growing old.”

¹⁰ The text does not explicitly state that Tamakazura has been promoted to the third rank, but the mention of purple robes in the context of Reizei’s other statements makes it clear that she has received his favor. The poem plays on the dual meanings for the phrase *hai aigataki [ha(h)i a(h)igataki]*—“the ash (*hai*, i.e., the mordant used to fix dyes) has a hard time taking / setting the color” and “cannot meet” (*aigataki*, which I have translated as “aloof and untouchable”).

¹¹ Reizei is referring to the story of Taira no Sadafun (d. 923), a courtier and poet who is sometimes referred to by the name Heichū. Sadafun was courting a woman in the house of a major counselor when she was suddenly taken away by Fujiwara no Tokihira (871–909), who made her his wife. Tokihira was the ruthless minister of the Left and de facto regent who was responsible for the downfall of Sugawara no Michizane.

¹² *Man'yōshū* 1424 (Yamabe no Akahito): “I came to pick violets in the fields of spring, but I find the fields so precious that I spent the night sleeping there.”

¹³ *Kokinshū* 708 [also *Tales of Ise*, section 112] (Anonymous): “Buffeted by a powerful wind, the smoke from the salt-making fire of a fisherwoman of Suma has drifted off in an unforeseen direction.”

¹⁴ This is not the same woman who served Tamakazura’s mother and Genji.

¹⁵ “Mandarin ducks, wild ducks, wild geese have all come to Hara Pond, so cut not the glistening water plants, but let them grow, o let them grow!”

¹⁶ *Kokin rokujō* 3333 [also *Man'yōshū* 2550] (Anonymous): “I long for her constantly, whether going about or resting ... her figure, with that crimson skirt trailing behind, is always on my mind.”

¹⁷ *Kokin rokujō* 3508 (Anonymous): “I do not wish to speak of my love or my yearning ... I shall leave that to the silent color of gardenia that dyes my robes.” The word for gardenia, *kuchinashi*, may be read as a wordplay meaning “silent” (literally, “without a mouth”). The dye made from gardenia seed was a rich yellow similar to the color of mountain roses, which explains the association Genji makes here.

XXXII

Umegae

A Branch of Plum

GENJI WAS planning the ceremony at which his daughter, the Akashi Princess, would don her first train, and he was determined to make the event the most splendid of its kind ever seen. The event would be held during the second month at roughly the same time the Crown Prince, who was now thirteen, would have his coming-of-age ceremony, and she would enter service for the Crown Prince soon after.

It was now the end of the first month, a period in the court calendar that marked a lull in public and private responsibilities at the court and provided Genji some free time to blend incense for his daughter's upcoming ceremony and subsequent move to the palace. Genji had just inspected some fragrant woods that the current Assistant Governor General of Kyūshū had sent to him, along with other imported goods, and he decided they were not as good in quality as some older woods he possessed. He had a storehouse at his old Nijō villa opened and various materials brought to him, including some cloth from China. Upon inspecting these items, he remarked, "These older brocades and damasks are more pleasing and better made." He went through everything carefully, selecting various items that were unlike anything else seen nowadays at the court, including a crimson damask with gold designs presented to him long ago by the Korean Embassy during its mission at the beginning of his father's reign. He would have this damask used to make covers for the Akashi Princess's personal furnishings, mats for the floor, and trim for cushions. Once he had made his selections, he divided up the brocades and silks the Assistant Governor General had sent to him and gave them to his daughter's ladies-in-waiting.

He lined up pieces of fragrant woods, both old and new, to compare and judge them, and then parceled them out among his women. "Blend two kinds of

incense from these,” he told them. It was a busy time as people at Genji’s estates at Rokujō and elsewhere were occupied preparing magnificent gifts and rewards for the senior nobles that would be distributed at the ceremony for the Akashi Princess. The clanging of iron mortars and pestles rang out from each of the residences at Rokujō as the ladies ground and mixed the ingredients they had selected with the fragrant wood Genji had given them to create their own particular incenses.

Genji secluded himself in the main hall, where he set about diligently blending two types of incense based on a secret formula handed down from the Jōwa period by Emperor Ninmyō¹—how he came by the formula is anybody’s guess. Murasaki had curtains put up around a space just off the main room of the east hall and withdrew there to work on creating her two incenses, which were based on formulas developed by Prince Motoyasu, a master incense maker who was a son of Emperor Ninmyō and who served as the Hachijō Minister of Ceremonials. Her secretiveness prompted Genji to remark, “The victor in this contest will be judged on the depth and subtlety of the fragrance produced.” The two of them were behaving so competitively that they hardly seemed like the parents of the young lady. Very few women waited on either of them during this period, since they were busy putting all their effort into ensuring that the accessories and furnishings for the ceremony would be spectacular in every detail. The boxes for the incense jars, the shapes of the jars themselves, and the design of the censers were original and remarkably modern in form, unlike anything seen before. Genji was going to such trouble because he planned to select only the finest of the incenses produced by his ladies—after testing each one—and he wanted containers and accessories worthy of them.

A light rain fell on the tenth day of the second month. In Murasaki’s garden the plum trees near her residence were in full bloom, and the beauty of their color and fragrance was unsurpassed. Prince Sochinomiya paid a visit that day to see how Genji was getting along as he was busily trying to finish up preparations for the ceremony that day and the next. The two men had always enjoyed a special relationship, and they discussed various topics. They were just getting around to praising the plum trees when a messenger arrived bearing a letter from Princess Asagao. The letter was attached to a branch of plum from which all the blossoms had scattered. Sochinomiya had heard rumors about Genji’s infatuation with Asagao, and found it most amusing. “So tell me, just what sort of letter is it that she should be going to all this trouble?”

Genji smiled. “That’s a rather impudent question. Just so you know, it seems she has been very conscientious and hurried to finish up a task I requested of her.” Saying no more, he put the letter away.

Asagao had sent an aloeswood box containing two porcelain jars, one blue and one white, each filled with large round incense pellets. She had decorated the blue jar with an artificial sprig of five-pine needle to signify that the incense was *kurobō*,² a sandalwood-based fragrance associated with winter. A carved plum blossom was tied to the white jar to indicate the springtime fragrance of the incense it held. The cords used to tie on these decorations created a soft, vivid impression. Sochinomiya was impressed. *What an elegant presentation*, he thought as he inspected the box. He then noticed that Asagao had attached a poem in a faint hand:

*The fragrance of its scattered blossoms
No longer clings to this branch of plum ...
May it suffuse the sleeves of her robes*

Aware of Genji's feelings for Asagao, Sochinomiya overdid his murmuring recitation of the verse.

Genji's son had the messenger stay on and plied him with wine until the man was extremely drunk. He also rewarded him with a set of women's long robes in the plum style, red lined with purple, made of cloth imported from China. Genji chose paper of plum red for his reply and attached it to a branch of red plum blossoms from Murasaki's garden. Sochinomiya was curious to see the contents of the letter and remarked somewhat resentfully, "That must be some letter you've written ... what secrets are you keeping that you need to be so discreet?"

"What secrets could I possibly have? It hurts me that you should think I would keep anything from you." Genji took up his brush and wrote the following poem on that occasion:

*Fearful of being censured, you keep the fragrance
From your branch of plum blossoms hidden ... yet that scent
More alluring than ever, permeates my heart*

"It may seem I am being self-indulgent by treating this ceremony so seriously," Genji said, "but I believe that my efforts are justified—she is the only daughter I have. She is really quite unattractive, and I would be embarrassed to have someone who is not close to her assume the honor of tying the waist cords. And so I'm thinking of asking the Umetsubo Empress to come here from the palace to carry out that role. Although I am permitted a degree of familiarity in my interactions with Her Majesty, she is such an imposing and distinguished person that I feel humble before her, and I would be ashamed if anything at the

ceremony looked common or vulgar."

"Her Majesty's great good fortune is also something that must be taken into account. She would be an auspicious choice for the young lady," Sochinomiya added, echoing Genji's thoughts.

The delivery of the box of incense from Asagao gave Genji an excuse to sample all of the fragrances that his women had been preparing, and so he sent a message to each of them: "Because of the rain today, the air this evening will be humid, which is the perfect condition to test your efforts." In response, they presented their creations in a variety of charming jars and boxes. Genji ordered a large number of censers be brought out, and he had Sochinomiya serve as judge, telling him, "You must decide which of these is best. To whom should I show them, if not to you?"³

"I'm not qualified to judge," Sochinomiya answered modestly, but he managed to establish subtle critical standards to determine the merits, flaws and categories for all of the indescribably lovely fragrances. On the basis of those criteria, he was able to distinguish which ones were superior and which inferior. At the very end Genji brought out the two types of incense he had blended himself. Certain courtiers at the palace were in the habit of burying their incense on the bank of the stream running beside the quarters of the Right Guard to allow the damp soil to intensify the aroma. Following that practice, Genji had buried his own incense next to the stream that flowed under the passageway leading off the west side of his residence. A Secretary in the Imperial Guards—the son of Koremitsu, who by this time had risen to the rank of Consultant—was sent to dig up the incense. He brought it to Genji's son, who took it and, in turn, presented it to his father.

"You've given me a most difficult task! It's awfully smoky in here," Sochinomiya said, as he struggled awkwardly to come to a decision. One might have assumed that the same techniques and formulas would have been passed down to all the ladies. Instead, each had blended incense according to her individual method and taste, which made for many stimulating moments in judging the depth or subtlety of the various fragrances.

It was almost impossible to say which among the varieties of incense was best, but the winter incense *kurobō* that Princess Asagao had prepared was, in spite of the humility with which she had presented it to Genji, especially refined—at once alluring and profoundly subtle. The *jijū* incense that Genji had created—a scent redolent of aloeswood and cloves favored during the autumn by gentlemen-in-waiting⁴—was deemed by Sochinomiya to possess a surpassing elegance and rich warmth. Murasaki had provided three types of incense, and her *baika*,⁵ a spring fragrance that evoked the scent of plum blossoms, had a bright,

modern quality to which she had added a slightly sharp, piquant note that made it exceptional. “I have never enjoyed a finer *baika* ... a perfect scent for the breezes of spring,” Sochinomiya noted in admiration.

Hanachirusato had been reluctant to put herself forth. She thought that she was not worthy to be in competition with the other distinguished ladies, who were using all their skill to create their fragrances, and felt that just having her incense compared to the others would be so embarrassing she would want to disappear like the wisps of smoke rising from a censer. Thus, she presented only one incense, her version of *kayō*, a summer fragrance that brought to mind the aroma of lotus blossoms. It was an unusual incense, subtle and secretive, that created a touchingly intimate feel.

The Akashi lady, who resided in the northwest residence, with its winter garden, fretted that the other ladies would overwhelm her if the contest were judged on the basis of seasonal fragrances, and so she produced a superb hundred-paces⁶ incense for perfuming robes that was based on a formula passed down by Emperor Uda and specially selected by the connoisseur Minamoto no Kintada.⁷ It was a fragrance of peerless grace and refinement.

Sochinomiya concluded that all the incense had been prepared with remarkable care and ingenuity, and when he judged that it was all practically flawless, Genji was moved to remark, “We seem to have chosen a most diplomatic judge.”

The moon came out, the wine flowed, and they talked of the old days. The moon, shrouded in mist, had an ethereal quality, and the soft breezes that followed the rain carried the enchanting scent of plum blossoms, which mingled with the ineffable fragrances of the incense that filled the chamber. It was an intoxicating atmosphere for all present.

In the offices of Genji’s household staff some attendants were placing strings and bridges on the musical instruments to be used the following day at the ceremony for the Akashi Princess. There was a large gathering of courtiers, and the delightful sound of flutes being played echoed throughout the residence. Kashiwagi, Kōbai, and other sons of Tō no Chūjō had dropped by simply to pay respects, but Genji had them stay and summoned his staff to bring out several instruments. Prince Sochinomiya took up the *biwa* lute, Genji selected a thirteen-string koto, and Kashiwagi received a six-string Japanese koto. They each displayed a nimble, lively touch that in concert produced a most charming effect. Genji’s son played a transverse flute in a mode suitable for spring, and his clear notes reverberated to the very heavens. Kōbai beat rhythm for the group, and his vocal performance of the *saibara* “A Branch of Plum”⁸ was captivating. Kōbai was the one who as a young page sang “Takasago” all those years ago at the

banquet celebrating the winners of the rhyme-guessing contest.⁹ Genji and Sochinomiya joined him in singing, and because the concert was not overdone, it proved a pleasant evening's diversion. Sochinomiya passed a winecup to his brother and composed the following:

*My enchanted spirit soars higher and higher
Hearing this song, so like the voice of a warbler
In this alluring garden of plum trees in bloom*

“Certainly a thousand years ...”¹⁰

Genji replied:

*This spring the plum trees are in full bloom
At my abode ... I wish you would stay
Till you take on their color and scent*

He passed the winecup to Kashiwagi, who then presented it to Genji's son with this poem:

*Play your bamboo flute on and on
All through the night until it sways
The plum bough where the warbler sleeps*

Genji's son replied:

*The breeze seems loath to scatter the blossoms ...
Would it be right, then, to play on and on
Until the warbler must flee a bare branch*

“A cruel suggestion on your part ... ,” he added, to the laughter of everyone there.

Kōbai responded in turn:

*So long as mist does not obscure the moon
Then surely the warbler in the blossoms
Will think dawn has come and wake up to sing*

Prince Sochinomiya went home when it was fully dawn. As he was preparing to leave to board his carriage, he was presented with a set of court robes that belonged to Genji, as well as two jars of incense that had not been tested the

night before. He left with this poem:

*Going home with the sleeves of these fabulous robes
Suffused with the vivid fragrance of plum blossoms
My beloved will be suspicious and reprove me*

Genji laughed. “You really are fainthearted!” He followed Sochinomiya out while the ox was being yoked.

*The loved one at your villa will think
How amazing you are to return
Wearing a brocade of plum blossoms*

“I’m sure you’ll look like nothing she’s ever seen before!” The Prince found his brother’s wit a little too sharp. Genji gave modest gifts of long robes or women’s robes to the young men in the party, draping the items across their shoulders.

Genji went over to the southwest residence at around eight o’clock that evening during the Hour of the Dog. A space off the main room of the west hall, which the Umetsubo Empress used as her quarters, was specially set up for the ceremony, and a Handmaid from the palace had already arrived to put up the Akashi Princess’s hair. Murasaki had an audience with Umetsubo; their ladies-in-waiting, together with the Akashi Princess’s women, made for a very large group of attendants.

During the Hour of the Rat, at around one in the morning, the cords of the train were tied. Though the light from the lamps was dim, Umetsubo thought that, from what she could make out, the young lady was radiantly beautiful.

Genji spoke to Umetsubo. “It is because I trust you never to abandon her that I asked you to perform this role, even though it meant she had to appear before you in the indecorous dress of a child. I am overwhelmed by the humbling thought that your participation in this ceremony will set a precedent for future generations.”

“I had no idea what to expect,” Umetsubo replied, “but since you went to such lengths to ensure this would be a spectacular event, I must admit I felt somewhat anxious about my role.” So saying, she dispelled Genji’s concern that he might have been guilty of a breach of etiquette. She looked young and charming as she spoke, and he found it wonderfully pleasing that all the refined, lovely women gathered around him should get along so well, just as he had hoped they would.

The Akashi lady had been hurt by what she considered the cruel decision to keep her from seeing her daughter on this occasion. Genji had in fact considered

letting her attend, but in the end he had to be mindful of what people might say, and so he let the event proceed as planned, without her presence.

These sorts of ceremonies—even those not as grand as this one—are complicated and taxing to carry out, and were I to relate even just a few details of the proceedings the reader might well suspect that as usual I have given an exaggerated and one-sided account. For that reason I have chosen not to set down an exhaustive description of the event here.

The Crown Prince's donning of trousers at his coming-of-age ceremony took place some time after the twentieth day of the second month. He was so mature for his age that a number of distinguished nobles and officials had hopes of competing for power by offering their daughters to him. However, the timing of the ceremony for Genji's daughter made it clear what the Chancellor was planning, and so the Minister of the Left and others concluded it might be disadvantageous to send their own daughters to serve the Crown Prince.

When Genji learned about this, he put off moving the Akashi Princess to the palace.

"They're all badly misguided," he said. "Having a large number of women vying with one another at the court is an ideal way to uncover their individual flaws and merits, so that some small distinctions may be made among them. If all these splendid young ladies are locked away in their homes, the next reign will not be an especially glorious one."

Many noblemen remained reluctant to have their daughters follow after the Akashi Princess, but when the Minister of the Left learned through various sources of Genji's decision, he went ahead and had his daughter installed in the Reikeiden.

The Crown Prince was impatiently waiting for the arrival of the Akashi Princess, and so Genji decided that he would send her to the palace in the fourth month. In preparation for the move he had his old apartments in the Kiritsubo refurbished. The furnishings were replaced with superior items, and Genji himself looked after the design and styling of the accessories and decorations. He also gathered sketches for paintings and commissioned the finest masters in all the arts and crafts to make over the chambers, bringing every detail to a brilliant polish. For the bound volumes of poetry and romances that were to fill his daughter's cabinets, Genji chose works that would be of immediate use for writing practice. A great many of those volumes contained examples of calligraphy that had secured lasting reputations for the great masters of the past.

"Everything is corrupted in the latter days of Buddha's Law," Genji remarked to Murasaki, "and the arts today are superficial and inferior to works of the past in every respect save one ... the writing of *kana* is much better nowadays. The

style that predominated in ancient times was fixed and regular, but it tended to always follow the same pattern and showed no creative flair. Calligraphic styles of *kana* have become fresh and intriguing only in recent times. Years ago, when I was learning the female style of writing,¹¹ I collected a large number of pertinent copybooks to study different models. One of them, which I acquired quite innocently without really knowing what was in it, contained a few lines dashed off by the lady at Rokujō, Umetsubo's mother. Her calligraphy was quite extraordinary, and when I saw it, I was smitten and behaved in a way that eventually hurt the lady's reputation. It was never my intent to treat her badly, but she came to regret our relationship. She was a woman of deep sensitivity—perhaps her spirit has observed how I have supported her daughter and sees me now in a different light. Her daughter's calligraphy, on the other hand"—he added, suddenly lowering his voice to a whisper—"is pleasant enough in its way, but I'm afraid that it lacks that indefinable spark that distinguishes a truly great hand.

"Your late aunt, Fujitsubo," he went on, "was undoubtedly a woman of depth and refinement, but her calligraphy was a bit too delicate and thus lacked the substance that truly beautiful writing requires. Oborozukiyo, Suzaku's Principal Handmaid, is one of the most gifted calligraphers of this age, but even she is prone to excessive flourishes, all in the name of being chic. Despite that tendency, she has to be counted among the most talented along with Princess Asagao ... and, of course, with you."

Murasaki was embarrassed at receiving such praise and she demurred, saying, "I do not deserve to be compared with such dazzlingly brilliant women."

"Don't be so modest. Your writing possesses a supple grace and warmth that is exceptional. The more a woman becomes adept at Chinese characters, the more she is likely to mix them in among her *kana*, which then tend to become angular and stiff."

Genji had additional bound volumes of blank paper made to serve as copybooks, and he took great care to make sure the covers and cords were of the highest quality.

"I shall give some of these to Sochinomiya and Tō no Chūjō's brother, the Commander of the Left Gate Guard, and have them provide samples for my daughter. I'll produce two matching volumes myself. Those two are always putting on grand airs as master calligraphers, but I'm sure I can write just as skillfully!" He did not lack confidence in his own abilities.

As he always did on such occasions as this, Genji chose the finest ink-charcoal and brushes and distributed them among his women together with a letter urging them to provide samples of their calligraphy. A number of the

ladies felt that this was too much for them and repeatedly declined his request, and so he had to insist on it in the end. He had a stock of thin, exquisite Koma paper from Korea. “I’d like to test our young gentlemen of taste,” he said, and distributed the stock among several men: his own son; the son of Prince Hyōbu, who was Commander of the Left Palace Guard;¹² and Tō no Chūjō’s son Kashiwagi. “Draw a waterscape with reeds,” he ordered, “in whatever way your fancy takes you. But you must work the brushstrokes of a poem in *kana* into the lines you draw to depict the reeds. If you prefer, you may draw instead a painting or sketch with a poetic inscription inspired by the scene.” They all set about diligently to complete the assignment.

Just as he did when he was blending incense, Genji secluded himself in the main hall of the southeast residence to focus on his own work. The cherry blossoms had by now passed their peak, and the pale blue skies were clear and balmy. Calling up old poems from memory, he focused on writing them out just as he pleased—some in a running cursive style, some in a more formal manner, some in the female style. Very few attendants were waiting on him. He had only two or three women rubbing the inkstones, selecting poems from venerable anthologies, presenting them for his consideration, and acting as advisers and critics. He kept the blinds up and, as he sat near the veranda in dishabille with a bound volume open on top of an armrest, holding his brush with the tip of its handle between his teeth, thinking about what he was to write, he looked so magnificent that no one could have ever tired of gazing at him. As he hunched over the pages of red and white paper that he had chosen specifically to set off his calligraphy, the manner in which he adjusted the grip on his brush and his expression of concentration made for a scene that discerning, sensitive people would have found truly breathtaking.

With the announcement of Prince Sochinomiya’s arrival, Genji snapped out of his reverie, slipped on court robes, and called for another cushion. He then waited for his brother to be shown in. Sochinomiya was handsomely attired, and the women behind the blinds peeked out to catch a glimpse of his regal mien as he mounted the front steps to the main hall. The two men greeted each other deferentially, and their mutual display of proper protocol was extraordinarily refined. Genji sounded very happy to see his visitor. “You’ve come at just the perfect moment ... I secluded myself here to while away the idle hours, but the solitude and tedium are beginning to wear on my nerves.” Sochinomiya had brought the bound volume with samples of his writing and had one of his servants hand it over to Genji.

Genji examined it right away. While the calligraphy wasn’t all that spectacular, it did show off Sochinomiya’s one strength, which was his ability to

write in a crisp, clean style. He had selected a number of distinctive old poems that reflected his idiosyncratic tastes and written down each one in three lines using mainly *kana* with a few Chinese characters mingled in here and there. The effect he created was pleasing and took Genji by surprise. "I never imagined you would produce such fine work." He then added, with a tinge of exasperation, "I'll have to throw away all of my brushes now."

Sochinomiya replied in a teasing manner, "Well ... it's not too bad, I think, even if it is brazen of me to offer my own handwriting alongside that of a distinguished master."

Having looked at his brother's efforts, Genji could not very well keep his own under wraps. He brought out the two matching volumes, and together they examined his work. The cursive script set down on stiff Chinese paper was astonishing, while the fine lines and supple grace of the female style he had chosen to write with such care on the soft Koma paper, with its modest hues, was like nothing ever seen before. Sochinomiya was moved to tears, which seemed to him to flow alongside the trailing flourishes of Genji's *kana*. He was convinced that he would never tire of looking at his brother's calligraphy. The beauty of the poems Genji had imaginatively copied out in a free, running style of cursive on gorgeous colored paper, which had been produced by the most skilled artisans at the palace, was unsurpassed. Following wherever his fancy took him, he had jotted down verses here and there on the pages in a most charming fashion. Sochinomiya lingered over these copybooks, not bothering even to glance at the work produced by the others.

The Commander of the Left Gate Guard showed a preference for boldly ostentatious brushstrokes, but they failed to produce a clear, clean impression; it seemed as if his technique were aimed at covering up the flaws in his calligraphy. His selection of poems also seemed much too showy. Genji did not allow his brother a proper look at the models produced by his ladies, and he did not even bring out the work of Princess Asagao.

The books containing the reed waterscapes and paintings with poetry were a delight, each one reflecting the whims and skills of the artist. Genji's son had lavishly depicted powerful surging waves, and his rendering of thin, straggly reeds brought to mind the shores at Naniwa. The various *kana* that he had sketched in amidst the reeds were particularly well executed. On some of the pages he switched to fundamentally different styles of calligraphy, apparently in accord with the way he imagined a particular scene, and his blending of the forms of the characters with the appearance of rocky shores and the like was elegantly modish.

"There's too much to take in," Sochinomiya remarked, enthralled by the work.

“I don’t have enough time to fully appreciate it.” Being a man of refined sensibilities and a connoisseur of all the arts, he was greatly impressed and lavished praise on the work.

The two men spent the day commenting on various styles of calligraphy, and when Genji brought out several books in which paper of differing types and quality had been bound together, Sochinomiya sent his son, who served as a gentleman-in-waiting at the palace, to go to his villa and fetch some books and scrolls. The young man selected four scrolls of the ancient *Man'yōshū* copied out by Emperor Saga, a master calligrapher of Chinese characters.¹³ He also took out the twenty scrolls of the *Kokinshū* dating from the Engi period¹⁴ that Emperor Daigo had fashioned by pasting pieces of light blue Chinese paper onto mounting paper that was a light blue swirled with designs in darker blue. Matching jade spindles on all the scrolls and Chinese-style ties of flattened cords in multicolored parallel stripes made for a voluptuous presentation of the set. The style of calligraphy was different for each scroll, and Emperor Daigo had copied out the poems flawlessly. The two men pulled lamps closer to inspect them.

“One could never tire of looking at these,” Genji remarked, praising the work. “People in this day make a show of how fashionable their calligraphy is, but they can handle only a few styles properly.”

Sochinomiya at once made a present of the scrolls so that they might be passed on to the Akashi Princess. “Even if I had a daughter, it wouldn’t do to pass these treasures on if she were incapable of properly appreciating them ... as things stand, they would just crumble away and go to waste.” In appreciation for the services of Sochinomiya’s son, Genji gave the young gentleman-in-waiting some very fine copybooks of Chinese calligraphy, which he placed in an aloeswood box, and a wonderfully wrought Korean flute.

During this period, Genji spent much of his time evaluating different styles of *kana* script, requesting samples from people who had a reputation as a master calligrapher, regardless of their rank or station in life. He selected materials whose contents were appropriate to each of their respective skills and asked them to make copies. Genji did not include lesser works or calligraphers among the boxes of books that he planned to send with his daughter to the palace, and in commissioning every book or scroll to be included, he was careful to make clear distinctions among them according to the rank and status of the writer. Among all the marvelous treasures that made up the trousseau of the Akashi Princess—treasures that would have been highly appreciated even at courts in other lands—these books and scrolls excited the most interest among the many younger women at the palace. In addition to all of these items, Genji also prepared a

collection of sketches and paintings and he even considered including the illustrated scrolls containing his diary of those days in exile in Suma. However, he changed his mind and decided not to bring it out after all, realizing that his daughter was still a little too young to fully understand the ways of the world.

Tō no Chūjō heard distant reports of how Genji was busily preparing for his daughter's impending move to the palace, and the news made him terribly anxious and frustrated. He had long ago hoped to send Kumoinokari to serve Emperor Reizei, but here she was at the prime of her life with her beauty going to waste. He suffered to see her so idle and depressed, but because the attitude of Genji's son had not changed and he continued to exhibit his infuriating air of indifference, Tō no Chūjō felt sure that the court would ridicule him if he meekly relented and proposed that the two be married. In private, he regretted his earlier actions—*If only I had given in when he was so eager to take her!* He recognized that he could not lay the blame for the situation entirely on the young gentleman.

Genji's son heard that the Palace Minister's opposition to him had softened a little, but the bitter memory of how much he had suffered kept his emotions in check, and he pretended to be as coldly indifferent as ever. Truth be told, however, he was still in love with Kumoinokari and could not give his heart to another. He found himself painfully yearning for her so often that he could no longer bear this foolish game,¹⁵ and yet the ridicule her nurse had subjected him to on account of those light blue robes still rankled. He was determined to wait until he had risen to the position of Counselor—then he would show them.

Genji was troubled that his son was still so oddly adrift. “If you have given up on the Palace Minister’s daughter, then you ought to accept some other proposal ... it seems that the Minister of the Right and Prince Nakatsukasa, just to name two possibilities, have each indicated he would be willing to see you take his daughter.” The young gentleman remained deferential in attitude, but said not a word in response.

“When it comes to matters like this,” Genji continued, “I am in no position to speak to you about them, since I paid no heed to the sage counsel my own father graciously gave me. That being said, when I think about it now, his advice to me is as true now as it was then. So long as you remain single, people will speculate that you must have someone you love but can’t marry ... and then when your destiny runs its course and you end up with someone quite ordinary and uninteresting, the anticlimax will make you look bad in the eyes of others. No matter how great your pride and ambition, things won’t always necessarily go the way you want ... there are limits, after all, and you must not give yourself over to wanton desires.

“As you know, I was raised at the palace from the time I was a little boy, and my behavior was so constrained that I simply could not do as I wished. I was careful about my conduct, mindful that if I committed even the most trivial transgression, I would be censured as frivolous. Yet despite all my efforts, in the end the court branded me a libertine. It was a bitter lesson to learn, so don’t assume that you can go around blithely doing as you please just because your rank is low and you’re not yet a prominent figure. There are plenty of examples from the past of even the wisest sages who, having no wife or children to provide stability and force them to control themselves, found their lives thrown into chaos because they selfishly gave in to their passion for some woman.

“If you obsess over a woman who is not appropriate for you, you will harm her reputation and bring resentment on yourself that will be a fetter on you for the rest of your life. A man may take to wife a woman whose true character he has misapprehended, and upon realizing she does not fulfill his desires, he may find it difficult to tolerate her. In such a case, the man must exercise forbearance and put aside any thoughts of abandoning her. If she has parents, he should yield to their wishes ... and if she has no parents and her circumstances are straitened, he should show compassion and focus on whatever small virtues she might possess. A man of deep sensitivity will realize that cultivating such an attitude is best in the long run—not only for his wife, but also for himself.” Whenever he had quiet moments of leisure, Genji would pontificate in this manner.

Such admonitions were all well and good, but his son needed no one to tell him to feel compassion for Kumoinokari, especially when the subject of him taking another woman came up—even when it was mentioned in jest. For her part, Kumoinokari was ashamed that her father seemed more troubled than normal, and she felt depressed that her own woeful circumstances might be the cause of his anxiety. Nonetheless, she remained calm and aloof on the surface, passing her days in pensive reflection.

Sometimes when his longing for Kumoinokari became too much for him, Genji’s son would send her a heartfelt letter expressing how deeply devoted he was. She would read it and think, *Who can I trust?*¹⁶ A more worldly woman would have been suspicious and doubted her lover’s faithfulness, but the innocent Kumoinokari was often touched by his words.

“Prince Nakatsukasa has approached the Chancellor, and it looks as though they are going to arrange a match.” When he heard this, Tō no Chūjō was once more plunged into gloomy despair over his daughter’s prospects. With tears welling in his eyes, he spoke privately to her about this news. “That is what I’ve heard ... your young gentleman has certainly behaved cruelly. I have no doubt that Genji is changing plans in response to my firm refusal of his request, but I’d

become a laughingstock at court if I weakened now and gave in to him.”

Kumoinokari was extremely ashamed. Because she was about to cry, she felt awkward and turned away from her father. Her figure at that moment was more sweetly adorable to him than anything else in the world. His mind was in turmoil. *What should I do? Should I pursue the matter with Genji and see how he feels?* As soon as her father left, Kumoinokari moved close to the veranda and stared outside, lost in thought. *How strange they are, these tears that fall of their own accord even before I'm aware of my own feelings. What must Father have thought of me?* While she was pondering such things, a letter arrived from her beloved. Needless to say, she read it at once. It was long and detailed and included this poem:

*Such cruelty as yours seems typical
Of this world of woe ... am I the strange one
For being unable to forget you*

Not a word concerning the rumors about Prince Nakatsukasa’s proposals—it made her sad to think that he could be so cruel as to hide the truth behind a veil of silence. She sent him this reply:

*We’re now at the end, and you’ve forgotten
The love you swore you would never forget ...
Is not your heart typical of this world*

Her reply seemed so strange to him that he couldn’t put her letter down. He sat with his head cocked, gazing at it in complete bewilderment.

¹ The text has an alternative reading, Sōwa, for the name of this period, which lasted from 834 to 848 CE.

² The name of this incense, *kurobō*, simply means “black.”

³ *Kokinshū* 38 (Ki no Tomonori): “To whom should I show them, if not to you ... only a person who is sensitive to the color and fragrance of plum blossoms can appreciate them.”

⁴ The term for this type of incense, *jijū*, comes from the court title “gentleman-in-waiting.” The text makes this association clear, since the formulas Genji uses are ones handed down from Emperor Ninmyō. The exact recipes are not spelled out, but would have been a mixture of woods, spices, and bonding agents such as honey.

⁵ The name *baika* means “plum blossom.”

⁶ This incense, *hyakubu*, is mentioned earlier in the tale. The name literally means “hundred paces,” which refers to the distance from which the fragrance could be detected.

⁷ Emperor Uda lived from 867 to 931. Minamoto no Kintada (889–948) was a grandson of Emperor Kōkō and a noted poet.

⁸ “The warbler who comes to the branch of plum will sing throughout the spring, yes, throughout the spring, though for now the snow still falls ... how lovely it is, the snow that still falls!”

⁹ This scene is depicted in the *Sakaki* chapter.

¹⁰ *Kokinshū* 96 (Sosei): “How long will my spirit soar over these fields ... certainly a thousand years so long as the blossoms do not scatter.”

¹¹ *Onnade* is the term used in the text. The word literally means “woman-hand” and refers to writing primarily in *kana* (particularly *hiragana*, the Japanese syllabary developed from extremely simplified cursive forms of Chinese characters used for their phonetic rather than semantic value). The style is associated with women not because it was practiced exclusively by women—men often wrote using primarily *kana*, so *onnade* is not, strictly speaking, a purely gendered style of writing—but because literate women were in general not as well educated in Chinese characters. Indeed, because of gender bias, it was thought that facility with Chinese characters was not ladylike.

¹² This commander was one of Tamakazura’s suitors. He is not to be confused with Tō no Chūjō’s half brother, also a commander in a different guard post, who is mentioned immediately above and who appeared earlier in the *Otome* chapter as the father of one of the maidens of the Gosechi dance.

¹³ The *Man’yōshū* (Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves, comp. ca. 759–70) is the oldest extant collection of Japanese verse. Emperor Saga ruled between 809 and 823. Since the *Man’yōshū* was originally written entirely in Chinese characters before the development of *kana* systems, Saga’s style of writing reflects the work he purportedly copied.

¹⁴ The Engi period ran from 897 to 930.

¹⁵ *Kokinshū* 1025 (Anonymous): “When I try to stay away and not meet you, just to see what will happen, my yearning is so great that I can no longer bear this foolish game” (alluded to earlier in the *Akashi* chapter).

¹⁶ *Kokinshū* 713 (Anonymous): “Now that I believe you have lied to me, who can I trust to be true and sincere?”

XXXIII

Fuji no uraba

Shoots of Wisteria Leaves

WHILE GENJI was busily preparing for the Akashi Princess's move to the palace, his son, the Consultant, was distracted and prone to pensive moods—feelings that he found most peculiar.

Why does my fixation with Kumoinokari bewilder me so? I should just go to her—after all, I really do love her. I've even heard rumors that her father has relented and is hinting that he'd be willing to relax his guard and sleep at his post just to let me pass.¹ Of course, if, in the end, I'm bound to get her no matter what I do, then maybe I should just wait and see how things develop. That way I won't come off looking like a fool in the eyes of the court. Such thoughts continued to torment him, and his conflicting emotions brought chaos to his heart.

During the same period, Kumoinokari was in a state of grief. If the rumors that her father had heard were true, then it meant that nothing was left of the relationship with her beloved. As a result of this bizarre, mutual misunderstanding, the two of them turned away from each other—a reaction that only proved they were still very much in love.

Tō no Chūjō was tormented as well, having come to the realization that, in spite of his unyielding attitude toward the young lovers, he was now powerless to do anything about it one way or the other. *If the negotiations between Genji and Prince Nakatsukasa proceed to a successful conclusion, he mused, then I'll have to reconsider her future and begin looking for other possibilities ... but that would create rather difficult circumstances for any prospective groom and would make me look ridiculous as well. What's more, if I marry her to a lesser man, then naturally the honor of my house will be diminished. I've tried to keep the sexual intimacy they shared as children secret, but word of it is bound to get*

out. Either way, I have no choice but to give in ... though somehow I'll have to keep up appearances.

On the surface, Tō no Chūjō affected an air of unconcern, but because his relationship with Genji had been strained by mutual resentments, he was torn on the inside and reluctant to just abruptly bring up the subject of their children. *If I make too much of this, people will think I'm a fool. No ... I must wait for an opportunity when I can more casually reveal my intentions.*

On the twentieth day of the third month Tō no Chūjō went to the Gokurakuji² to attend a memorial service on the anniversary of the death of his mother, Princess Ōmiya. All of his sons accompanied him, and a dashing, spirited crowd of high-ranking officials gathered as well. Genji had commissioned readings from the sutras, and his son, who had been very close to his grandmother, naturally participated in the service, looking after every detail in a moving display of filial devotion. In appearance and bearing, the young gentleman was every bit as magnificent and dignified as anyone there. Just now coming into the full bloom of his manhood, he was splendid in every respect, and Tō no Chūjō seemed to be paying keener attention than usual to his demeanor. The young gentleman, however, had long come to regard the father of Kumoinokari as a cruel man and was always wary, aloof, and extremely guarded in his presence.

As evening approached and those who had gathered at the temple were about to make their way home, Tō no Chūjō stood apart, staring out at the spring scene—cherry blossoms scattered in mad profusion, mist obscuring everything—reminiscing about the past and murmuring lines from old poems. Genji's son found himself drawn as well to the elegant beauty of the scene and, though people were bustling about with cries of “It looks like rain,” he lingered on, gazing out in reverie. Tō no Chūjō’s heart was pounding in anxious expectation as he observed the Consultant’s expression. *Is this the right moment?* He tugged lightly on the sleeve of his daughter’s beloved.

“Why do you rebuke me so?” Tō no Chūjō asked. “If you would only consider the connection that has brought us both here for these rites today, perhaps you could find a way to forgive me. I would regret it if you were to cut me off as I enter the last years of my life ... I may not have much time left.”

The young Gentleman at once assumed a deferential attitude.

“It was Grandmother’s last wish that I look to you for support, but because you did not seem inclined to forgive my transgression and give me your blessing, I’ve been reluctant to approach you.”

Everyone seemed to be vying to be the first ones to leave as the crowd hurriedly dispersed to avoid the rain and wind. Back at his residence, Genji’s son lay awake all night turning this question over in his mind until the break of

dawn: *What could it mean that the Palace Minister should speak in an intimate tone that he has never before used with me?* Coming from a man who was a source of constant anxiety, Tō no Chūjō's words, however trivial they might have been, continued to echo in the young gentleman's ears.

Tō no Chūjō had witnessed the devotion that Genji's son had shown to Kumoinokari all these years, and perhaps that is what prompted his change of heart and dispelled his opposition to their marriage. He was now trying to think of some small event that might serve as an appropriately informal opportunity to facilitate the match. As it turned out, that opportunity was provided soon after the memorial service by the gorgeous wisteria in his garden, which bloomed in wild profusion at the beginning of the fourth month. The color of the blossoms at their peak was unusually brilliant this year, and it would have been a shame to let them pass without showing them off to others. Thus, Tō no Chūjō arranged for a musical entertainment to accompany a viewing of the blossoms, and on an evening when the twilight would enhance the richness of the flowers' light purple hue, he had Kashiwagi take a letter to his daughter's beloved: "Our meeting the other day under the shade of the cherry blossoms was unfortunately cut short by the rain ... if you have some free time, perhaps you might drop by today?" A poem was included in the letter:

*The light at dusk deepens the color
Of wisteria in my garden
Will you come to see what's left of spring³*

The letter was attached to an especially lovely stem of wisteria. The words that Genji's son had been waiting and waiting to hear had finally arrived, and they set his heart racing. He replied with humble restraint:

*You tell me, "Come, view the wisteria"
But in twilight, when all is indistinct
Can I see my way to pluck the blossoms*

"I feel so nervous," he said to Kashiwagi. "Perhaps you could correct my message for me?"

"I would be delighted to be your escort," Kashiwagi replied.

"No, no, you'd be much too splendid a guard." He declined the offer, and Kashiwagi made his way back home.

The young gentleman showed Tō no Chūjō's letter to his father. Genji's face took on an expression of smug pride that was at once irritating and detestable.

“Well ... his invitation suggests he’s planning something, does it not? If his attitude has changed this much, it must mean that he has set aside his resentment over your lapse of filial behavior toward Princess Ōmiya.”

“I’m not sure that’s the case. There’s a lull in activity at the court during this time of year, and since the wisteria in his garden is blooming more lushly than usual, he’s probably using that as an excuse to have some music performed.”

“You may be right,” Genji countered, “but he did send Kashiwagi with this letter, which means that he considers it important ... so you must hurry off.” With that, Genji gave his blessing to the match. His son, however, remained wary, his heart unsettled as he wondered how all of this would turn out.

“That robe you’re wearing is tinged just a touch too strongly with red, and it makes you look callow. *Futaai*⁴ is a fine color for some nondescript youth who has no hope of achieving the position of Consultant, as you have done. But for a man in your position, a pale blue robe is far more suitable. You really must take care of your appearance!” He carefully selected an exquisite cloak from his own wardrobe, as well as fine set of under robes, and had them brought out to one of his son’s attendants.

The young gentleman went back to his chambers, where he took extra time to groom and dress himself. As a result of this delay, he arrived after the twilight had faded, just as Tō no Chūjō was beginning to fret that he might not be coming. Seven or eight of his sons, including Kashiwagi, came out to greet Genji’s son and show him inside. They were all strikingly handsome, but the young Consultant looked extraordinary in his crisp, refined outfit, radiating an air of confident charm and splendor that put them all to shame.

Tō no Chūjō had gone to considerable trouble to prepare the space where he would seat his honored guest. He too had dressed especially for the occasion, having chosen a formal cap and robes. Just before he went out to meet the young gentleman, he addressed his principal wife and her ladies-in-waiting: “You must take a peek at him. He has matured into an outstanding young man—quiet and dignified—someone who stands out from the crowd. In certain respects, he outshines even his father, the Chancellor. Genji is so radiantly elegant and charming that just to see him brings a smile and makes you forget the sorrows of the world. It’s true that Genji may be a little voluptuous and capricious when it comes to the public realm, but that flaw is understandable given his upbringing at the palace. His son, on the other hand, is far better educated, more prudent and masculine, and he has earned a reputation at court as a sober man of perfected virtue.”

After the two men formally greeted each other and exchanged the expected pleasantries, they moved out to the veranda to admire the wisteria.

“All the flowers of spring, without exception,” the Palace Minister remarked, “surprise and delight the eye with their dazzling colors when they are in full bloom, but they are so short-lived and scatter so soon that you come to resent them. Only the wisteria blooms this late, and it continues to flower on into the summer—that’s what makes it such an unusual and appealing flower. Its purple hue calls to mind warmly intimate relationships.” He smiled, and his handsome figure exuded a lustrous elegance.

Because the moon had risen, it was difficult to clearly make out the pale color of the blossoms, but the men were caught up in their appreciation of the scene and passed around the winecup and played music in praise of the beauty of the flowers. The Palace Minister was soon pretending to be inebriated and rather forcefully urging the Consultant to drink up. His guest, however, could see what was afoot and so made a show of how painful it was for him to decline the cup.

“My young man, you seem to be the most gifted official in our realm ... perhaps too gifted for this degenerate age. That’s why I’ve taken it quite hard that you have not shown more consideration to an old man like me. Surely those Chinese classics you studied taught you the virtue of filial piety. I imagine that you’re quite familiar with the teachings of a certain Chinese sage, and so I must take exception when you cause me such distress.” It may have been the effects of the wine, but whatever the cause, he was playing his role of wounded father for all it was worth, hinting at his true feelings in a most charming manner.

“Why should you feel that way? When I think about the past—about my late mother and grandmother—I realize what I owe to you and others who took their place and looked after me, and I would give up everything to repay that debt. I know I’m slow and lazy by nature, but I cannot understand how you could view my attitude toward you as anything but filial.” The young gentleman spoke in a deferential tone.

The Palace Minister seized that very moment to murmur a line of verse that he had been waiting to use: “Shoots of wisteria leaves ...”⁵ Taking that as his cue, Kashiwagi broke off an extremely long, full cluster of richly hued blossoms and set it down next to the guest of honor’s cup. Genji’s son picked it up, but he found himself feeling awkward and at a loss for words. Tō no Chūjō jumped in with the following:

*Loath as I am to do so, I shall censure the twining
Wisteria that overgrows this pine ... and I shall blame
My daughter, though I lament that you chose to wait so long*

The Consultant raised his winecup and, making a ceremonial bow, gave a

perfectly proper response:

*Having passed so many dew-drenched springs
At last I have entered the season
When wisteria blossoms for me*

He handed the cup to Kashiwagi, who replied:

*Wisteria blooms may be mistaken
For a gentle maiden's sleeves ... their colors
Deepen depending on who cares for them*

There were other poems, but as the wine flowed and the men got drunker, no one was able to come up with anything else worth recording here.

The light of the seventh-day moon was faint, but it reflected serenely in the mirrorlike pond. It was an in-between time of the season—a little lonely in feel—when the leaves at the tops of the trees were not yet fully visible. The pine tree, which was not all that tall, was entwined with the lovely drooping clusters of wisteria. It leaned a little to one side, as if striking a pose. As he usually did on such occasions, Kōbai sang in his sonorous voice—this time a *saibara* titled “A Fence of Reed-Wattle.” The song, which tells of a young man who throws a house into chaos when he is caught trying to steal away with his lover,⁶ brought a wry smile to Tō no Chūjō, who remarked, “What a peculiar choice of song.” He lent his own pleasing voice to the chorus, though he changed the original line “a house thrown into chaos” to the more appropriate “a house of venerable age.” As the celebration proceeded, the mutual resentments that had once strained their relations were swept aside.

It was now getting late, and Genji’s son, pretending to be ill from too much drink, turned to Kashiwagi.

“I’m not feeling well and can’t stand it any longer ... but I also can’t make it home. Do you think I might stay here for the night?”

Hearing this, Tō no Chūjō told his son, “I leave it to you, my young lord, to find lodgings for him. This old man is so drunk that he’s going to have to excuse himself. It’s rude of me, I know, but I must retire!” And with that, he went back inside.

“I see the wayfarer will spend the night in the shade of blossoms,” Kashiwagi responded. “It’s a trying responsibility, being your guide ... I wonder how I should handle it?”

“Are you suggesting that the wisteria is promiscuously binding herself to the

steady pine? You might have chosen a more auspicious image,”⁷ the young gentleman shot back with a serious expression.

Kashiwagi disliked being shown up like this, but he kept his feelings to himself because it was clear that, just as he had hoped, Genji’s son was a man of outstanding character. Kashiwagi had long wanted things to turn out this way, and so he confidently led the young gentleman to his sister’s chambers.

The groom felt as if he was in a dream, but it gave him a sense of pride knowing that his station in life had become increasingly distinguished. Kumoinokari was embarrassed and shy, but in his eyes she had matured over the past six years and was now a lovely woman more perfect than ever.

“I was certain I’d end up an example to the world,”⁸ he complained to her, “but apparently my devotion to you has persuaded your father to relent. Still, I find it passing strange that you never recognized how faithful I was. Did you hear your brother Kōbai singing ‘A Fence of Reed-Wattle’? That was cuttingly sarcastic. It made me want to sing ‘The Barrier Gate at Kawaguchi’ in reply.”

Kumoinokari was irritated by the insinuation of the song to which he alluded, since it tells the story of a young woman who slips out of her house through a makeshift fence and past a vigilant guard in order to sleep with her lover. She replied as follows:

*Makeshift indeed, the fence that lets shallow waters
Trickle through the river’s mouth at Kawaguchi ...
From whose mouth did rumors that I was shallow flow*

“You’re deplorable!” She was pouting like a child.

He flashed the barest hint of a smile and composed the following:

*Do not blame the barrier at Kawaguchi
For shallow waters leaking out, but the guardsman
At Kukida who let rumors of us escape⁹*

“I have suffered intolerably for so many years, I can hardly think straight any longer,” he added.

Acting as if he were not well and using drunkenness as his excuse, he gave no indication that he was aware of the approach of dawn. Her women couldn’t bring themselves to alert him of the time, and Tō no Chūjō, irritated that the young gentleman was behaving like a husband of many years, testily remarked, “He seems to be reveling in his triumph by sleeping so late ...” In spite of all these complaints, Genji’s son left right before the break of dawn—it was an absolute

delight to see his sleepy face.

His letter the following morning was delivered with the same discretion that had marked all of his previous notes to her, but Kumoinokari was not up to a response that day. As her more senior attendants—women much given to wagging their tongues—were nudging each other knowingly, her father dropped by and looked at the letter. This made things even worse for her, and she felt extremely put out. The groom had written:

“You behaved as though you did not want to give yourself completely to me, and so I am now more than ever conscious of where I stand with you. That is unbearable and makes me feel like I should disappear, and yet ...”

*Chide me not ... I have hidden my tears so long
By wringing damp sleeves in private that today
My weak hands can keep them secret no longer*

It was a very intimate note, and her father smiled. “How skillfully he has learned to write,” he observed, showing no trace of his old bitterness. Seeing that Kumoinokari had not managed to write a reply, he encouraged her. “It won’t look good if you don’t answer him straightaway.” He then realized how awkward she would feel writing such a letter in his presence, and so he withdrew. The messenger’s reward was especially generous this time, and Kashiwagi treated him warmly. The man, a Secretary in the Right Palace Guard, was one of the groom’s most trusted men. Previously, he had always had to go about furtively to deliver his young lord’s messages to Kumoinokari, but today he could go about openly with a normal expression on his face.

Back at Rokujō, Genji heard all about what had happened. Because his son had a more radiant glow about him than usual when he returned, Genji observed him closely before giving him the usual fatherly advice.

“And how are you this morning? Have you sent off your letter?” he inquired. “There are examples where even the wisest of men can lose their head over a woman, but I think that the patience you have exhibited all this time, never allowing your relationship to become a source of malicious gossip, is evidence of your outstanding character, which is superior to others your age. Tō no Chūjō is inflexible, he plays too strictly by the rules, and now that his resistance to your marriage has completely crumbled without a trace, he has certainly left himself open to gossip at the court. Nonetheless, you must be magnanimous and not give yourself over to any feelings of triumph, any sense of swelling pride, or any impulse to be flippant and self-satisfied. Tō no Chūjō may come off like a generous, bighearted man of principle, but deep down he has some rather

unmanly tendencies, traits that can make him rather prickly to have to deal with.” Still, all in all, things had balanced out in the end, and he felt the young lovers made a most attractive couple.

Genji did not look old enough to be the young gentleman’s father but seemed more like an older brother instead. Whenever they were in separate places, people would mistake one for the other, since their faces were almost identical—though whenever the son was in his father’s presence, their distinct, respective merits were apparent. This particular morning Genji was dressed in a Chinese-style weave of medium blue over a robe in white with designs possessing a translucent sheen that made them stand out clearly—in all respects, he cut a dashing, elegant figure. His son was dressed in slightly darker blue over singlets of medium brown and of soft, white, patterned silk that made him look exceptionally refined as well.

It was the eighth day of the fourth month, the festival of the birth of the Buddha, and a statue of the infant Buddha was brought in for the Rite of Lustration. The priest who was to conduct the ritual arrived late, and so everyone at the various residences at the Rokujō estate had to wait until evening to dispatch page girls with offerings selected according to each lady’s individual preference. These offerings were presented in imitation of the customs at the palace, and the rite was performed exactly as it would be for an Emperor, including the act of pouring water over the statue. Noblemen and princes gathered; strangely they felt more stress and anxiety over how they looked and behaved participating in the rite here than they did at the more formal ceremony at the palace.

The young Consultant was feeling anxious, and in preparing for the Second Night with his bride, he was even more meticulous in grooming himself and arranging his attire—an attention to his appearance that those young women with whom he had had even the most casual dalliance jealously resented. He and Kumoinokari had longed for each other for so many years, and because their marriage was everything they had been hoping for, nothing at all could come between them—their bond was like a watertight basket that would never leak.¹⁰ As Tō no Chūjō grew closer to his new son-in-law and realized that he was a man of outstanding character, he came to cherish and support him in every way he could. Of course, he hated losing their battle of wills, but he found the Consultant so decent and serious and his unwavering loyalty to Kumoinokari over the years so praiseworthy that he gave them his blessing. Because her situation now seemed more auspicious than that of her older sister, the Kokiden Consort, Tō no Chūjō’s principal wife and the Consort’s ladies-in-waiting were dissatisfied and grumbled about it, but nothing untoward occurred.

Kumoinokari's real mother, the principal wife of the Azechi Major Counselor, was delighted that her daughter, who had been unable to go to the palace, had managed to marry the son of the Chancellor.

With everyone at the Rokujō estate busy preparing for the Akashi Princess's move, the date was set for sometime during the last ten days of the fourth month. Murasaki planned to attend the Miare Rites to celebrate the descent and return of the deity of the Upper Kamo Shrine. The ceremony was held the night before the Kamo Festival, and, as she usually did, she invited the other ladies to join her. However, the idea of simply following along after her carriage, like some sort of escort, was not appealing, and they all decided not to attend. The number of carriages accompanying Murasaki was thus not all that imposing, there being only about twenty altogether, and her formal escort was small. But for all its simplicity, her procession still displayed an air of splendor.

On the day of the Kamo Festival, following the Miare Rites, Murasaki prayed at the shrine at dawn, then stopped at a viewing stand on the way back to the Rokujō estate to watch the procession escorting the High Priestess to the Kamo River for the Purification Ritual. The women of the other ladies at Rokujō were in attendance for this event, and they each pulled up in their respective carriages, stopping in a line in front of Murasaki's viewing stand. The bustling scene was so magnificent and awe-inspiring that even from a distance onlookers knew very well it was Murasaki who was seated there.

Genji remembered the incident when the carriage of the Umetsubo Empress's late mother, his lady at Rokujō, had been so violently pushed aside.

"It was cruel of my late wife to have done such a thing, puffed up with pride and self-conceit at a moment when she was at the height of her glory," he said. "And she, who so terribly slighted another, died as a result of the resentment she caused." He did not go into further details about the incident, but added, "Of the children left behind, my son seems to be rising up the ranks slowly as an ordinary official. Umetsubo, on the other hand, occupies an unmatched position in the world, and when you think of this reversal of fortunes, it is sadly poignant. The world is an uncertain place; no matter how much we may wish to have everything we desire in life, I worry that once I am gone and you are left behind, you will suffer a terrible loss and come down in the world." At that moment, senior officials were gathering at the viewing stand, and he moved over to where they were seated.

Kashiwagi was serving this day as representative for the Palace Guard. He and the other officials and representatives had gathered at the Palace Minister's villa and then come straight from there to the viewing stand. The daughter of Koremitsu, who had gone into service at the palace as the Fujiwara Assistant

Handmaid after performing as a maiden of the Gosechi dance, had been chosen to represent the Handmaid's office. She was held in such high regard that Emperor Reizei, the Crown Prince, and the Chancellor bestowed their gracious favor, lavishing so many fine presents on her that she had no place to put them all. Genji's son also sent her a congratulatory message—she had, after all, once been his lover, and because they had shared a deep, intimate affection for one another, the news that he had married a lady of highly distinguished lineage caused her great distress. His letter included this poem:

*What are they, those leaves that adorn our caps today
I see them here but I cannot recall their name
Having passed so many days without meeting you¹¹*

“How sad it is.” He had simply not been able to let the opportunity pass without sending her the poem, but how did she feel about it?

Amidst all the confusion and bustle as she was preparing to board her carriage, she somehow managed a reply:

*You ask me if I recall the name of those leaves
That adorn your cap, but you're the one who should know
You who won leaves of katsura for your studies*

“Since I'm not a Doctor of Letters ...” It was a trifling response, but he found it nettlesome that she should have bested him. He could not forget her and would have to find a way to meet on the sly.

It was customary when sending a daughter to the palace to have the father's principal wife accompany her. *Murasaki will not be able to serve for a long time, Genji mused, and so I ought to have the girl's mother go with her as well.*

Murasaki was of like mind.

It's only natural that at some point the Akashi lady should be reunited with her daughter ... keeping them apart for so many years has caused her great unhappiness. The Akashi Princess is now at an age when she is gradually becoming aware of the situation and is anxious about her mother. It would be unfortunate if both were to think ill of me.

She shared her thoughts with Genji.

“You must take this opportunity to send the Akashi lady with her daughter,” she said. “The girl is only eleven, and with so many young attendants around her I'm concerned she's still vulnerable. There are limits to how closely her nurses will be able to keep watch over her, and since I cannot always be near the girl, it

would bring me peace of mind to know her mother was with her."

Genji was impressed by her considerate thoughts, which were in line with his own. When he reported what Murasaki had said to the Akashi lady, she was overjoyed and felt her prayers had been answered. She hurriedly set about preparing the robes and other items her attendants would need so that she would not compare unfavorably to Genji's distinguished wife. The Akashi lady's mother, the nun who had come back to the capital with her daughter, had for years clung fervently to the hope that she might be able to see her granddaughter grow up and discover what the little girl's future held. *To be able to meet her one more time*—this was the one desire that kept her attached to this life, and it made the old woman sad to think that she would never realize that desire once the Akashi Princess had gone off to the palace.

It was customary to move to the palace at night and so, when the moment arrived, Murasaki set out with Genji's daughter, riding with her in a carriage drawn by servants. The Akashi lady was not permitted in the carriage, and it must have been humiliating for her to have to follow on foot. That didn't really bother her, however, as she wasn't at all concerned about herself. What had long caused her distress was the thought that a woman such as herself, whose lowly status was the one flaw in the carefully polished jewel that was her daughter, should have lived so long.

Genji did not want the ceremony welcoming his daughter to be some eye-popping affair, but because of his position and status, it turned into an extraordinary event of its own accord. Murasaki had raised the Akashi Princess with limitless devotion, and she genuinely treasured and loved the girl. She found it hard to hand her charge over to the care of others. *How I wish I had a daughter of my own who would come to the palace like this*, she thought longingly. Indeed, for both Genji and his son, the fact that Murasaki had no children to extend the glory of the house was the one thing that left them dissatisfied on this auspicious occasion. After three days Murasaki withdrew from the palace and returned to the Rokujō estate.

The night Murasaki left she met the Akashi lady, who had come in to take her place. "It will be clear when you see how grown-up she is just how many months and years have passed, and so at this point there is no need for the two of us to be distant or to stand on ceremony with one another." Murasaki spoke warmly, and the two of them conversed. Apparently, this was the first opportunity they had to speak on familiar terms. Judging from the Akashi lady's demeanor as they talked, Murasaki now understood what it was about the woman that had so attracted Genji. Similarly, the Akashi lady looked in admiration at the noble beauty of Murasaki, who was in the prime of her life, and realized that Genji had

been completely justified in judging this woman peerless and elevating her in his love and esteem above all his other ladies. *Is it not astonishing*, she thought, *that my destiny has allowed me to stand beside such a remarkable woman?*

The ceremony for seeing Murasaki off was dazzling, and she departed in a carriage drawn by servants—an honor normally reserved for a Consort withdrawing from the palace. Observing that honor and comparing her circumstances with Murasaki's, the Akashi lady was once again reminded of her own lowly status.

When she saw her daughter, who looked like a lovely doll, the Akashi lady felt that she was in a dream and could not hold back her tears—it certainly did not seem to her at that moment that tears of joy and tears of sorrow were one and the same, as the poet claimed.¹² Her life had been marked by depression and sorrow, by grief over the various hardships that it had been her fate to have to endure. However, now that she was able to assist her daughter, which she had longed to do for so many years, she understood at last how truly gracious the deity at Sumiyoshi had been to her. The realization that she had been blessed made her spirits soar, and she wanted to live a long life.

The Akashi Princess was a clever child whose education had not been overlooked in any way, and so she quickly garnered the admiration of the court. Moreover, her remarkable looks and demeanor captured the Crown Prince's youthful heart, and he showed her special favor. The attendants waiting on the other young ladies who were vying to win his affection spoke disparagingly of the Akashi lady, saying it was a disgrace for her to be serving her daughter—but such malicious talk did nothing to harm the Akashi Princess's reputation. Her mother looked after the appearance of her daughter's salon, which, it goes without saying, had a stylish allure and unrivaled elegance, and she made sure every little detail was perfect. As a result of her efforts, officials and noblemen at the palace regarded the chambers of the Kirtsubo as the site of an especially brilliant, stimulating salon, and they came to admire the women who served there, each of whom had her own special qualities. The Akashi lady, aware of how appealing her daughter's attendants were to the men of the court, went to great lengths to ensure proper appearance and comportment among them.

Murasaki would visit on appropriate occasions. Her relationship with the Akashi lady was ideal and closer than ever; even so, the Akashi lady never tried to rise above her station and get too close, but always maintained a respectful, deferential distance. She did nothing that could be viewed with scorn and displayed perfect poise and grace.

Genji had long hoped that his daughter's move to the palace would take place during his lifetime, which he had always assumed would be short, and now he

had seen his plans come to fruition. Moreover, his son, who, despite being a serious young gentleman, had been leading an unsettled lifestyle that once troubled Genji, was now settled in a charming, tranquil relationship with Kumoinokari. Thus, Genji felt at ease and thought that he could finally pursue what he truly wanted to do, which was to retreat from the world and focus on his religious devotions. Although it would be difficult for him to abandon Murasaki, he was sure that he could count on the Umetsubo Empress to be a significant support for her. Further, his beloved was fully recognized by society as the mother of the Akashi Princess, and she was the one person to whom the girl herself would always turn first. For that reason, even though he knew he would worry about Murasaki after withdrawing from the world, he felt that he had people he could count on to take care of her. Hanachirusato, residing in the northeast residence, would no longer enjoy the bright gaiety that his occasional visits brought into her life, but she did have his son to look after her. After contemplating these matters, he concluded that he did not have to be worried about any of his women.

Genji would turn forty the following year. The entire court, from His Majesty on down, was busy preparing for a lavish celebration. At the autumn promotions, he was granted an honorary rank equivalent to that of a Retired Emperor,¹³ his stipends were increased, and his income was supplemented with benefices and sinecures. He had achieved everything he had wanted in life and lacked for nothing, even without this promotion, but the court followed an old precedent that was rarely used and provided him with the official staff needed to manage the affairs of a Retired Emperor. He now possessed such majestic stature that, to his great disappointment, it would no longer be possible for him to visit the palace. Yet, even after bestowing all of these favors on Genji, Emperor Reizei remained dissatisfied that he could not abdicate and cede the throne to his true father, but had to be mindful of the political realities at the court.

Tō no Chūjō was promoted from Palace Minister to Chancellor, while Genji's son rose from Consultant to Middle Counselor. As he set out from his wife's residence on his way to the palace, where he would offer formal thanks to His Majesty, the new Middle Counselor was perfect in all respects, his face and figure having acquired a radiant splendor. As Tō no Chūjō watched him leave, he was struck by how fortunate it was that Kumoinokari had not gone into service at the palace, where she might have lost out to a rival.

The Middle Counselor would from time to time recall that evening when Taifu, Kumoinokari's nurse, had said to her mistress, "Is it really your destiny to marry a commoner who has started out at the sixth rank?" He now presented Taifu with a chrysanthemum whose colors had been beautifully tinged by the

frost.

*Seeing the dew on the young, pale green leaves
Did you imagine the chrysanthemum
Would flower with such a deep purple hue*

“I cannot forget the words that caused me such heartache,” he said, his handsome face glowing with a smile.

She was embarrassed and felt sorry for what she had done, but she found him utterly charming.

*Since the chrysanthemum has grown from a seedling
In a distinguished garden, no dew would disdain
To settle there just because its leaves were pale green*

“How could you possibly have taken offense?” she said, defending herself with practiced skill.

With his enhanced power and prestige, the Middle Counselor now found living in Kumoinokari’s quarters at Tō no Chūjō’s villa too constraining, and so they moved back to the old residence at Sanjō. It was a little run-down, but they had it remodeled in very stylish fashion and moved into the rooms once occupied by Princess Ōmiya after having them refurnished. It was a house filled with poignant memories. The small trees that had been planted along the edge of the garden were now casting thick shade, and clumps of pampas grass had grown so thick and wild that they had to be pruned back. The water grasses were cleared away from the stream so that the flowing water burbled pleasantly once more.

The young husband and wife were gazing out at the stream one delightful evening, reminiscing about the sad, trying times of their youth. Kumoinokari had many fond memories, though she also recalled with embarrassment all the things that people must have thought about them. The older women who had served her grandmother had not withdrawn and scattered but were still in service there, each in her own room, and they were overjoyed to be summoned back together before their new lord and mistress. The Middle Counselor composed a poem:

*O pure, clear stream burbling among those rocks
Guardian of this house ... do you know where
The one who once gazed upon you has gone*

Kumoinokari replied:

*Cruel, shallow waters, flowing blithely
Unconcerned that you no longer reflect
The image of one who has passed away*

Her father, now the Chancellor, paid a visit just as she was composing her poem. He had been on his way back home from the palace and was enchanted by the autumn foliage.

The appearance of the Sanjō residence had hardly changed at all from the time his own parents had lived here, but upon observing how the presence of the young couple had brought back a bright, cheerful feel to the quiet, peaceful atmosphere of the place, he was deeply touched. The Middle Counselor, his face a little flushed as he too was moved by memories associated with this residence, grew increasingly quiet and pensive. They were lovely together, a perfect match, though it seemed Kumoinokari's beauty was of a kind not especially uncommon. The Middle Counselor, on the other hand, was peerless. The older attendants took the liberty of sitting in their presence and chatting in their old-fashioned ways about things that happened long ago. Tō no Chūjō then noticed the poems about Princess Ōmiya, which they had jotted down for practice and left lying there. Tears came to his eyes.

"I should like to address those questions to that stream as well, but it would just bring more tears to an old man like me, and that would bring bad luck to you newlyweds, who have just moved here."

*It is natural for an ancient pine
To wither and die ... but now moss covers
As well the seedling that it left behind*

Because the Middle Counselor's old nurse, Saishō, had not forgotten Tō no Chūjō's harsh attitude toward her former charge, she replied with a rather smug expression:

*I feel safe in both of your shades
Progenies of that pine, your roots
Intertwined since you were seedlings*

The other old women went on to compose verses in a similar vein. The Middle Counselor thought they were charming. Kumoinokari was embarrassed and

blushed.

An imperial excursion to the Rokujō estate was planned for late in the tenth month. Since the fall foliage would be at its peak, it promised to be a spectacular event, and so His Majesty sent an invitation to Retired Emperor Suzaku to accompany him on the outing. This would be a rare, wonderful occasion, and everyone at court was excited at the prospect. Genji did everything in his power to ensure that the welcome for the two sovereigns would be dazzlingly brilliant.

When the appointed day arrived, the procession made its way to the Rokujō estate at around ten in the morning, during the Hour of the Snake. First, the horses from the Imperial Stables of both the Left and Right were led out and lined up before the pavilion on the riding grounds of the northeast quadrant. The Left and Right Palace Guards were then arrayed beside the line of horses just as they had been for the Sweet Flag Festival in the fifth month. At around two in the afternoon, during the Hour of the Ram, the party moved to the south side of the main hall of Genji's residence in the southeast quadrant. Brocade had been spread over the arched bridges and passageways along the route, and curtains had been stretched across all those places where the Emperor and Retired Emperor might be exposed to view. The preparations were magnificent and dignified.

Genji had summoned master cormorant fishermen from both the palace and his own staff and had them release their birds from boats floating on the southeast pond. The birds caught many small, carplike fish. They were not intended as any kind of formal spectacle, but as an interesting diversion for the party as they went along the way. The foliage on the landscaped hill in the garden was quite lovely, but the foliage in the garden of the southwest quadrant was special. For that reason, Genji had had the passageway between the two residences taken down and the gate opened so that nothing, not even autumn mists, would be able to obscure the view.

The seats for the two sovereigns had been arranged so that they were slightly above Genji's, but His Majesty, Reizei, ordered that this be changed so that Genji, who now had privileges equal to those accorded any retired emperor, would be seated on the same level. Genji took this as a great honor, but Reizei was disgruntled that he could not do everything in his power to formally show his respect for the man who was his true father.

A Lesser Captain of the Left Guard brought the fish from the pond, and an Assistant Commander of the Right presented a brace of fowl taken in Kitano north of the palace by falconers from the Chamberlain's office. The two men approached the front of the main hall from the east side and knelt to the left and right of the steps. The Chancellor, Tō no Chūjō, conveyed the order that the

catch be prepared and served. The repast for the princes of the blood and the high-ranking officials included rare delicacies that were presented in an unusual style. All of the guests were soon inebriated, and, as evening came on, musicians were summoned to entertain. Their performance was subdued and elegantly subtle, and the pages who served His Majesty performed a dance. The scene brought to mind that celebration of the autumn foliage at the Suzaku Palace years ago. While the Chinese-style court song “Our Gracious Emperor” was performed, Tō no Chūjō’s youngest son, only ten years old, danced with consummate skill. When Emperor Reizei removed one of his robes and presented it as a reward for the dance, the boy’s father himself descended the stairs and bowed humbly in gratitude. Genji, remembering how he and Tō no Chūjō had once performed the dance “Waves of the Blue Sea,” had some chrysanthemums picked from the garden and presented to his old companion with this poem:

*Even chrysanthemums in the hedge, their colors
Deepened by the frost, seem to yearn from time to time
For that autumn when once we danced and twirled our sleeves*

Tō no Chūjō had stood on equal terms that time when he performed the dance with Genji, but he realized now that while his own fortune had been superior to that of all other men, Genji’s destiny had been incomparably noble. A chill autumn shower fell, exactly as it had during that celebration long ago—the rain seemed to sense the mood of the occasion. The new Chancellor offered this reply:

*Mingling among auspicious purple clouds
These chrysanthemums look to me like stars
Shining forth in a pure and spotless reign*

“A season of splendor yet to come ...”¹⁴ he added.

The various dark and light shades of the autumn leaves blown about and scattered by the evening breeze lay on the garden, which now resembled the brocade-covered passageways. The handsome pages were the sons of distinguished noble houses. They were dressed in robes of pale rose-tinted tan¹⁵ or pale bluish-gray over layered robes of grape purple or maroon, their hair done up in loops at the sides and their foreheads barely showing beneath their caps. They performed several brief dances, and as they withdrew beneath the shade of the autumn leaves, they seemed to regret that the sun was going down. The

performance of the court musicians was calm and understated. The nobles then began to play, calling for stringed instruments from the Bureau of Books and Drawings. As the music was growing livelier, three kotos were brought out for the sovereigns to play.

Retired Emperor Suzaku listened in deep admiration to a six-string Japanese koto known as “Uda’s Priest”—so named because it was the favorite instrument of Emperor Uda¹⁶—and was moved to hear that its tone had not changed over time. He offered this verse:

*I have experienced many autumn showers
In my rustic village over the years ... and yet
I have never seen such lovely colors till now*

He seemed somewhat resentful that nothing so wonderful had happened during his reign.

Emperor Reizei replied:

*Do you view these leaves and think them common
They make a garden brocade that draws on
The glories of the past for their models*

Reizei sought to comfort Suzaku in this way. As each year went by, His Majesty grew more handsome, and it was now virtually impossible to tell him apart from Genji. The Middle Counselor was in official service that evening, and his face was also astonishingly similar to his father’s. It may be the workings of imagination, but Reizei’s looks seemed to exhibit a more noble refinement. On the other hand, the Middle Counselor seemed to have a fresher, more youthful quality about him. When he played the flute, it was marvelous. Among the courtiers positioned on the steps who were singing in accompaniment, Tō no Chūjō’s son, Kōbai, had by far the most beautiful voice. The two houses indeed seemed to be connected by their glorious karmic destinies.

¹ Kokinshū 632 [also *Tales of Ise*, section 5] (Ariwara no Narihira): “Would that the barrier guard on the road I travel secretly to see my lover fall asleep for me each and every night” (alluded to earlier in the *Tokonatsu* chapter).

² Gokurakujī, which was located in the southern precincts of the capital, was the funerary temple for Fujiwara nobility of senior rank. A different temple, the Hōtōji, now stands on the site.

³ This poem seems to echo a verse by Bai Juyi, *Wakan rōei shū* 52: “Beneath wisteria blooms in the

gathering twilight, how sad I feel that spring will not stay on, but must depart.”

⁴ *Futaai* is a color produced by weaving threads of dark blue and scarlet together or by dyeing cloth first with scarlet (using the dye from safflowers) and then with indigo. The reddish tint would have suggested (though not formally signified) a somewhat lower rank. Genji’s advice here is not just a matter of taste but has to be understood within the context of his son’s long-standing anxiety over his status.

⁵ *Gosenshū* 100 (Anonymous, composed by a woman upon being assured of her lover’s faithfulness): “Shoots of wisteria leaves open up under the warm rays of the spring sun … and, if you truly love me, I will yield to your warmth as well.”

⁶ The young woman in the song is identified by the word *otoyome*, which in this case most likely means “young bride,” but which could also mean “the wife of a younger brother.” If the song has the latter meaning, then it would seem to play on the comic situation of a young gallant who sneaks into his lover’s house only to take the wrong woman (Murasaki Shikibu presented her own version of this story in the *Utsusemi* chapter). In any case, Tō no Chūjō ‘s reaction is understandable, since Kōbai is clearly teasing Genji’s son.

⁷ Kashiwagi’s image of a traveler sleeping beneath the blossoms suggests that Genji’s son will be sleeping with a prostitute, and the hint of being unfaithful or promiscuous is what draws the retort from the serious young groom.

⁸ *Gosenshū* 1036 (Mibu no Tadamine): “There has never been a case of someone dying from yearning for his love … but surely I will become such an example to the world.”

⁹ Genji’s son deflects the blame for rumors about them and places it squarely on Kumoinokari’s father—the guardsman at the barrier gate at Kukida. Kukida barrier and Kawaguchi barrier are likely two names for the same place, though the name Kukida plays on the word *kuku*, which means “to leak” or “to pass through.”

¹⁰ *Tales of Ise*, section 28: On being left by a faithless wife, a man wrote: “Why must this basket now be a memento of the time we were together, tightly bound to each other like these woven reeds, which I had hoped were watertight?” The poem plays on the word *katami*, which may mean both “woven basket” and “memento.”

¹¹ The name of the heart-shaped leaf he refers to is *aoi*. Because of the orthography, the name plays on two meanings: *aoi* (“wild ginger”) and *aohi* (“the day we meet”). Katsura leaves, which as the reply poem notes were given to scholars to signify achievement, were also used to adorn caps for this festival. Thus the reply by Koremitsu’s daughter cleverly rebuffs Genji’s son by exposing his pretense of not knowing the name of the plant.

¹² *Gosenshū* 1188 (Anonymous): “The feelings of joy and sorrow are one and the same … they are both expressed by tears alike.”

¹³ Because Genji was a commoner, he could not be promoted to retired emperor, and so he is given an appointment with benefits equivalent to such a high rank. There are no historical cases of any commoner receiving such an honor.

¹⁴ *Kokinshū* 279 (Taira no Sadafun): “There is a season of splendor yet to come, for after autumn is past, the color of the chrysanthemum will change and deepen.”

¹⁵ This color, *akaki shiratsurubami*, looks somewhat like pale rose but with a very light acorn brown tint.

¹⁶ Uda lived from 867 to 931.

XXXIV

Wakana

Early Spring Greens: Part 1

FOLLOWING THE excursion to the Rokujō estate, Retired Emperor Suzaku found himself suffering from a strange malady. He had been in poor health for a long time, but this particular illness seemed ominous. “For many years I have harbored a deep desire to retreat from the world and devote myself to religious austerities,” he remarked, “but I was always reluctant to take such a step while my mother was still alive. Now my premonition of impending death drives me to follow that path at last.” So saying, he began making preparations for taking his vows.

Aside from the current Crown Prince, Suzaku had four other children, all princesses. The mother of the Third Princess was herself the daughter of the Emperor who had reigned just before Suzaku’s own father ascended the throne. However, unlike her sibling, Prince Hyōbu, she had been reduced to commoner status and given the Minamoto name. She was brought to the palace and installed in the Fujitsubo as a consort for Suzaku when he was still the Crown Prince. She was close to Suzaku and certainly had hopes of rising to the highest rank as Empress, but she had no supporters to help her along, and because she did not come from a distinguished lineage—her mother had been an insignificant concubine—she seemed rather lost and forlorn among all the great ladies at the court. Then, Suzaku’s mother, the former Kokiden Consort, brought Oborozukiyo in as the Principal Handmaid, and no one could compete with her for Suzaku’s affections. The mother of the Third Princess was thus completely pushed aside, and, though Suzaku privately felt sorry for her, she was filled with bitter regrets after his abdication and continued to harbor resentments toward the court until the day she died. The daughter she had left behind, the Third Princess, was Suzaku’s favorite. He felt sorry for her misfortune and raised her

with special care. The girl was now about thirteen or fourteen, and he was anxious about her future. *After I abandon this worldly life and retreat into the mountains, she'll be left behind. Will she have anyone whom she can rely on to get by in this world?*

The construction of the temple that would serve as his retreat in the hills west of the capital was now complete, and he was busy making preparations for his move there. At the same time, he was also planning the Third Princess's coming-of-age ceremony, when she would don her first train. He bequeathed to her alone not only what he considered the most precious treasures and the finest furnishings in his possession—all of which might have been expected, given his special feelings for her—but also everything large or small that might have had some meaning to her, right down to the most trivial playthings. He then distributed what was left to his other daughters.

After hearing that his father was not well and was preparing to take vows and go into retreat, the Crown Prince went with his mother, the former Shōkyōden Consort, to pay his respects. Though the Crown Prince's mother had not been the most beloved of Suzaku's women, her destiny in giving birth to a future Emperor was unmatched, and so they conversed at length about all that had happened over the years. Suzaku dispensed advice to his son on all aspects of the proper administration of the state. The young man was mature and wise beyond his years, and because he had powerful supporters—the Major Captain was his uncle, and his primary consort was Genji's daughter—Suzaku was confident that he would not have to worry about his son's future.

"I have no lingering resentments," Suzaku told his son, "but I remain fettered to the world and hindered from that inevitable final parting by my concern about what will happen to all my daughters once I am gone. I've seen and heard people in the past talk about how it is the destiny of women to be disdained as flighty and capricious creatures, and I have always regarded such opinions as regrettable and unfortunate. After you assume power as Emperor, be kind to them and look after all of them, each according to her individual circumstances. Three of my daughters have someone to rely on, and so I have entrusted their futures to those who are already supporting them. The Third Princess, however, is still young, and because her mother has passed away, she has only me to look after her interests, and I'm worried that life will be very harsh for her once I have abandoned this world and she is cast adrift." He wiped tears from his eyes as he told his son how he felt.

He asked the Crown Prince's mother as well to look after the Third Princess and regard her fondly. However, because the former Shōkyōden Consort had once been a rival to the Third Princess's mother, who had been treated with far

greater affection by Suzaku, the relationship between the two women had never been cordial. Thus, as one might guess, she did not think of the Third Princess affectionately enough to look after her—though, to be sure, she harbored no lingering resentments against the girl herself.

Suzaku worried about his daughter constantly, morning to night. As the year came to a close, his illness worsened, and he would not even come out from behind his blinds. Sometimes malignant spirits afflicted him, but there were also periods when his condition improved. Even with these occasional respites, he was convinced that his death was imminent. Although he had abdicated, those he supported during his reign continued to serve him and take comfort in his warm kindness and splendid appearance, and they grieved with all their hearts that he might soon pass away. Messages of concern from the Rokujō estate followed one after another, and when Suzaku learned that Genji himself planned to call on him, he was pleased and honored.

Genji's son, the Middle Counselor, paid him a visit, and Suzaku summoned him inside the blinds, where they had a close, intimate conversation.

"The late Emperor, my father, gave me many last instructions when he was near death, and he had special requests regarding both your father and Emperor Reizei. However, after I succeeded him to the throne, I found that there were limits to what I could do, and while my personal affection for your father never wavered, a fleeting transgression on his part alienated him from me ... though he has given no indication during the intervening years that he holds any lingering grudge. When it comes to one's own position or fortune, there are many examples from the past when even a wise and prudent man loses control of his emotions and, driven to seek revenge, does something twisted and evil. People at the court had such suspicions about your father, wondering when his true feelings would be revealed, but he has endured and kept himself in check. He has even treated my son, the Crown Prince, with kindness and consideration. They enjoy an extraordinarily friendly relationship, and while I am profoundly grateful that they have grown so close, I am not by nature an especially wise man, and, like all parents, I wander lost in the darkness of affection for my children. That's why I decided to stay completely out of my son's affairs, as if they were no concern of mine, since I'm afraid I might come off looking like some foolish, doting father. As for Emperor Reizei, it makes me happy to think that because I've done exactly as my late father requested, His Majesty has upheld the honor of the imperial line and of my own reign like a beacon of enlightened rule in this degenerate age, just as I had hoped he would. After the excursion to Rokujō last autumn, I have been reflecting on the past and would very much like to see your father. There are so many things that I must discuss

with him when we meet. He really must come in person, so encourage him.” He broke down and wept.

“It is difficult for me to judge things that happened long ago when I was still young,” the Middle Counselor replied. “When I was mature enough to go into service at the court, I went about observing how the world works, and during all that time, whenever I talked with my father—no matter if the subject was important or trivial, or if we were discussing something of a private nature—not once did he even intimate that he harbored grievances over the past. He sometimes laments that once he ceased actively serving His Majesty and withdrew to his villa to quietly pursue his own interests, he could no longer carry out your father’s last wishes ... almost as if they had become no concern of his. Also, when Your Majesty was on the throne he was still a young man, without sufficient talent and experience, and he regrets that with so many other wise advisers in attendance you never saw him achieve his desired goal: to be of service to you. He has told me that now that you have abdicated and entered a quiet period in your life, he would like permission to visit and open his heart to you ... yet, because he continues to find himself constrained by his new circumstances, months have gone by and he has not been able to come here.”

The Middle Counselor was not even twenty, but he cut an ideal courtly figure. His handsome features were at their peak, and he was exceptionally refined. Suzaku studied him intently and was secretly drawn to the idea of entrusting the Third Princess, who was proving to be such a worry, to the young gentleman’s care.

“You’ve settled in at the Chancellor’s house, have you not?” Suzaku asked. “For many years I was puzzled by the estrangement between you two, and I thought it a great pity. I am relieved to hear that it has worked out, though I am also disappointed ... for very different reasons.”

The Middle Counselor was puzzled by these remarks and wondered what they could possibly mean. He had, of course, heard rumors to the effect that Suzaku was trying to find a way to secure the future of the Third Princess and hoping to find a suitable husband for her so that he could withdraw from the world with his mind at ease. For that reason, he had to assume that Suzaku was referring obliquely to his daughter. However, he could hardly answer in a way that showed he had caught the gist of Suzaku’s comments immediately, since that might give offense by confirming that rumors about the Third Princess were indeed spreading at court. So he rather offhandedly replied, “Since I have no redeeming qualities to speak of, it was difficult for me to find a wife.” He said nothing more.

The ladies-in-waiting there had gathered to take a peek at him. “How splendid

he is in both looks and manners. Ahh ... he's perfect," the younger women remarked. But the older women countered, saying, "Well now ... he may be handsome as you say, but he doesn't compare to the way his father looked at that age. Genji was so exquisitely noble that one practically swooned just looking at him."

Suzaku overheard them talking and replied, "My brother's looks are truly special. But now he is even more extraordinary than when he was twenty ... there is an ever-increasing aura about him, and the only word that does justice to him is 'radiant.' When you see how dignified and capable he is on public occasions, his majestic bearing is wonderfully dazzling, and when he's in an informal setting, bantering and teasing, he exudes a unique charm—no one can match his gentle, affectionate demeanor. He's a rarity in this world. In every respect a man of such excellent character that it makes one speculate what he did in former lives to merit such great fortune. He was raised at the palace and was far and away the favorite of our father, who lavished attention on him and considered him more important than his own life. In spite of all that, Genji was never willful or arrogant, but behaved modestly. In fact, he did not become a Middle Counselor until he was in his twenties. I believe that he was twenty-one when he was promoted to Consultant and Major Captain ... and so the son seems to have outpaced his father when it comes to advancement at court. Apparently, his children's reputations are surpassing his own. The Middle Counselor is a young man who serves the realm with his learning, talents and prudence, and his virtues are not at all inferior to Genji's. I may be mistaken about this young man, but his reputation, which is growing more impressive, seems quite remarkable." And so he praised both father and son.

The Third Princess was very pretty, and whenever her father looked at her and saw how young and innocent she was, he would say, "If only I could give you to someone trustworthy, a man who would marry you and care for you, who would overlook your inexperience and teach you what you need to know." He summoned her older, more experienced nurses to talk about preparations for the upcoming ceremony when she would don her first train. In the course of their conversation, he remarked, "I've heard that Genji raised the daughter of Prince Hyōbu as his wife, and I wish there were someone who could do the same for my daughter. Unfortunately, it's hard to find such a man among the courtiers, and Emperor Reizei has the Umetsubo Empress. His other consorts are all highly distinguished women as well, and so my daughter would have difficulty competing in such company without powerful supporters. I should have approached the Middle Counselor and casually dropped some hints about her when he was still single. He may be young, but he seems truly capable and has a

promising future.”

“The Middle Counselor is by temperament earnest and steady,” one of the nurses replied, “and for years he remained devoted and faithful to his young bride and would not let his affections stray to another woman. Now that he is finally married and has what he desired, he is not likely to waver. Why not consider his father instead? I hear rumors that his fondness for fascinating women is as strong as ever and that he is especially drawn to women of distinguished lineage. For example, they say he has found it hard to forget the former High Priestess at Kamo—the one he calls Princess Asagao—and still corresponds with her.”

“That’s all fine and well, but his amorous nature and his fickleness worry me,” Suzaku protested—though in reality he had been considering just this option.

Perhaps I should do as her nurse suggests, he thought, and give her to Genji. After all, even if she were to have a hard time competing with his other wives and they were to treat her unfairly and with contempt in spite of her higher status, he could still be a substitute father for her.

“All things considered,” he continued, “if you have a daughter and you want to arrange at least a proper marriage for her, then you would want her to be with a man like Genji. We don’t know how long we have in this uncertain world, and so it’s best to live life to the fullest as Genji does. If I were a lady—even just his sister—I would certainly try to be close to him. I certainly felt that way when we were young. It’s no wonder that women are so attracted to him!”

Was he perhaps remembering Oborozukiyo at this moment?

Among those who looked after the Third Princess was a nurse who came from a most distinguished background. Her older brother was a Middle Controller of the Left who had served Genji as a close confidant for many years, and because he was sympathetic to the Third Princess, the nurse took the opportunity to speak with him about her charge when he came for a visit.

“Her father has indicated how he would like his daughter to be taken care of, and, if the occasion arises, perhaps you might let Genji know of this. There have been examples of imperial princesses who have remained unmarried, but the Third Princess would be more secure having someone who is devoted to her and will look after her every need. Apart from her father, she does not have anyone who will seriously look after her interests, and though we women try to help her, what assistance can we really give? Of course, not all of her women think as I do, and one of the ladies-in-waiting may take it upon herself to act as a go-between for some gentleman and cause a scandal that exposes her to gossip and derision. If a match could be arranged while her father is still alive, then it would

be easier for me to look after her. Although she comes from the most distinguished lineage, it is difficult to gauge the destiny of a woman, and almost anything might cause her grievous ruin. Her father favors her above all his many children, and so she will certainly be the target of jealous resentments. One way or another, I do not want her to suffer even the slightest reproach."

"What *would* be the best thing for her?" the Middle Controller mused. "My lord is astonishingly loyal: once he begins seeing someone, even if it's only a temporary fling, he remains devoted, whether she is someone who has truly captured his heart or someone for whom he does not have deep feelings. He calls on each of them—how often depends on the degree of affection he feels for the woman—and though he has gathered a very large number around him, it seems he considers only one woman, Lady Murasaki, to be the true love whom he cherishes above the others. As a result, many of his women live unfulfilled lives. Nonetheless, if it's the Third Princess's destiny to be married to him, then I imagine that no matter how remarkable a woman Lady Murasaki may be, she is of lower birth and cannot stand on equal terms with our young princess. Still, there are things about this that give me pause. Actually, I've been told that in private he opens up playfully and admits that even though he has received more glory and honor than one might expect to achieve in this degenerate age, when it comes to his relationships with women, he has suffered both harsh condemnation and deep disappointment. And when I consider all the ladies whom he has taken under his protection, he is certainly justified in feeling that way. Not one of them is of decidedly low birth, and yet, by the same token, none is exceptionally distinguished either ... indeed, do any of them possess a reputation and family background equal to his? When you look at his situation from that perspective, the Third Princess would be a perfect match for him. That is, if the union can be arranged as her father wishes."

When the nurse next had a chance to speak to Suzaku, she reported what her brother had told her.

"I approached the Middle Controller about the proposal, and he thought that Genji would be amenable, since it would fulfill a dream he has had for many years. He said that if you truly want to go through with this, he would convey the proposal. So, how should we proceed? Although Genji himself makes distinctions among his women depending on their status, he looks after all of them with extraordinary kindness. While they all may be of lower status compared to your daughter—commoners, really—the entry of yet another rival for their husband's attention might irritate them and possibly lead to some unpleasant incident. It appears that many men hope to be the one to take care of your daughter, and it might be best to give the matter careful consideration

before making a decision. The Third Princess may be a woman of the highest nobility, but given the current state of the world in this degenerate age, people do as they please to make themselves happy. Consequently, when it comes time to marry, women now want to follow their hearts and not the dictates of family circumstances. My young lady strikes me as unusually naive and easily distracted, and there are limits as to what those of us who wait on her can do to protect her. If you give them clear general directions, you can trust your responsible servants to carry them out. However, without someone special to look after her, your daughter will remain vulnerable."

"I've been thinking along the same lines," Suzaku said. "The situation of a Princess who marries is extremely unsettled, and, no matter how noble her status may be, so long as a woman is bound to a man things will naturally arise that will cause her regrets or resentments. That is why I have been struggling with my decision, my mind in turmoil. When I consider the alternative, however, an unmarried Princess will find herself in a precarious position should those who are responsible for her die. It may have been possible in the old days for a woman to get by on her own in the world after being separated from the father whose protection she relied upon, but people back then were subdued and did nothing that society would disapprove. They knew their place and followed the custom that one should not aspire to a relationship above one's station. Nowadays, however, I understand that people engage in all sorts of improper, licentious relationships. Why, I've even heard of young noblewomen who, despite being raised in the most tender and attentive fashion, acquire a scandalous reputation by having an affair with some common Lothario. Such scandals sully the honor of the parents and cast a dark shadow over their family legacy. So you see, whether my daughter is married or single, I have cause for concern either way. Regardless of a woman's station in life, it's hard to know what destiny awaits her. That's why I worry about everything.

"In general, if a woman lives her life obeying the instructions of her parents or older brothers, then for better or worse, she will at least escape censure should she suffer a reversal of fortune later in life. It may seem that there's nothing wrong with a woman choosing to marry as she pleases, especially if she subsequently enjoys the blessings of exceptionally good fortune. Still, I remain convinced that she will irreparably damage her standing in society if she secretly follows the whims of her heart—feelings stirred merely by something she has heard about a man in passing—without informing her parents or obtaining the permission of her guardians. Such behavior is frivolous and unworthy even for a woman of commoner status. Of course, none of this means that the woman's feelings should not be taken into account ... indeed, it is utter folly to assume that

everything is the working of karmic destiny when, say, the reckless actions of one of her attendants binds the woman to a man for whom she has no deep feelings. One can only imagine how she would conduct herself under such circumstances.

“I worry that my own daughter seems strangely passive and dependent, and it would be terrible if one of her ladies-in-waiting were to take it upon herself to arrange a tryst with some man and then word of the affair leaked out.” Because he looked so anxious about what would become of the Third Princess after he had abandoned the world, all her attendants found it increasingly stressful to serve her.

“I’ve been waiting patiently for years,” Suzaku continued, “to see if she matures a little and has a better understanding of society’s ways. Now I feel that I’m under pressure to do something, for I fear I may not live long enough to fulfill my deepest wish, which is to take vows and go into retreat. It is true, as you said, that Genji has many wives, but he understands the world, and since there isn’t another man whom I’d feel more confident about, we needn’t concern ourselves too much with how many wives he has. The disposition of the girl herself will determine how things turn out. All of his women live in tranquil harmony, and he’s a model for the world at large; when it comes to finding someone who would make me feel confident her future is secure, he simply has no peers.

“So tell me, is there anyone else who would be better for her? My younger brother, Prince Sochinomiya, is a man of fine character. My daughter and he are both of imperial blood, and so he would never treat her as an outsider or disparage her. However, he is overly refined and self-indulgent, and his lack of seriousness has given him a reputation as a man of no substance. Such a man could hardly be trusted.

“Then there is the Fujiwara Major Counselor¹ ... I have heard that he hopes to oversee her household. He is such a loyal and responsible man that I’m sure he would take care of her. And yet, I still have doubts about him ... he’s of such low rank that my daughter would surely be disappointed. In the old days, when it came to choosing a groom, people sought a man with an exceptional reputation above all else. They would have been disappointed if such a decision were made solely on the basis of a man’s willingness to serve his bride.

“The Chancellor’s son, Kashiwagi, who I understand is now Commander of the Right Gate Guard, secretly yearns for her, according to Oborozukiyo. He’s someone I’d have to consider if he were at a little higher position at court ... but as things stand, he is simply too young and without sufficient rank. His mind is set on marrying a woman of high status to further his career, and so he has

remained single. His calm, proud demeanor makes him stand out from his peers, his education and training are impeccable, and he is destined to be an important guardian of the throne. His future is assured, but his rank ... well, I simply cannot consider him a serious choice." And so he fretted over various possibilities.

No one was troubling Suzaku about his other daughters, who never received from him the kind of attention he lavished on the Third Princess. For some odd reason, word of his concerns about her spread of their own accord, even though he spoke about them privately, and so there were many men eager to pursue her.

Tō no Chūjō shared his thoughts with his principal wife, who then passed them on to her younger sister Oborozukiyo. "Kashiwagi is still single because he is determined to marry a princess. If you have occasion to speak to the former Emperor about this matter, would you please inform him of my son's interest? It would be a great honor to me if he would deign to summon my son as a prospective groom." Oborozukiyo did all she could to present the case for Kashiwagi and to gauge Suzaku's reaction.

Prince Sochinomiya, having lost Tamakazura to the Major Captain, was aware that she would hear about his continued search for a new wife; and with that in mind, he was determined to choose very carefully, knowing that he would be ridiculed if he settled on some lesser woman. Thus, when he heard about the Third Princess, he was thrilled at the prospect, but edgy and impatient as well.

The Fujiwara Major Counselor had been the head of Suzaku's household staff for many years and had served him closely all that time. He was concerned that he would be cast adrift once Suzaku went into retreat into the mountains, and so he was desperate to be the one chosen to look after the Third Princess. He pressed his suit, eagerly sounding out Suzaku and trying to win his favor.

When Genji's son, the Middle Counselor, heard what was going on, his heart raced with excitement, for he knew that if the opportunity came along and he let his own interest in the girl be known, his proposal would certainly not be dismissed. After all, he had learned about the Third Princess not through an intermediary but from Retired Emperor Suzaku himself, and he had seen the look on Suzaku's face as he had dropped his encouraging hints. Even so, Kumoinokari was now his intimate partner, and she was trusting in him. Because he was by nature not given to wanton behavior, he kept his emotions in check.

During all those years when I was suffering because I could not be with her, I never once used that as an excuse to give my heart to another. It would be despicable of me to now overturn all of that and suddenly give her cause to grieve. If I were to marry someone of such extraordinarily high rank as the Third Princess, I'd never be able to do as I wished, and because my affections would be split between the two of them, I'd never have a moment's peace and

would surely make myself unhappy as well. He said nothing about any of this. However, after Suzaku broached the subject to him, the thought of the Third Princess going to some other man bothered him, and so he kept his ears attuned to any gossip he might pick up.

The Crown Prince also heard about his father's concerns and sent him a letter in which he offered his opinion on the matter:

With regard to finding her a husband, you must bear in mind that you will be setting a precedent for future generations, and give that consideration more weight than any short-term advantages you might gain from the match. If you are thinking of giving her to a commoner, just remember there are limits on such a man's rank, no matter how virtuous he may be. That's why you should entrust her to Genji, who can act as both husband and father to her.

Suzaku, who had been eagerly waiting to hear from his son about this, wrote back: "What you say is most sensible. You have obviously given considerable thought to this matter." He was now more than ever determined to approach Genji about the Third Princess, and so he dispatched that older brother of his daughter's nurse, the Middle Controller of the Left, to present his proposal.

Genji had long been aware of the Third Princess's situation, and he knew of Suzaku's concerns.

"I can certainly sympathize," he told the Middle Controller, "but the reasons behind this proposal seem weak. Suzaku claims he's worried because he doesn't have many years left, and yet how could I agree to look after his daughter when I can't be sure that I'll outlive him? I suppose that if we all died in the order in which we were born, then I might survive him for a few years, but even so ... In any case, I could hardly treat any of his daughters as strangers. While I'm honored to be approached about the Third Princess in particular and to be asked to give her special protection, I can do so as her uncle without having to marry her. And even if I promise to look after her, the world is an uncertain place, and I might not live long enough to fulfill that promise."

"There are other concerns as well. Suppose she were to grow familiar and intimate with me as the one person she could trust and I then follow the example of my brother and retreat from the world to pursue religious devotions? The distress that would cause her would in turn make me anxious, and I would be unable to break free from my attachments to this world. I know my son, the Middle Counselor, may look like a young man of no consequence, but he has grand prospects ahead of him, and from all appearances he has the qualifications

to become an important guardian of the realm. Shouldn't Suzaku really be considering my son as a prospective groom? Perhaps he's reluctant to approach him, knowing the young man is so serious and has committed himself to a young woman he loves."

Genji did not seem inclined to accept the proposal. The Middle Controller of the Left was disappointed that this should be his answer and felt sorry for Retired Emperor Suzaku, who had given the decision such careful consideration. Accordingly, he went on to explain in detail the personal circumstances that had prompted the offer.

Genji smiled knowingly. "I gather that he loves the Third Princess very much, and so it's natural for him to go out of his way to look deeply into every possible avenue to secure her future. Given that that's the case, he should simply send her into service at the palace. True, His Majesty has a number of distinguished ladies who arrived ahead of her, but that shouldn't be a major problem. It is absolutely not the case that a woman who comes later will be seen as inferior. Take my father's reign: the Imperial Mother of Suzaku was my father's first wife, installed as the Kokiden Consort, and she enjoyed great prestige. But the woman who came to him last, Fujitsubo, ended up eclipsing her by giving birth to His Majesty, Reizei." He went on to add: "The consort who bore the Third Princess was Fujitsubo's half sister—a woman who, so I am told, was almost equally favored in looks. The Third Princess must be a remarkable young lady, since she comes from distinguished lineages on both her paternal and maternal sides." His words suggested that he now wanted to learn more about her.

The year was coming to a close. There were no signs that Suzaku's condition was improving, and so he rushed to finalize his plans for his retreat and busied himself with preparations for his daughter's ceremony, which he wanted to be the most solemn and spectacular such event for all time. The west side of the Oak Pavilion² on the northeast corner of the old Suzaku Palace was refurbished for the occasion; instead of using native damasks and brocades for the curtained dais and the standing curtains, he chose to have the room decorated and arrayed in a style befitting an Empress of China so that it would give off an elegant grandeur. He had long ago asked the Chancellor, Tō no Chūjō, if he would do the honor of tying the waist cords for the Third Princess's train, but Tō no Chūjō, being the kind of man who would make a big fuss about protocol—going on about being unworthy and that sort of thing—thought the honor a nuisance since he, unlike Genji, was not related to the girl. Still, he had never been able to refuse anything Suzaku asked of him and agreed to attend.

The Ministers of the Left and Right along with all the other high-ranking officials were also in attendance, including some who had serious conflicts in

their schedules but went out of their way to be there. Eight princes of the blood and all of the courtiers who were in service either to His Majesty or to the Crown Prince gathered at the event, having heard how splendid it would be. Emperor Reizei and the Crown Prince assumed that this would be Suzaku's last public ceremony and, moved to pity, made available to him numerous Chinese-made items from the Chamberlain's offices and the imperial storehouses. Genji also sent wonderful treasures from his Rokujō estate. In addition, he provided the rewards and stipends for the various participants and the gift for the guest of honor, Tō no Chūjō.

The Umetsubo Empress sent a set of robes and comb boxes that she had commissioned specially for this occasion and she included with them the hair ornaments and accessories that Suzaku had given her long ago when she left the capital to go to Ise as the High Priestess. These items had been refinished to update them, but they retained their original style. They were presented during the evening of the day of the ceremony. The messenger who brought them was an acting assistant master in Umetsubo's household staff who had once served Suzaku as well. The man had been instructed to give the items directly to the Third Princess. A poem was included:

*These venerable combs I received
Long ago brought the past back to me
Whenever I wore them in my hair*

When Suzaku saw them, poignant memories flooded back to him as well. The Umetsubo Empress had passed on the accessories as an expression of her hope that the Third Princess would experience the same good fortune she had enjoyed. They made for an auspicious gift, and that is why Suzaku avoided any hint of his old unrequited feelings for the Umetsubo Empress in his reply:

*I hope that I may see her follow you
In fortune's grace, the eternal blessings
These venerable combs foretell for her*

Retired Emperor Suzaku, who had been in such poor health, had to summon up all his strength to be able to make it through the ceremony, and three days after it was over, he took the tonsure at last. Even a commoner finds the change of appearance that comes with taking religious vows a cause for sorrow, and so one can well imagine the distress Suzaku's women suffered when he withdrew from the world. Oborozukiyo stayed close by his side, and she was so

despondent that he was unable to comfort her at all.

"A parent may wander lost in the darkness of their love for a child, but even that worry has its limits. How hard it is to part from one who has loved me as deeply as you have!" His heart was in chaos, filled with conflicting emotions, but he forced himself to sit up nonetheless, reclining on an armrest, and the abbot from Mount Hiei and two other eminent priests administered his vows.

The ceremony in which he renounced this world and put on the robes of a novitiate was terribly depressing. Even the priests, who had achieved enlightenment concerning the evanescent nature of the world, were moved to tears on this day, and so it was hardly surprising that Suzaku's daughters, his consorts and concubines, and all the men and women of high and low rank who served on his staff should have wept and sobbed openly. Their grief merely added to the agitation that Suzaku was already feeling, confounding his expectation that once he had taken vows he would finally retreat into a place of quiet serenity. Indeed, his concern for the Third Princess continued to occupy his thoughts and bind him to this world. Messages expressing sympathy for him arrived from all over, including first and foremost from His Majesty.

When Genji learned that Suzaku's condition had improved a little, he visited him. Although he was now receiving the same benefices as a Retired Emperor, he eschewed all of the pomp and formality associated with that rank. He was treated with the highest respect and honor by the court, but he maintained a humble appearance, choosing to use the same inconspicuous carriage he had always traveled in and keeping the number of men in his escort down to an appropriate minimum.

Suzaku was overjoyed that Genji had come to see him and, despite his maladies, he gathered himself to receive his guest. Dispensing with the usual formalities, he had Genji shown into his private chambers, where cushions were laid out. Seeing Suzaku in his priestly garb, the past and future seemed to blur together as Genji found it hard to hold back his tears. His heart was so full, it took him a few moments to collect himself.

"The death of our father made me realize the impermanence of all things, and my desire to do as you have done and take vows has only deepened over time. But, unfortunately, I have been weak-willed and wavering in my resolve ... and now I see you like this and feel ashamed at my own cowardice, which has prevented me from following your lead. So often I have compared my circumstances to yours and found nothing to prevent me from withdrawing from the world ... and yet, whenever I'm about to take that step, I always come up with numerous excuses for not doing so." Genji was inconsolable.

Suzaku was feeling disconsolate and, unable to maintain his strength and

composure, he broke down in tears. He spoke in a frail voice about things past and present.

“I have long been preoccupied with the thought that I might die any day, but I let time pass all the same. Finally, I realized that I might dither until I could no longer achieve my heart’s true desire, and that’s when I decided to go through with it. I have little time left to practice my devotions as I please, but during the time I do have left I shall calm my heart and focus on meditating on the Holy Name. I am a man of no distinction, and only my dreams for the Third Princess hold me back and keep me lingering so long in this world. It makes me anxious when I think of how those dreams have caused me to neglect my devotions to the Buddha.” He went on at some length about his feelings, ending with this statement: “The thought of leaving all of my daughters behind is distressing, but I am especially worried about the Third Princess, who has no one to look after her, and I’m troubled not knowing what will become of her.”

Genji gazed in pity at Suzaku, who seemed unable to broach the subject directly. Truth be told, he was, deep down, eager to learn more about the young woman, and, despite his misgivings, he found it hard to let the matter drop.

“It’s true,” Genji responded, “that a Princess may have even more cause than a commoner to rue not having someone to support her. Your son, the Crown Prince, is a remarkable young man and will be a wise successor, a sovereign who is more than this current degenerate age deserves or expects. People will look up to him and deem him trustworthy. Because he’s so virtuous, I’m sure that, if you were to approach him and explain the situation fully, he’d never lightly dismiss her, but would do all he could to set your mind at ease about her future. Of course, there are limits to what he can do. Even if he is able to administer the government exactly as he wishes, once he assumes the throne, he cannot act on his personal preferences and show favor to any one woman, let alone his own sister. If you really want to do everything you can for your daughter and set your mind at ease, then you must find someone who is honest and sincere—a man who vows to be steadfast, never to shirk his responsibilities, no matter what, and to stay with her and protect her always. Since you insist on worrying about what will happen after you leave the world behind, I suggest that you select an appropriate candidate and discreetly make arrangements to entrust your daughter to his care.”

“I’m inclined to agree with you,” Suzaku replied, “but it has been difficult to find the right man. I’ve looked to the past and found many examples in which imperial princesses had a husband selected for them. But in all those cases, their fathers were still on the throne and politically powerful, and thus it was feasible to find a man who could take care of them in the way you propose. In my case,

however, I'm retired and will soon be withdrawing further and further from the world. I know I shouldn't set my sights too high for her, but of all the things I'm turning my back on, she's the one person I find it impossible to abandon. As I have been torturing myself considering various solutions, my illness has grown worse, days and months that I can never get back have passed, and I'm at my wits' end. It's awkward of me to place this burden on you, but I ask you to show this one young daughter of mine special consideration and take her under your wing, find suitable prospects for her, and decide who might be best for her. I had wanted your own son, the Middle Counselor, to take her when he was still single, but alas, the Chancellor got to him before me."

"No doubt, my son is an earnest young man, and he will be of valuable service to the court. But he is still inexperienced and lacks mature judgment. It's presumptuous of me, I know, but by placing her under my committed care, I don't think that she would be any less protected than she is at present ... the one thing that worries me, though, is that I may not have much longer to live, and it troubles me to think that I might not be able to carry out my responsibilities toward her." And with that, Genji accepted Suzaku's proposal.

That evening, the gentlemen who served on Suzaku's staff and the officials who had escorted Genji gathered for a banquet in the presence of the Retired Emperor. The affair was informal with a simple but elegant meal in keeping with Suzaku's religious austerities. Those in attendance wiped tears from their eyes on seeing how much change had come to the life of the Retired Emperor, who ate from nothing more than a priest's bowl set upon a simple tray of unfinished aloeswood. There were many lovely, touching moments, but it is too much trouble to describe them all, and so I will forego recording them. Late that night, just before Genji was to depart, he rewarded each man in accord with his rank. The Fujiwara Major Counselor, who headed Suzaku's household staff and had sought the Third Princess for himself, was to see Genji back to the Rokujō estate. Snow had fallen that day, and the cold made Suzaku's illness worse; but even though he was suffering physically, his heart was at peace over having finally resolved the Third Princess's future.

Genji's heart was now torn by conflicting emotions. Murasaki had already heard vague reports about Suzaku's decision to offer the Third Princess to Genji. *It can't possibly be true*, she thought. *He once seemed quite serious in his pursuit of Princess Asagao, but in the end he could not bring himself to consummate their relationship, and so ...* Concluding there was nothing to the reports, she did not even ask him about the matter.

Observing such innocent faith in his loyalty, Genji felt sorry for Murasaki and was filled with anxiety. *What will she think of this? My feelings for her have not*

changed at all, and should this proposal come about, our relationship will only grow deeper ... but until she can see for certain that she is still my beloved, she'll be tortured with doubts. They had been together for so many years that they were always open with each other; because they were very close, it bothered him to be keeping something like this from her. Even so, he could not bring himself to tell her that night, but decided to wait for the morrow.

The next day snow was falling, and the look of the sky stirred profound emotions as they spoke about the past and about things to come.

"I went to pay my respects to Suzaku, who has not been well of late, and it was very sad to see him like that. He finds the thought of leaving the Third Princess behind unbearable, and he went on and on about her. I felt so bad for him that I could not refuse his request to look after her ... though I suppose the gossips will make a big deal of it. The idea of a man my age marrying a girl like that is embarrassing—a completely inappropriate match—and when Suzaku's representative approached me with the proposal, I was able to put him off with various excuses. But when I spoke with him in person, he opened up to me and explained the situation in such a deeply heartfelt way that I simply could not refuse him. When he goes off to his retreat in the mountains ... well, it seems that I shall have to bring her here to Rokujō. Will you be upset with me then? No matter what difficulties may arise, you must know that my feelings for you will never change, so please do not doubt me. The Third Princess is the one I pity, so I shall treat her honorably. If everyone can live together harmoniously, then ..." His words trailed off.

Murasaki was anxious by temperament, always reacting in shock to his every trivial dalliance, and so he had been worried how she might react to his announcement. To his surprise, she remained coolly unruffled.

"How painful it must have been for him to ask you to do this," she replied. "Why should I doubt your feelings? I shall feel at ease so long as the Third Princess herself does not find my presence here as your wife shocking or cause for complaint. Since I am related to her mother, perhaps she will not consider me a complete stranger."

She was so meek in her response that Genji was prompted to lecture her at some length.

"I'm worried now ... what does this docile acquiescence of yours mean? Have your feelings for me waned? If you are telling me the truth, if you and she can get along with mutual understanding, then my love for you will be greater than ever. Pay no attention to whatever malicious gossip people may spread. Who knows how rumors get started, but they naturally distort the truth about the relationship between a husband and wife and unintentionally give rise to strange

stories. Keep your emotions in check, and trust in what you see. Do not jump to conclusions and raise a fuss, and do not be heedlessly resentful."

This proposal is something that just dropped out of the blue, she thought, and there is no way he could have declined it. So I shall say nothing that might hint at any jealous resentment. Besides, this isn't some passionate romance that would require him to be sensitive to my feelings or to pay attention to my admonitions. There was no way for him to avoid this request, no matter how I might feel about it, and so I don't want people to think that I'm foolishly devastated. My stepmother, of course, is always calling down curses on me, and for some strange reason she blames me for what happened between the Major Captain and Tamakazura. I suppose that when she hears about this she'll assume that I am getting my just desserts. It could be said that Murasaki was a kindhearted woman, but were there no recesses in her heart where worries or resentment toward others were hidden away? The thought that she had been careless to feel so secure, to believe that nothing would come between her and Genji, secretly tormented her—the Third Princess was of higher status after all. The overconfidence she had once possessed about her relationship with Genji would end up making her a laughingstock. For all that, she remained outwardly calm.

The New Year arrived. At the Suzaku Palace the Third Princess was busily preparing for her move to the Rokujō estate. The men who had been interested in taking her—Prince Sochinomiya, Kashiwagi, and the Fujiwara Major Counselor—were all bitterly disappointed. Even Emperor Reizei had entertained thoughts of bringing her to the palace, but when he heard about the arrangement with Genji, he gave up the idea.

This year would mark Genji's fortieth birthday, and His Majesty could not let it pass without an official imperial celebration. The court had been abuzz with talk about the preparations for some time, but Genji, who had a long-held distaste for solemn occasions and their many annoying formalities, left the planning to others.

On the twenty-third day of the first month, the Day of the Rat, Tamakazura brought early spring greens³ to Genji. She had given no hint of her intentions beforehand, planning out everything in strict secrecy, and though her visit was sudden, he couldn't very well refuse her gifts. She tried to be discreet about the excursion, but she was the wife of an important man, and the pomp of her visit reverberated widely.

A room on the west side of the main hall of the southeast residence had been readied for the event. The folding screens, standing curtains, and other furnishings were all new, and instead of setting out formal-looking chairs in the

Chinese fashion, she had forty seat cushions, mats, armrests, and accessories beautifully arranged for the banquet. Two pairs of cabinets inlaid with mother-of-pearl were filled with a variety of presents—four chests of summer and winter robes, one for each cabinet, incense jars, boxes with medicine or with combs and hair ornaments, inkstones, a stand and lidded bowls for washing hair, and other items. She had privately seen to it that everything was exquisitely crafted. The stands holding the garlands of flowers were stylishly modern, intricately carved of aloeswood and fragrant sandalwood and trimmed in gold and other colors. Tamakazura, a woman of sensitive taste and courtly elegance, had made sure that every detail was fresh and novel. She knew Genji's tastes, however, and made sure that the preparations were not ostentatious.

The guests arrived, and just as Genji was about to go out and take his seat with the men at the banquet, he spoke with Tamakazura. So many memories of the past must have been in his heart! Though the banquet was to celebrate his fortieth year, he was so young and handsome that she couldn't help thinking they must have miscalculated his age, and his vibrant energy was not at all like that of a father. She felt embarrassed before him, having seen him so rarely in recent years, but she did not stand on formality and spoke to him in a familiar tone. She had her children with her, two very cute boys. Given the feelings that existed between her and Genji, she felt ashamed to be showing them off to him, but her husband, the Major Captain, had insisted that she use this occasion to do so. Her two sons were dressed alike, innocent-looking in their little cloaks, and their hair was parted in the middle, hanging down to their shoulders and framing their faces.

"I don't really worry too much about growing older," Genji remarked, "since I feel as young as ever and nothing much has changed ... though when I see the next generation in my grandchildren here celebrating me in this way, it makes me a little uncomfortable to realize how old I am. My son, the Middle Counselor, has had a child recently, but he is being absurdly reticent and has yet to show me the baby. You were the first to count up my years and plan this fête today ... but still, I find this Day of the Rat depressing. I'd prefer to forget about growing old for a while longer."

Tamakazura had matured beautifully and had acquired an air of dignity that was delightful to see. She composed the following:

*I have brought along the pine seedlings⁴ I plucked in the field
Where early spring greens are shooting forth ... and I pray today
That the craggy rock where they took root may last for ages*

Her verse was most proper in tone. Genji formally received the early spring greens, which were presented on four aloeswood trays, one for each decade of his life. Taking up the winecup, he replied:

*Drawing good fortune from the pine seedlings
Destined for long lives, the early spring greens
Of the field will surely live long as well*

As they were talking about various other things, high-ranking officials arrived in the aisle room on the south side.

Prince Hyōbu felt uncomfortable attending, but he had been invited and was close to Genji, who was, after all, his son-in-law, and so he decided it would be awkward *not* to go—otherwise people might assume that he was nursing some grievance. Thus, he arrived later in the morning. It annoyed him to see the Major Captain wearing a smug look on his face as he flaunted his connection to Genji, but Prince Hyōbu could still take pride in his own grandsons, who were related to Genji through their stepmother, Tamakazura, and their aunt, Lady Murasaki, as the boys performed various services at the banquet.

One by one, beginning with Genji's son, courtiers of appropriate rank presented Genji with forty baskets of fruit and forty chests filled with various delicacies. Genji sent the winecup around and an infusion made from early spring greens and herbs was served. Four aloeswood stands holding cups and utensils, all in a lovely modern style, were set in front of Genji.

To show respect for Retired Emperor Suzaku, who was still ailing, the party did not summon musicians from the court. However, Tō no Chūjō had made arrangements for flutes, reed pipes and other wind instruments to be brought in. "There has never been a banquet as charmingly novel and elegant as this one," he announced. Because he had taken care well in advance to select only instruments of surpassing tonal quality, the concert that followed was beautifully understated.

Among the various instruments performed to honor Genji was a six-string Japanese koto that was Tō no Chūjō's favorite instrument. He was a virtuoso on it, and he put all his heart into his performance, playing magnificently. When no one else dared follow him, Genji pressed Kashiwagi, Commander of the Right Gate Guard, to play. Kashiwagi, despite his vigorous attempts to beg off, finally relented and performed in a truly entertaining manner that was no less skilled than his father. While everyone agreed that it was not unusual for a son to inherit the talents of his father, they had assumed it was impossible for such skills to be passed down so perfectly, and so they were greatly impressed.

The secret songs that make up the repertory of koto music transmitted from China is relatively easier to memorize because each song has established modes, styles of plucking and written scores. In the case of the Japanese koto, the subtle overtones of the *sugagaki* technique, when improvised in concert, serve to harmonize the other instruments and resonate with a strange, unearthly beauty. Tō no Chūjō would keep his strings slack to produce a low timbre and pluck the instrument to achieve many harmonious overtones. Kashiwagi tended to keep his strings taut to produce a higher pitch, creating a warmly inviting tone. The princes in attendance, having never heard anything like it before, were enthralled.

Prince Sochinomiya performed on a seven-string koto that had once been stored in a pavilion at the palace where special old treasures were kept. The instrument had acquired the highest reputation over several generations, and near the end of his reign, Genji's father had presented it to one of his daughters, the First Princess, who cherished it. Tō no Chūjō borrowed it from her in order to make the occasion exceptional, and Genji was deeply touched by the gesture, which brought back many loving memories of the past. Seeing the expression on Genji's face, Prince Sochinomiya, who was now drunk and feeling lachrymose, passed the instrument to him. Genji could not let such a poignant moment pass, and so he played a rare and remarkable piece. Though not formal or grandiose, the musical entertainment that evening was of unrivaled sophistication.

Singers were summoned to the steps of the main entrance on the south side, and they accompanied the instruments by intoning the syllables of the musical scale in extraordinarily fine voices until the night deepened and the modes were changed, with the performers shifting to intimate minor keys. When "Green Willow" was performed, the sound was so lovely that even the warblers asleep in the plum trees must have been astonished. The banquet was a private affair, and the gifts and rewards were unusually lavish.

Tamakazura went home at dawn. Genji presented her with various gifts.

"Now that I pass my days shut away like this, almost as if I had renounced the world," he remarked, "I seem to have lost track of time, and it leaves me forlorn to be reminded of just how old I am. You must drop by from time to time to see how much I have aged. Having attained such an august position in life, I find myself constrained and regret that I cannot go to see you as I would like."

Many memories came back—some delightful, some sad—and he was frustrated and sorry that she had to hurry back so quickly. Tamakazura, of course, felt an appropriate bond with her real father, the Chancellor; but as the years went by and she settled into her life with the Major Captain, she felt more and more grateful to Genji, who had done so much to take care of her.

Shortly after the tenth day of the second month, the Third Princess moved to the Rokujō estate. Her quarters here were every bit as immaculate as at the Suzaku Palace. Curtains were set up to mark off her sleeping quarters on the west side of the main hall where Genji had partaken of the early spring greens. Apartments for her ladies-in-waiting were set up in two nearby quarters in the west hall and along the passageways connecting those quarters to the main hall, and they were splendidly furnished and decorated. She was provided with a trousseau that included items from the Suzaku Palace, just as if she were a woman going into service for an emperor. It goes without saying that the ceremony marking her move was conducted in a grand manner, with a large escort of high-ranking officials and nobles. The Fujiwara Major Counselor, who had hoped to look after her household, was attending her as well, though he felt uncomfortable doing so. Genji departed from established protocol and came out to meet her carriage. However, he was a commoner, and so it would not have been proper for the Third Princess to go to him, as she would have done for His Majesty had she gone to the palace. In fact, the etiquette was in all respects different from what was expected at the palace, since the groom in this case was not a prince. Their relationship was thus an unusual one.

Over the next three days, as the marriage was consummated, both Genji and Retired Emperor Suzaku did everything they could to ensure that the nuptials were carried out with the greatest possible dignity and courtly elegance. Over in her quarters in the east hall, Murasaki no longer felt secure about her marriage with Genji. In truth, her position was in no way eclipsed by the arrival of the Third Princess, just as Genji had promised, but she had grown used to being his unrivaled favorite; because he was taking such a young bride, a woman who had a bright future stretching before her and who could not be lightly dismissed, Murasaki couldn't help feeling awkward and tense. Still, she maintained her composure, and, when the move took place, she helped Genji take care of even the most trivial details. For his part, he found her utterly adorable and was even more taken with how remarkable she was.

In addition to being extremely slight of build, the Third Princess was still girlish and altogether immature. He thought back to the time when he discovered and took in his little purple gromwell, with her ties to Fujitsubo. She was only ten at the time, but quick-witted and an interesting companion. The Third Princess, who was thirteen, merely seemed childish. It occurred to him, however, that this might be for the best, since it was unlikely that she would ever be jealous of Murasaki. Even so, she still struck him as incredibly insipid.

During the three days of the nuptial ceremony, Genji went to the Third Princess's bedchamber every night. Murasaki, who in all her years with Genji

had never experienced anything like this, tried to endure the situation, but she was sad and hurt all the same. She paid more attention than usual to making sure his robes were perfectly scented, and the way she gazed off pensively was extremely sweet and endearing. *The circumstances with Suzaku are admittedly unusual, but why did I agree to bring in another wife to set alongside my beloved? This is the result of my own carelessness ... that licentious weakness of mine. Suzaku wouldn't consider my son as a groom, even though he is a young man, but still ... Tortured by these thoughts, tears welled up in Genji's eyes.*

"Tonight is the Third Night, so I must go ... it's the one night you must forgive me for leaving you. I would hate myself if, after tonight, I should ever let anything disrupt our relationship again. Still, I have to be careful and not let Suzaku hear that anything is amiss." Torn by conflicting emotions, he seemed to be in genuine pain.

Murasaki gave a wan smile.

"If your own heart is indecisive, then how should I be expected to understand how to resolve your dilemma? I wonder which way you will go in the end?" Because it was no use speaking to her, Genji felt ashamed, and he stretched out facedown, his chin cupped in his hands. Murasaki drew an inkstone over and composed the following:

*I trusted that our relationship would last
Far into the future in this changing world ...
But now your affections shift before my eyes*

She had written her verse down among other older poems on the same subject.

Genji picked it up and read it, and though there was nothing special about it, he felt the emotions she expressed were perfectly reasonable.

*Though our lives must come to an end
In a world of impermanence
The vows we made are eternal*

He could not bring himself to go right away, but Murasaki pressed him to leave: "Your hesitation will give others the wrong impression, and I'll be the one who looks pathetic." He set off in his soft, handsome robes, leaving an indescribably alluring scent behind. As she watched him go, her heart was restless.

Over the years, Murasaki had feared that Genji might take a wife whose status was higher than her own. Though she was convinced with each new affair he had that this one would be the one to end her relationship with him, he always

distanced himself from the other woman in the end. She thus grew more confident over time, thinking that he had given up his amorous ways and that things would always stay the same between them. And now this—a peculiar marriage that would set the whole court abuzz with gossip. As it turned out, their relationship was not as stable as she had so blithely assumed, and she feared an uncertain future. Nonetheless, she continued to maintain an outward calm, even as her women deplored the situation.

“Who would have thought such a thing could happen?”

“He looks after so many women, but they all yield privilege of place to our mistress ... that’s why everyone lives in harmony here.”

“Yes, but this new wife seems more willful, what with her imperial lineage, and she won’t just quietly recede into the background.”

“You mark my word: whenever there’s something that doesn’t sit well with her, no matter how insignificant it may be, she’ll definitely cause trouble.”

Murasaki pretended not to share their concern and stayed up late that night talking with them in a most pleasant manner. For all that, she found it difficult to listen to her women venting their misgivings.

“Our lordship may have gathered many women around him,” she explained, “but he feels dissatisfied that there is no one of exceptionally noble lineage who fits his ideal, and is perhaps all too familiar with us. It’s a wonderful thing that the Third Princess has come here. I hope to grow close to her ... perhaps because I still have a youthful heart myself? Unfortunately, people seem to think that I will remain aloof. If she were my social equal or a woman of inferior status, then the situation might be something unusual that I could not ignore. But she is an imperial princess who was put into a difficult situation when her father took vows and left her without any support ... and, given her position as his principal wife, I don’t want to have an uncomfortable relationship with her.”

Nakatsukasa, Chūjō, and the other women exchanged glances as if to say, “She’s much too kind.” The two of them had been sexual intimates of Genji, but that was long ago, and they had been in Murasaki’s service for so many years now that apparently they had grown very devoted to their mistress, who had once been their rival for his affection. Genji’s other ladies sent her messages of condolences along the lines of the following: “How are you feeling about this? His new wife isn’t such a burden for those of us he never held close to his heart, but in your case ...” They meant well, trying to draw her out like this, but she couldn’t help being hurt. *Those who speculate about me in this way cause me the most distress. The world is evanescent, so why should I obsess over such matters?*

Murasaki did not, as a rule, stay up late at night, and she grew self-conscious,

thinking that people might criticize her and say that jealousy was keeping her up. She withdrew to her bedchamber, and her attendants brought in her covers. It upset her to have to pass these terribly lonely nights, which brought back those years when they lived apart because of his exile to Suma. *No matter how far away he was, she recalled, so long as I heard from him that he was still alive, still in the same world as I ... well, I didn't think about myself but yearned for him and grieved over his absence. And if amidst all the confusion of that time he and I had passed from this world, our relationship would have amounted to nothing in the end.*

A stiff breeze was blowing, the night air was cold, and she was unable to sleep. But she lay stock-still, worried that the ladies-in-waiting on call nearby might hear her stirring. She was distraught all the same, and the crowing of a cock during the wee hours of the morning stirred intense emotions in her heart.

She did not believe, in fact, that he had intended to hurt her, but—was it because her thoughts were in such turmoil?—her spirit went out and she appeared to Genji in a dream. He was startled and his heart was so agitated that he did not wait for the crowing of the cock at dawn, but hurried off pretending that he was unaware it was still nighttime. Because the Third Princess was very childish, her nurses were in attendance nearby. They watched as Genji pushed open the hinged double doors in the corner of the aisle room and departed. In the darkness of the predawn sky, they could just make out the faint glimmering of snowflakes. The scent of his perfumed robes lingered on, and one of the nurses muttered a line of verse to herself: “The darkness tries in vain ...”⁵

Patches of snow remained here and there, but because they blended into the white sand of the garden, they were hard to make out in the dark. Genji quietly murmured a line from Bai Juyi: “The snow that lingers, hidden below the fortress wall ...”⁶ He tapped on a shutter, something he had not done in a long time, but the women inside pretended to be asleep, and he had to wait for some time before they raised it for him.

“They kept me waiting so long that I’m practically frozen! I came back in the middle of the night because you really frightened me, even though I’ve done nothing wrong!”⁷ When he pulled her covers and robes away to get in bed beside her, Murasaki tried to hide her sleeves, which were slightly damp from her tears; even though she was warm and gracious, she did not open up to him completely, but kept a proper distance—an attitude that put him to shame even as he was delighted by it. Comparing the two women in his mind, the Third Princess may have possessed the nobler lineage, but no one could match Murasaki’s sensibility.

Because he spent all the next day with her, reminiscing about the past or

complaining about how distant and unforgiving she was acting toward him, he was not able to call on the Third Princess. Instead, he sent a note to her quarters: “I seem to have caught a cold from going out in the snow this morning and I’m not at all well. I shall take it easy here, where I am more comfortable.”

The young woman’s nurse didn’t even bother writing back, but sent a messenger to deliver by word of mouth a curt reply: “I have informed the Princess.”

What a rude way to respond! thought Genji, who was taken aback. *It would be a pity if Suzaku heard about this. For the time being, I’ll just have to keep up appearances.* Try as he might, however, he realized that he wouldn’t be able to because of his love for Murasaki. *This is not how I thought it would turn out. Ahh, I’ve got a serious problem.* For her part, Murasaki was upset by Genji’s lack of consideration, since people would blame her for not letting him go to the Third Princess.

The next morning, he arose in the familiar surroundings of Murasaki’s quarters and sent his letter off to the Third Princess. Though he was not overawed by her rank, he nonetheless wrote with great care on white paper.

*Though not enough to block the way between us
This light morning snow that blows and swirls about
Agitates my heart by keeping me from you⁸*

He attached the letter to a branch of white plum blossoms and summoned a messenger. “Take this to the Third Princess’s attendants in the passageway to the west hall.” He presently moved out near the veranda to view the garden. He was wearing layered white gowns and toying with the twigs of plum blossoms trimmed from the branch he had used. He looked up at the sky, where a few scattered flakes of snow drifted down onto the lingering patches of snow, which seemed to be waiting there like welcoming companions.⁹

Hearing a warbler singing cheerfully in the top branches of a nearby red plum tree, he slipped the twigs inside his sleeves and murmured a line of verse: “My sleeves are scented ...”¹⁰ As he sat there gazing out beyond the raised blinds, he looked nothing at all like someone’s father or a man of prominent rank, but was the very image of youthful grace.

Sensing that the reply from the Third Princess might take a little time, he went back inside and showed the blossoms to Murasaki.

“Now, this is how I would always wish plum blossoms to smell,” he said. “If only I could give their scent to the cherry blossoms, no one would pay attention to any other flower.”¹¹ Plum blossoms attract attention, I suppose, because few

other flowers bloom at this time of the season, but how I would love to set them alongside cherry blossoms at their peak.” Just then, the Third Princess’s reply arrived.

The letter was wrapped in vivid scarlet tissue paper. Genji felt his chest tighten. *Such a childish hand ... I don’t want to let anyone see it for a while. I don’t want to keep secrets from Murasaki, but the young woman’s calligraphy is so immature that it might be an embarrassment, given her status.* Since it would be awkward for both of them if he tried to hide the letter, he set it down, partially unfolded, next to where she was reclining on an armrest. She gave a sidelong glance and read the following:

*Swirled by the wind, the light spring snow
That drifts through the sky is fleeting
Soon it must melt and disappear*

The hand was every bit as immature as Genji had feared. Although it caught the eye of Murasaki, who thought that a young woman her age should not be writing in such a childish manner, she nonetheless pretended that she had not seen it. Had it been anyone else’s writing, Genji would surely have privately noted its flaws to Murasaki, but he felt sorry for the young woman and merely remarked, “You have nothing to worry about.”

That day he went for his first daytime visit to the quarters of the Third Princess. He put extra effort into his grooming and attire, and her ladies-in-waiting, who were just now seeing him clearly for the first time, were utterly captivated. Some of the older women, such as her nurse, experienced a mix of elation and anxiety, for they were concerned about his good looks. As one of them put it: “Oh dear ... our lord is splendidly handsome, but his looks are sure to give us trouble ... after all, how could his other women not resent our mistress?”

The childish figure of the Third Princess looked extremely cute, surrounded as she was by grandly magnificent furnishings, but she was also naive and helplessly fragile, and her slight frame was completely obscured under many layers of clothing. She was not all that shy with him; her openness, which any child might exhibit toward someone she has just met, gave her an easygoing charm. *Her father has a reputation among courtiers for lacking the learning and wisdom that would lend him an aura of manly seriousness, Genji mused, though he possesses a superior aesthetic sensibility and discriminating taste. So, why did he raise his daughter to be so tediously passive? I’ve heard that she is his great favorite, but still ...*

He felt that this was all a bit regrettable, but that did not mean he looked on the Third Princess with displeasure. After all, she readily agreed with everything he said to her, and when she replied she would innocently blurt out whatever was on her mind. Seeing her like this, he felt that he would never be able to abandon her. In his younger days, he would have felt as if his expectations had been betrayed and looked on her with contempt, but now, having gained the knowledge that there are many types of people in the world, he was more forgiving. *Women each have their own individual qualities, but it is hard to find one who truly stands out as superior. They each have many virtues and flaws. I'm sure that, to an outsider, the Third Princess probably looks like the ideal wife.*

After spending so many years with Murasaki always by his side, he now admired her character more than ever and took pride in having educated her so well. If he were away from her for even a single night or morning, his anxious longings would intensify; it gave him a sense of foreboding when he considered why he might feel that way.

Retired Emperor Suzaku moved to his temple in the middle of the month. He sent numerous heartfelt letters to the Rokujō estate. He of course asked after his daughter, and repeatedly told Genji, “You should not be concerned about what I might think or that something might trouble me. Simply do what you think is best for her.” Still, for all that, he worried a great deal about the Third Princess, knowing how young and innocent she was.

He sent a letter to Murasaki as well:

My young daughter has moved there without the maturity to fully grasp the situation. She is blameless, however, and so please be forgiving and look after her for me. Since you are her cousin, you have a good reason to call on her now and then.

My lingering attachments to the world

*Have now become fetters that hobble me
Along the mountain path I would follow*

You may think me foolish, but I cannot dispel the darkness of a parent’s heart.

Genji glanced at the missive and said, “Very touching indeed ... your answer must show him all due respect.” He had her attendants bring out wine for the

messenger and pressed the man to drink. In the meantime, Murasaki was at a loss as to how to reply. Since Suzaku had retreated to a temple, this wasn't the sort of occasion that called for something elegant or witty, and so she simply wrote what was in her heart:

*If you are still concerned about the world
You left behind, then you should not loosen
The fetters you find so hard to release*

She gave the messenger a special reward: a full set of women's robes. When Suzaku saw her accomplished calligraphy, it troubled him to think that his daughter would look immature at a residence where there was a woman so dauntingly superior in every respect.

It was now time for all of Suzaku's consorts and concubines to go their separate ways, and there were many sad moments of parting. Oborozukiyo decided to move back to a villa on Nijō that had once been occupied by her late father, the former Minister of the Right, and by Suzaku's mother, the former Kokiden Consort. She was more precious to Suzaku than anyone save the Third Princess, and it was very difficult for him to give her up. She thought about becoming a nun, but Suzaku advised against it, pointing out that it would look as though she were following him in a heedless rush with no serious purpose. In the end, she made do with commissioning Buddhist statuary and other holy items.

Over the years, Genji had found it impossible to forget Oborozukiyo, a woman, to his lasting regret, he had had to give up even though he had deep feelings for her. His desire to somehow meet her one more time and talk with her about the experiences they had shared was constantly on his mind, but their current circumstances forced them both to be mindful of what the court might say, and the memory of the unfortunate uproar caused by their affair made them cautious. Still, Genji grew more and more curious to learn how she was getting along now that she was living quietly on her own, no longer troubled by worldly relationships. Although he worried that it might be improper for him to contact her, he sent a constant stream of notes, written with deep sentiment, in the guise of routine inquiries after her health. Had they been young, she might have worried what people would think. However, given their ages, she did not feel constrained and replied to him from time to time, depending on the occasion. Seeing her calligraphy, which had achieved full maturity and was even more accomplished than in the past, he could hardly stand it; he was always sending messages of heartfelt devotion to her through her lady-in-waiting from the old days, Chūnagon.

He summoned Chūnagon's brother, who had once served as Governor of Izumi, and reminisced with youthful passion.

"I need to speak directly to the lady your sister attends. There is to be a curtain between us, of course, but no intermediary. Once you have obtained the lady's permission, I shall pay her a very secret visit. But, given my status, I must exercise extreme caution in going out on such nocturnal adventures, and so I don't want you to breathe a word of this to anyone. Such discretion will keep both of our minds at ease."

Oborozukiyo sighed and replied simply that meeting him was out of the question.

This will not do, she thought. Now that I've experienced the cruel vagaries of his affections over the years, I understand the way of the world a little better. I have no idea what we would have to talk about now, except for our shared sorrow over the Retired Emperor's decision to retreat from the world. Even if he came here in complete secrecy and no one found out, I would still feel guilty.

Her response prompted him to reflect on their relationship.

We didn't exactly avoid one another when the court was a much more difficult, dangerous place for us to meet. I understand how genuine her anxiety about Suzaku may be now that he's withdrawn from society, but that doesn't undo what happened between us. No matter how much she might want to clear her name, once those rumors rose up "like a flock of birds"¹² there was no restoring our reputations. He would go to her, following the trail marked through the Shinoda Woods in Izumi.¹³

"The Hitachi Princess," Genji said to Murasaki, "has been ill for some time, but I've been so distracted with events recently that I haven't been able to visit her. I'm feeling guilty about her, the poor thing, but it's awkward for me to go see her during the daytime, when I would be conspicuous, and so I'm planning on a discreet visit to the annex at the Nijō villa this evening. Don't let anyone else know of this."

He was in a state of nervous anticipation, which made Murasaki suspicious since, as a rule, he was not all that keen on visiting his Princess Safflower. Still, after Genji married the Third Princess, his relationship with Murasaki was no longer what it once was; even though she had an inkling of what he was up to, she now felt reticent around him and pretended to be ignorant of his activities.

He did not go over to the main hall to see the Third Princess, but exchanged letters with her instead. He spent the day carefully scenting his robes. He set out after dark in an informal carriage with roof and blinds made of *hinoki* wicker and a small escort of four or five of his closest retainers—it was just like the old days, when he would travel incognito to some amorous encounter.

The former Governor of Izumi informed his sister, Chūnagon, of Genji's pending arrival. She in turn whispered his message to Oborozukiyo, who was stunned. "What's going on? What did your brother tell him?" She sounded terribly put out, but Chūnagon's brother insisted, saying, "You really must greet him in a properly elegant manner; then, you may have him go home ... it would be unbearably awkward if you didn't admit him." After considerable persuasion and pleading, Genji was shown into Oborozukiyo's chambers.

After inquiring about her health, he said, "Do come closer. You may keep the standing curtain between us if you wish ... rest assured that nothing remains of that old wanton proclivity of mine." Because there was little she could do about it, Oborozukiyo moved toward him, sighing all the while. *Just as I guessed*, Genji thought, *still as susceptible to me as ever!* They could both imagine the appearance of the other's movements, since they had once been intimately familiar with each other, and the feelings that they experienced at that moment were powerful. They were in the east hall of the villa, and Genji had been seated in the southeast corner in the outer aisle of the main chamber. The sliding panel door that separated them had been firmly latched, which prompted a complaint from him. "This makes me feel like an adolescent. I can tell you exactly how many months and years my longing for you has made me suffer ... it's horribly cruel of you to pretend that you have no idea how I feel."

It was now very late, and the cries of faithful mandarin ducks to their mates called up touching memories for the two of them. The villa, which had been so crowded and bustling in the days when her father, the late Minister of the Right, was in power, now seemed deserted and silent. Such a change led Genji to ponder the mutable nature of the world. Even though he did not want to come across like that fool Heichū, who brought a bottle of water with him whenever he went courting to provide instant tears, the profound feelings his thoughts evoked at that moment did bring tears to his eyes. He spoke to her in a mature, gentle tone—so different from the attitude that he showed her in the past—and pulled at the sliding panel door as if to ask her if she really meant to keep it closed.

*So many months and years have passed since last we met
At Ōsaka barrier, the slope of trysts
Yet what barrier could stop the flow of my tears*

Oborozukiyo replied:

*Like that clear spring at the barrier of Ōsaka
My tears alone flow unobstructed — yet the road to Ōmi*

*My tears alone flow unstoppen ... yet the road to him
Whose name holds promise of a meeting is now blocked to us*

Though she tried to maintain some distance between them with her response, the memory of that scandal prompted her to wonder who, apart from herself, had been responsible for that terrible incident. With that question in her mind, her resolve weakened as she realized they had always been destined to meet at least one more time. She was not by nature an especially prudent woman, but over time, as she gained knowledge of the world through numerous regrettable experiences, both public and private, she grew extremely guarded and sensitive to how others perceived her behavior. Meeting Genji tonight, however, brought back the old days. Their affair no longer seemed just a distant memory, and her refusal to yield lacked all conviction.

She was still young and attractive, still charmingly engaging. Nonetheless, the conflict in her heart, the struggle between her sense of propriety and her love for him, was evident by the way she sighed over and over—sighs that enthralled Genji even more than if he were meeting her for the first time. He regretted the coming of dawn, for he did not want to leave. The sound of birds singing brightly echoed in the faint light of an extraordinarily lovely dawn sky. The cherry blossoms had scattered by now, and the pale green tops of a stand of trees were enveloped in mist. That wisteria-viewing party that Oborozukiyo's father had sponsored long ago took place at around this time of the season. Memories of those days came back to him, even though many years had intervened, and he was deeply moved.

Chūnagon had pushed open the double doors in the corner where he had been sitting and saw him off. He stopped and turned back toward her. "This wisteria ... how beautiful its hues, glowing with ineffable grace. How sad that I must leave its shade." He could hardly bring himself to go. The sun was now rising over the hills, and in the early morning light he looked radiantly handsome. Chūnagon, who was seeing him for the first time in many years, was dazzled, for he was more magnificent than she remembered. To her eyes, he did not look like a being of this world. *Why couldn't my mistress have married him? She never rose beyond her position as Principal Handmaid because her older sister did everything in her power to ensure that Genji would be exiled ... but that only resulted in ruining her reputation.*

They ended their conversation leaving much unsaid. He truly seemed to want to stay on, but Genji was mindful that his exalted position did not allow him to do as he pleased. Because he feared being observed by Oborozukiyo's attendants, he grew anxious as the sun rose. His escort had brought his carriage

around to the gallery entrance, and the men were discreetly coughing and clearing their throats to warn him that it was time to leave. He summoned one of his escorts and had the man break off a sprig of wisteria.

*I have not forgotten the depths to which I sank for you
And yet heedlessly I stand again at the precipice
Ready to hurl myself into waves of wisteria¹⁴*

Chūnagon felt sorry as she watched him leaning on the railing of the veranda, apparently deeply troubled and uncertain. Oborozukiyo's heart was also in turmoil, torn between the need to appear modest and her aching desire to sit beneath the shade of those blossoms.

*The precipice from where you claim you'll hurl yourself
Is not truly a precipice ... I shall never
Throw myself again into waves of heedless love*

Genji, who was acting like an irresponsible youth, found his own behavior appalling, an affront to both Suzaku and Murasaki. And yet, because there did not seem to be any barrier guard keeping close watch over Oborozukiyo, he left only after obtaining her promise that she would meet him again. When they were conducting their affair, he had been attached to her more than to others, so why would their relationship, which had been thwarted after such a brief time together, be any less serious now?

He made his way back home very discreetly, but Murasaki was waiting on him. Seeing how sleepy he looked, she understood where he had gone but behaved as if she had no idea. This made him feel worse than if she had been in a jealous rage. Because he was puzzled as well, wondering why she was turning a blind eye to his behavior, he swore vows of devotion more fervent than any he had ever before made. He did not want to let anything about his tryst with Oborozukiyo slip out, but Murasaki had already guessed what happened. Thus, while he didn't tell her all that went on the night before, he divulged a few details to try to placate her: "It was a very brief meeting, and we were constantly separated by a door and screen. I felt as though we had much left to say, and I would like to go once more, provided I can stay out of sight and avoid censure."

She smiled ever so slightly.

"How stylishly up-to-date you must have looked, having recovered your youth. But while you were off reliving a past affair, here I was, worrying that I would have no one to rely on." Tears welled up, confirming her true feelings and

making her look all the more adorable.

“It hurts me to see you so anxious. Show me how you feel by just pinching me. I did not train you to sulk or brood ... your attitude is certainly not what I expected.” Apparently, he went on to tell her everything, doing all he could to put her in a better mood. He decided not to go to the Third Princess right away, but remained in the east hall to comfort Murasaki.

The Third Princess didn’t seem to care much about his absence, but those who were in charge of looking after her were uneasy and expressed their dissatisfaction. Had the Third Princess herself looked upset, he might have been more troubled about her reaction than he was about Murasaki’s, but he thought of her as nothing more than a gentle, pretty little plaything.

Genji’s daughter, the Akashi Princess, was now installed in the Kirtsubo, and the Crown Prince had yet to grant her leave to withdraw from the palace. Since she was young and accustomed to living a life of ease, this was a hardship. During the summer, she began feeling sick, and she thought it unreasonable that she was denied permission to go home at once. As it turned out, she was pregnant. She was perhaps too young to bear children, and everyone was concerned that her condition might be inauspicious. The Crown Prince finally relented, and she was permitted to go to the southeast residence at the Rokujō estate. Chambers were prepared for her on the east side of the main hall opposite the quarters of the Third Princess, who was residing on the west side. The Akashi lady was now able to stay with her daughter at all times—an arrangement that was, for her, the fulfillment of a dream.

Murasaki was to pay a visit to the Akashi Princess, and she took advantage of their coming meeting to make a suggestion to Genji: “Shall we have the doors between the Third Princess’s quarters and the rooms I’ll be using in the main hall opened so that I may call on her as well? I have been considering this for some time, but I have not had a chance to mention it and was a little reluctant to bring it up. If I can use this occasion to get to know her, I would feel more at ease.”

Genji smiled.

“What a wonderful suggestion ... just what I was hoping to hear. Of course, she is very young, and so you must teach her many things in order to set my mind at ease.” And with that, he granted permission. Murasaki felt more intimidated at the prospect of meeting the Akashi lady than meeting the Third Princess. She did up her hair and dressed herself to look incomparably beautiful.

Genji went over to see the Third Princess.

“The lady who lives in the east hall is coming over to see my daughter this evening,” he informed her, “and she has indicated that she would like to use that

occasion to meet you as well. Please grant her wish and speak with her. She is extremely kindhearted and is still young. You will find her a most compatible companion.”

“But I shall be so embarrassed! Whatever should I say to her?” She spoke quietly.

“Just follow the course of the conversation and respond accordingly ... you must not be aloof toward her.” He gave her detailed instructions on how to behave in hopes that they would strike up a cordial relationship. Although it would be embarrassingly awkward to expose just how insipid and immature the Third Princess really was, he also felt that it would be unfortunate if the two of them remained distant.

So I've been granted an audience. Murasaki was in a melancholy mood as she mulled over the situation. *But am I really inferior to her? True, he took me in when my situation was precarious, but ...* At moments like this, she would turn to practicing her calligraphy, writing out whatever old poems came to mind, for when she did so she was able to use those poems to help her understand her own emotional state.

Genji came back to Murasaki’s quarters. He had seen how lovely both his daughter and the Third Princess were, and yet, as he now gazed on the woman with whom he had grown so familiar over the years, he realized she was indeed peerless—though it should have been no surprise to him that she was exceptional. In addition to conducting herself properly, with a perfect balance of noble pride and humility, she exhibited a bright, modern grace and a fresh, lambent beauty. She appeared to be at the very peak of her splendor, and he marveled at how she managed from year to year, from day to day, to create the impression that she was growing ever more lovely and that he was seeing her beauty as if for the first time.

She placed the pieces of paper that she had been using for informal writing practice out of sight beneath her inkstone. He discovered them, however, and looked over what she had jotted down. The calligraphy was not the very best she could do, but it was charming all the same. He took particular note of one of her poems:

*Has he grown tired of me ... I feel autumn¹⁵
Closing in as the green leaves of the hills
Seem to change their colors before my eyes*

Genji playfully wrote a reply alongside:

*The green-winged wings of the mandarin duck
Have not changed colors at all, though I hear
The lower leaves of the bush clover have¹⁶*

Murasaki's unhappiness would occasionally reveal itself like this, but he was moved to admiration at her uncommon ability to hide her emotions and keep them in check.

Genji would be free of obligations to both Murasaki and the Third Princess this evening, and so, unable to resist, he secretly left to see Oborozukiyo. He knew it was wrong of him to go, but he found it impossible to control his impulses.

Genji's daughter felt more trusting and closer to Murasaki than to her real mother. For Murasaki, who now saw how beautifully the Akashi Princess had matured, the young woman was as precious to her as any daughter of her own would have been. They talked warmly at their ease for a while, and then the doors separating the east and west quarters in the main hall were opened, and Murasaki went over to meet the Third Princess.

It put her mind at ease to see how young Genji's new wife was, and she talked to the Third Princess in a motherly way about their family connections and how they were related. She then summoned the nurse, Chūnagon, and spoke to her.

"We wear the same garland on our heads,¹⁷ as it were, but even though we are related, I am mindful of her status and have not found an appropriate opportunity to introduce myself. I hope that from now on she will feel free to call on me in the east hall any time. I would be most happy if you would inform me of anything I might have neglected or done that displeases your mistress."

"My mistress has been feeling rather lonely and forlorn since she moved out from under the protective shade of those who once supported her," Chūnagon answered, "and so I am grateful for the indulgence you are showing. Even though her father has withdrawn from the world, he was privately hoping, as he stated in his letter to you, that the two of you would be close and that you would help her to learn what she needs to know, since she is so young."

"After receiving Retired Emperor Suzaku's gracious letter, I tried to think of how I could help her, but, regrettably, there is little someone as insignificant as I can do." With a gentle, calm manner she tried to engage the Third Princess in conversation, talking about illustrated stories or about how difficult it had been for her to give up her dolls. She sounded very youthful and came across to the Third Princess's childish heart as genuinely kind and sympathetic.

Following this first meeting, they exchanged letters constantly and spoke cordially with one another whenever some delightful diversion gave them an

opportunity to meet. People at the court gossiped unpleasantly about all the goings on at the Rokujō estate—their first inclination was to say things like: “How must his Lady Murasaki feel now? Genji probably no longer cares for her the way he used to ... at the very least, she has surely fallen a little in his esteem.” Then, when it was clear that Genji’s devotion to Murasaki was deeper than ever, there were some who claimed that his devotion must be a source of tension. In reality, however, the gossip faded as the two women maintained a friendly relationship that presented a pleasant picture of domestic harmony.

During the tenth month, in honor of Genji’s fortieth year, Murasaki had a sacred image of the Yakushi Buddha dedicated at the temple he had had constructed at Sagano. Because he cautioned her strongly against doing anything too grand or formal, she planned a subdued service that would be carried out quietly. However, the image, the boxes used to hold the sutras, and the coverings for the sutra scrolls were so exquisite that they put one in mind of paradise. She commissioned magnificent prayers and readings of the *Golden Light Sutra of the Most Victorious Kings*, the *Diamond Sutra*,¹⁸ and the *Sutra of Infinite Life* to ensure the peace and prosperity of the realm. Many high-ranking officials and nobles attended. The temple itself was indescribably imposing, and people felt the urge to linger there, attracted in part by the sights of the season, especially the fall foliage in the fields that had to be crossed to get to the ceremony. The clatter of horses and carriages moving over the paths reverberated continuously through the surrounding fields withered by frost. Each of the ladies at Rokujō also commissioned a grand reading of the holy texts.

The period of fasting ended with the conclusion of the dedication and readings on the twenty-third day of the month,¹⁹ and Murasaki sponsored the celebratory banquet. Because the residences at the Rokujō estate were all occupied by his other women, she decided to hold the event at the old Nijō villa, which in any case she thought of as her family home. She had everything—including the robes to be worn—taken care of at Nijō, and the necessary tasks were divvied up among the attendants, who carried them out as they saw fit. The halls and pavilions to the east and west had been partitioned into apartments and offices for the attendants, and so those had to be cleared away and the space grandly decked out for the courtiers, various masters and stewards, household staff, and even lower-ranking servants who would be attending. As was customary on such occasions, a covered platform in front of the central room of the main hall was partitioned off with curtains and magnificently furnished with a chair inlaid with mother of pearl. Twelve wardrobe stands were lined up on the west side of the main hall holding the usual gifts of summer and winter robes and bedclothes. The array looked stunning, but because the stands were covered by purple cloth

of figured silk, it was impossible to tell what treasures they held. Two tables had been set out in front of the seat of honor, and these were covered with Chinese silks whose colors gradually darkened from the center out toward the edges. The Akashi Princess provided an aloeswood stand to hold the garland. She had it constructed from an ingenious design of her own making, with legs carved in a floral pattern and decorations of gold birds on silver branches.²⁰ Murasaki's father, Prince Hyōbu, provided the four-panel screen behind Genji's seat. It had been delicately fashioned, depicting the four seasons as one would expect, but the unusual rendering of the mountains, waters, and deep pools gave the paintings a fresh appeal. Two pairs of cabinets holding gifts of all kinds were lined up along the north wall behind the seat of honor, and the other furnishings and decorations were in keeping with custom. High-ranking officials, the Ministers of the Left and Right, Prince Hyōbu and other courtiers were seated in the south-facing aisle of the main hall, and, of course, people of lower rank were present there as well, their places arranged in descending order of their status. The musicians were located in curtained areas in the garden to the left and right of the platform. Eighty stands holding rice dumplings and forty Chinese-style chests filled with cloth to be used as gifts had been lined up along the front of the east and west halls.

The court musicians arrived at around two in the afternoon during the Hour of the Ram, and the songs and dances that they performed included "Ten Thousand Years" and "The Emperor's Deer." As the day drew to a close, the flautists struck up the prelude to the Korean dance "Twin Dragons." This particular dance was rarely seen, and when the court dancers finished their performance, Genji's son and Kashiwagi stepped down into the garden and danced the coda to the piece beneath the autumn foliage. To those in attendance who remembered how Genji and Tō no Chūjō performed "Waves of the Blue Sea" together for the imperial excursion taken by Genji's father to the Suzaku Palace long ago, their sons seemed no less splendid this evening. Indeed, when their respective ages were taken into account, they were not merely equal to their fathers in terms of reputation, looks, and bearing, but had already surpassed them in office and rank. That the glorious destiny of one generation should be carried on into the next struck everyone there as auspicious. Genji was moved to tears as memories flooded back to him.

When evening came on, the court musicians withdrew. The Superintendent of Murasaki's household led members of his staff one by one over to the chests and presented them with their rewards, bolts of white cloth that were draped across their shoulders. As they made their way back along the lake, with the landscaped hill on the promontory as a backdrop, their figures called to mind the white

feathers of cranes—an auspicious image that symbolized the promise of a thousand years of good fortune. Now it was the turn of the nobles and officials to begin their own musical entertainment, and their performances were delightful as well. Genji had received several stringed instruments from the Crown Prince. The *biwa* lute and seven-string *koto*, which had been handed down to the Crown Prince by his father, Retired Emperor Suzaku, and the thirteen-string *koto*, which the Crown Prince had received from Emperor Reizei, all possessed tonal qualities that brought back memories of the old days. Though he rarely played any more, Genji joined in on a *koto*, and while he was plucking the strings, he recalled his time at the palace and how surpassingly grand his late father looked on all occasions. Then bitter regrets and disappointments filled his heart. *If only Fujitsubo were here. I would have sponsored a banquet like this one for her fortieth year. I so wanted to show her how much she meant to me, but ...*

His Majesty felt the absence of Fujitsubo just as keenly as Genji, but he suffered also from his long-standing frustration at not being able to show the proper degree of filial respect to the man who was his father. He had been planning an imperial excursion this year to the Rokujō estate, since he wanted to participate in this banquet, but Genji admonished him on several occasions, telling him to abandon the idea. “You must not do anything that would raise suspicions at the court.” And so, reluctantly, Emperor Reizei decided he would not attend.

The Umetsubo Empress withdrew from the palace to her residence in the southwest quadrant at Rokujō shortly after the twentieth day of the twelfth month. For the final services to celebrate Genji’s fortieth year, she commissioned prayers and sutra readings at the seven great temples in Nara. She presented four thousand bolts of cloth to those temples and four hundred bolts of silk to forty temples in the vicinity of the capital. She was fully aware of the extraordinary support Genji had given her, and she wanted to do all she could on this occasion to have him see just how deeply grateful she was. In addition, she thought she should do so on behalf of her parents, the late Crown Prince and the lady at Rokujō, who, had they still been alive, would have wanted to express their thanks. Genji, however, had informed Emperor Reizei that he did not want him to go out of his way to do anything lavish, and so Umetsubo scaled back her many plans as well.

“When it comes to celebrating someone’s fortieth year,” Genji said, “I have learned from past examples that few people live much beyond the event ... so please don’t do anything ostentatious this time, and we can celebrate in truly grand style on my fiftieth.” In spite of his admonition, Umetsubo planned to sponsor a public event to be carried out with great dignity.

The main hall of her residence was readied, and the banquet was no different in its magnificence from those given earlier by Tamakazura and Murasaki. The gifts and rewards for the high-ranking officials followed established protocol for major palace events. Princes of the blood each received the special gift of a set of women's robes. Courtiers of the fifth rank who were in the Emperor's service and those of the fourth rank who were in line to be promoted to Consultant received long white robes, bolts of silk or other items appropriate to their rank. The robes were finely made and graceful, and everyone was deeply moved when Umetsubo handed out items from her father, the late Crown Prince, including his renowned gem-studded leather belts and his ceremonial swords. Apparently, it was a celebration at which every well-known treasure from ancient reigns was brought together. In the old romances they deemed the enumeration of treasured possessions a wonderful thing, but I find such lists annoying, and, in any case, I could not possibly count up the gifts and rewards bestowed at that banquet.

Emperor Reizei did not want all of his plans to honor Genji's fortieth year to come to naught, and so he turned to Genji's son, the Middle Counselor. As it so happened, a certain Major Captain²¹ had resigned due to illness, and Reizei had been planning to promote the Middle Counselor to the vacant post as Acting Major Captain during the course of a banquet he was planning for Genji. But now, His Majesty decided to make the promotion right away. Genji was most pleased, and he humbly thanked Reizei, saying "This sudden appointment is more than my son deserves. Isn't it too soon for such an honor?"

Genji's son went ahead with plans for yet another banquet to be held at Hanachirusato's residence in the northeast quadrant of the Rokujō estate. He tried to keep the preparations secret, but because of His Majesty's involvement, the event would be formal and magnificent, with the other residences serving as venues for the celebration as well and with needed items brought in from the imperial storehouses and the imperial granaries. His Majesty ordered a certain Captain in the Chamberlain's office to provide rice dumplings for the occasion, just as if it were taking place at the palace.

Among those in attendance were five princes, the Ministers of the Left and Right, two Major Counselors, three Middle Counselors, five Consultants, and most of the courtiers who served His Majesty, the Crown Prince, and Retired Emperor Suzaku. Tō no Chūjō was given detailed orders by Emperor Reizei on how to arrange for the seating and furnishings. As Chancellor, he would not have gone out to such an event under normal circumstances, but he attended this particular banquet at the command of His Majesty. Genji was deeply humbled and surprised as he took his seat. Tō no Chūjō was seated across from him in the central room of the main hall, looking handsome and dignified, an eminent and

virtuous official in the very prime of his life. Genji still looked like the youthful Radiant Prince. A four-panel screen had been set up behind him with sketches depicting lovely scenes of the seasons. Emperor Reizei had written poems in his own hand over the paintings, which had been wonderfully executed on patterned green Chinese silk. The dark lines of the cursive characters created a dazzling effect and made the screen seem all the more superb—especially when one took into account the fact that it was His Majesty’s calligraphy. The Office of the Chamberlain had provided cabinets to hold the string and wind instruments. Because Genji’s son had achieved such imposing authority, his presence and conduct gave the proceedings that day a truly special quality. As the sun was setting, officials from the Left and Right Imperial Stables and from the six Guard Headquarters lined up in order of their rank with forty horses for review.

The usual dances, such as “Ten Thousand Years” and “Our Gracious Emperor,” were performed, but only in a perfunctory manner for the sake of convention; the presence of the Chancellor, a virtuoso of the six-string Japanese koto, had everyone there keenly excited at the prospect of a rare and extraordinary musical performance. Prince Sochinomiya took up the *biwa* lute, as he always did, Genji played the seven-string koto, and Tō no Chūjō was, of course, given the Japanese koto. Genji was profoundly inspired by his old friend’s performance—was it because he was listening with an ear trained over many years of practice?—and so he held nothing back in his own performance, using all of the secret techniques that he had learned to produce an ethereal tone. Thanks to the marriage of their children, their relationship was harmonious again, and they exchanged stories about the old days in a cordial, intimate manner that gave rise to warm sentiments. The winecup was sent around many times, the atmosphere became all the more pleasant, and they could not hold back their tears.

Genji had his gifts for Tō no Chūjō sent to the Chancellor’s carriage. They included a superb six-string koto, a Korean flute—the type of flute the Chancellor was fond of because it was the perfect accompaniment for the koto—and two red sandalwood boxes, one containing a book with examples from master Chinese calligraphers, the other a book of calligraphy in cursive by Japanese masters. Officers from the Right Imperial Stables, who had come to take the horses back to the palace, performed a lively Korean dance. Genji’s son, now Acting Major Captain for the palace guards, dispensed rewards to the officials from the six Guard Headquarters. Genji’s preference was to keep the celebration simple, and he discouraged any ostentatious display. Still, because his connections to Emperor Reizei, the Crown Prince, Retired Emperor Suzaku, and the Umetsubo Empress made him seem so inexpressibly august, it was

hardly a surprise that this banquet should have been so splendid.

Genji had been disappointed that the Acting Major Captain should be his only son—at least the only one he could acknowledge—and yet the young gentleman had an outstanding reputation and was more accomplished and upright in character than most of his peers. Genji was struck by how the unequal struggle between his late wife and the powerless lady at Rokujō, which had been marked by such jealous animus, had reversed itself in the divergent destinies of their children—one a commoner, the other an Empress.

Hanachirusato, who was skilled at sewing, had prepared the robes that Genji's son wore to the banquet that day. The rewards he presented, on the other hand, were prepared at his Sanjō residence by Kumoinokari. Usually Hanachirusato only heard about these sorts of festivities—even the elegant private events—from other people, and she wondered if the time would ever come when she could mingle in such distinguished company. Thanks to her connection with the Acting Major Captain, that time came around at last, and she felt she belonged.

The New Year arrived, and the due date for the Akashi Princess's baby was approaching. From New Year's day on, Genji had esoteric rites performed constantly to ensure a safe birth. He also had countless prayers said at various temples and shrines. Because he had witnessed the dreadful events that led to the death of his wife, he had developed a fear of childbirth; though he felt regret and dissatisfaction at not having more children, he was glad that Murasaki and some of his other ladies had not gone through the experience. He had been tormented for some time with worries over how his daughter would fare, since she was still only thirteen. Then, to everyone's dismay, her condition took a turn for the worse, and she fell ill during the second month. When yin-yang masters suggested that she ought to be moved elsewhere to escape the harmful influence of wandering spirits, Genji was too anxious to be separated from her and instead had her moved to the central chamber of the residence in the northwest quadrant. Two wings extended off this chamber, and he had tall earthwork altars erected all along the outside of the galleries encircling the residence. Purifying fires were lit on the altars to burn poppy seeds and drive off malicious spirits, and holy men renowned for their efficacious prayers gathered there. The Akashi lady, thinking that her daughter's destiny would make clear her own, was terribly apprehensive.

The Akashi Princess's grandmother was now extremely old and senile. Feeling as if it were a dream to be seeing her granddaughter in this condition, she hurried to her side and, not knowing when the birth would take place, would not leave. The Akashi Princess's mother, who had been serving her daughter for the past year or so, had never spoken at all of the past. However, the old nun,

unable to contain her joy, chattered tearfully on and on in her croaking voice about things that had happened long ago. The Princess, with a horrified expression in her eyes, at first recoiled from this strangely weird woman; then, after hearing vague reports that this nun was living at the Rokujō estate, she gradually warmed to her grandmother. The nun explained the circumstances surrounding her birth and Genji's situation while he was living on the shores at Akashi. "We were all upset when it was announced that he was to return to the capital, afraid that the relationship between your father and mother would end when he left ... so you can imagine how we felt about the glorious karmic destiny confirmed by your birth, which saved us all!"

The old woman wept as she told the story, and the Akashi Princess wept as well. *Had she not told me all of this, then truly I would never have known this stirring story about my own past.*

The Akashi Princess now realized the truth about her background. *The reality is that my own lineage does not justify my sense of pride at my high position. Lady Murasaki raised and polished me so that I would not suffer the contempt of others, and I have always considered myself superior ... even when I went into service at the palace, I dismissed the other women and behaved like a spoiled, arrogant child. What must people at the court be saying about me?* While she had been aware from the beginning that people thought of her mother as a little less distinguished than other women, she did not know that she herself had been born far from the court in the provinces. In fact, she never really thought too much about it, and her lack of curiosity was peculiar to say the least. It was troubling to hear that her grandfather was a novitiate living off in the mountains like some Taoist immortal, and all of the things that she had just learned about her family confused her.

The Princess was in a pensive mood when her mother arrived. The holy men gathered here and there to begin their raucous noonday prayers. There were no ladies-in-waiting in attendance just then, and so the nun had used their absence as an opportunity to get close to her granddaughter.

"Ahh, what a disgrace," the Akashi lady scolded her mother. "You must keep a low curtain between you and the Princess when you speak with her! Her curtain alone is not enough when the wind is gusting like this ... what if it blew open one of the panels? You're sitting so close to her, you look like a doctor. You really are past your prime, aren't you?" She was appalled.

The nun assumed that her own behavior was perfectly proper, but because she was in her dotage and a little hard of hearing, she cocked her head to one side and replied, "Ah, come again?" In truth, she wasn't as old as her behavior suggested—only about sixty-five or sixty-six—and her nun's attire was neat and

attractive. The Akashi lady felt her chest tighten when she realized, from the look on her mother's face—eyes moist and shiny, swollen from crying—that the old woman had been reminiscing indiscreetly about the past. "It seems that she's been telling you her fantastic tales about ancient times. She's always misremembering, taking things that never happened and spinning them into the most peculiar yarns. Really, she makes the old days feel like some dreamworld."

Smiling stiffly, she looked at her young daughter, who had such vibrant beauty but seemed melancholy and troubled, which was unusual for her. The Akashi lady felt so awed in her illustrious presence that she found it hard to believe that the young woman was really her daughter. *She's probably feeling confused, having heard about my pathetic upbringing. I was thinking that I would tell her once she had reached the pinnacle at court and was named Empress ... hearing these regrettable things is no reason for her to abandon her ambitions, but I feel sorry for her, since they seem to have shaken her confidence.*

When the priests finished their noonday prayers and withdrew, the Akashi lady brought some fruit and sweets and, thinking her daughter looked unhappy, urged her to eat a little. The nun, seeing how sweet and lovely her granddaughter was, could not hold back her tears. The old woman's face was beaming, her toothless mouth open in a most unattractive manner, and the area around her eyes was puffy and slack. The Akashi lady tried to signal with her eyes that tears were inauspicious at a time like this, but the nun paid no heed to her and instead offered this poem:

*Who could censure the diver's brine-soaked robes when she returns
From a shore teeming with shellfish ... or fault an aged nun
For tears when she returns like a wave to a blessed shore*

"Long ago they looked on old people like myself with tolerance," she added.

The Akashi Princess picked up a piece of paper next to her inkstone and wrote this reply:

*How I long for the aged diver, her robes
Soaked with brine, to guide me to that distant shore
And show me the rustic hut where I was born*

On seeing her daughter's verse, the Akashi lady could bear up no longer and began to weep.

I fear that he who left this world to live

*On Akashi's distant shore has not yet
Dispersed the darkness of a parent's heart*

She used her poem to try to cover up her tears. The Akashi Princess was filled with regret that she had no memory, even in her dreams, of that dawn when she left behind Akashi and her grandfather.

Soon after the tenth day of the third month, the Akashi Princess safely delivered her baby. For all the anxiety and fuss that accompanied her pregnancy, in the end it was an easy birth. And because the child was a boy, a young Prince with limitless prospects, Genji was relieved and pleased that all had gone as he hoped.

The northwest residence was too small and out of the way to handle all of the formal ceremonies celebrating the birth that would be coming up one right after another. Although the old nun considered the residence her "blessed shore," it lacked grandeur, and so the Akashi Princess and her baby boy were moved back to the southeast residence. Murasaki called on her, looking lovely in the white gown it was customary to wear in the presence of a newborn. She was sweetly charming, the very image of a mother, as she cradled the little Prince in her arms. Because she had no children of her own—she had not even witnessed a birth—she found it all astonishing and lovely. She held the baby constantly through his first fragile, difficult days, while the Prince's real grandmother, who yielded the responsibility of cradling him to Murasaki, took charge of the ritual morning and evening baths during the week following his birth. An Assistant Handmaid who served as intermediary for the Crown Prince—the very woman who had informed him that he had been chosen to succeed Emperor Reizei—was sent to oversee the ritual bathing. The woman was deeply impressed with the way the Akashi lady carried out her duties, despite the fact that she had come prepared to think the worst, having been informed privately about the lady's provincial background. Instead, she found a lady who was surprisingly refined, someone whose karmic destiny was truly special.

The reader is no doubt familiar with all the ceremonies and rituals that follow a birth, and so I shall forego describing them to you here.

The Akashi Princess moved back to the main hall in the southeast residence on the sixth day following the birth. Emperor Reizei sponsored an official celebration on the seventh night. Retired Emperor Suzaku, the little Prince's grandfather, could not attend, having taken vows and withdrawn from society, and so he sent Tō no Chūjō's son, Kōbai, who was now a Controller in the Chamberlain's office, to serve as his emissary and prepare for a magnificent event. The Umetsubo Empress arranged for the robes to be used as rewards, and

she made sure they were even more lavish than those that might be presented at an event at the palace. Princes and ministers of state also made the ceremony their primary concern during this period, vying with each other to do all they could to be of service.

Genji, who had insisted that the celebrations for his fortieth year be kept modest, wanted all the ceremonies honoring his newborn grandson to be magnificent on an unprecedented scale. As a result, the more private, reserved events, which were carried out with displays of courtly elegance that one would assume were meant to be passed on to later generations, tended to be overlooked.

Genji was able to hold the little Prince himself soon after he was born. "My son, the Major Captain, has a number of children now, but he hasn't allowed me to see any of them yet. I resent him for that, but at least I have this little one to hold!" It was natural, then, for him to find the child so adorable.

The boy grew rapidly day by day, almost as if he were being pulled and stretched. Genji quickly summoned the most experienced nurses, and he selected as attendants only those women already serving on his staff who were of the finest breeding and character.

The Akashi lady was, by nature, clever and attentive, quiet and dignified, and everyone praised her for showing the proper degree of humility after the birth of her grandson and for never flaunting her good fortune in a way that others might find distasteful. Murasaki had not met her often enough to get to really know her and had once found it difficult to forgive her relationship with Genji. Now, however, thanks to this little Prince, she was filled with warm admiration for the lady.

Murasaki had always been fond of children, and she looked very girlish herself as she hurried to make guardian dolls and other toys. She spent all of her time, from morning to evening, looking after the baby. In contrast, the old nun was frustrated that she was not allowed to see the little boy as much as she wanted. Her longing seemed to be almost enough to kill her.

Back in Akashi, the news of the boy's birth was greeted by the novitiate with such joy that he was prompted to remark to his disciples, "At last I can now completely withdraw from this world with my heart at ease." He turned his villa into a temple and donated all of the surrounding rice paddies and other property for its upkeep. Some years ago, he had acquired a residence in the interior of the province in a district deep in the mountains that was all but inaccessible to outsiders. Once he made the move there and secluded himself from the world, no one would ever see or hear of him again. He had remained in Akashi well into old age because of one small lingering concern; but now that the Prince was

born, he decided it was time to move into the mountains and entrust everything to Buddha and the gods.

In the last few years, he had stopped sending messengers to the capital unless there was some special reason to do so. Whenever Genji dispatched a messenger to him, he would reply to his wife, the old nun, with a line or two appropriate to the situation at that particular moment. However, once he decided to completely retreat from the world, he dispensed with that one lingering concern by sending the following letter to his daughter:

We have been living in the same world all these years, and yet I've come to the conclusion that somehow I've been transformed and inhabit a different realm from you, which is why I never communicated with people in the capital except for those times when I had to deal with some pressing matter. I never wrote to you in particular because I'm so used to reading the Chinese of the sacred scriptures that letters in *kana* take time for me to read ... time wasted because it distracts me from my meditation on the Holy Name. Still, I learned from the messengers who came here all about my precious granddaughter—how she went to serve the Crown Prince and now has given him a baby boy—and I am filled with deep joy at the news. The reason for my happiness has nothing to do with seeking worldly glory and honor at this point in my life. After all, I'm nothing more than a humble mountain hermit. Nonetheless, lingering attachments I have held onto all these years have corrupted my heart so that even during the devotions I practiced at the six appointed hours day and night, when my mind should have been focused on my rebirth on a dew-drenched lotus in the Pure Land, I was in fact praying for you. Now I must explain myself.

One night during the second month of the year you were born, I had a dream—a vision, really. My right hand was holding up sacred Mount Sumeru, the very center of our universe, and to the left and right of the mountain the sun and moon filled the world with their radiance ... though I myself remained hidden in the shade of the mountain, untouched by their light. I set the mountain afloat on a vast ocean, then boarded a small boat and rowed out toward the west. That was my vision. When I awoke I had great expectations from that day on, humble though my station was. At the same time, I wondered in my heart if I really should expect such glorious good fortune. Soon after my dream, your mother became pregnant with you, and so I sought out both sacred and profane writings to learn the import of my vision and found many things to make me believe it would come true. Although I felt overawed, since I was a man of such lowly

status, I resolved to do everything I could to raise you properly with the utmost care. There were limits to my power to do so, however, and so I came to Akashi, sank myself into the provincial life here, and determined that the waves of old age would never sweep me back to the capital. Instead, I stayed for years on these strands, concentrated on my hopes for you, and said many prayers with single-minded devotion.

Now those prayers have been answered just as I had hoped, and my mind is at peace. The moment when my little Princess becomes an imperial mother and my expectations have been fully realized, you must give thanks, beginning with the deity at Sumiyoshi. There can be no doubts any longer about what my vision foretold. Because the wish that preoccupied my life—the hope that my granddaughter would become Empress—will soon be fulfilled, and because I no longer have any doubt that I shall be reborn in the highest of the nine circles of the Pure Land that lies in the Far West beyond myriad realms, I shall now go off deep into the mountains and, while waiting to be called to my lotus paradise, practice my devotions amidst abundant waters and grasses until that final evening comes.

*The dawn that will bathe me in radiant light
Draws nearer and nearer ... now I would tell you
Of the dream of this world I saw long ago*

He recorded the month and date here.

Do not seek to learn the moment of my death. Do not follow the customs of the ancients and put on mourning robes for me. Think only that you have been transformed by divine destiny, and have prayers said and offerings made to ensure an old priest's rebirth in paradise. Still, with all the blessings that you will enjoy in this life, do not ignore the life to come. If I reach the paradise I pray for, we shall meet again. You must believe that we shall meet soon after you have crossed over to that distant shore.

Accompanying his letter was a large aloeswood box containing all of the written prayers that he had made to the deity of the shrine at Sumiyoshi. He sent only a brief note to his wife, the nun:

On the fourteenth day of this month, I shall leave my grass hut and go off into the recesses of the mountains. There, I shall offer my worthless body to the bears and wolves. You must wait patiently and live on until you witness

the moment our granddaughter becomes Empress and my dream is realized. Rest assured that we shall meet again in that radiant paradise.

That was all there was to the letter, and so the nun asked the priest who had come as her husband's messenger for more details.

"Three days after he wrote the letter," the man told her, "he headed off for the peaks. We disciples accompanied him to the base of the mountains, but when we got there, he made us turn back. Only one other priest and two acolytes went on with him. I had thought that I could never have experienced deeper sorrow than I did when he first took vows, but, as it turned out, the worst grief was yet to come. The day he left, he pulled out the seven-string koto and *biwa* lute he had played over the years whenever he was reclining during periods of rest from his devotions. He performed several songs as a way to take his leave of the Buddha, then left the instruments as an offering in the chapel. He gave most of his other worldly possessions to the Buddha as well, and what was left he distributed among his close disciples—there were more than sixty of us—each man receiving a gift appropriate to his status. He sent me here to the capital with the last remaining items to give to you and your daughter. When he finished giving out these mementos, he said that the time had come and disappeared into the cloudy mists of that distant mountain, leaving behind many to mourn him in the temple that was once his home."

This particular man had left the capital in service as a page when the novitiate was appointed Governor of Harima. He was now an old priest, and the thought that he would remain in the province on his own made him feel terribly sad and forlorn. If even the Buddha's sage disciples—enlightened men who had acquired unwavering faith on Eagle Peak²²—experienced the depths of sorrow on the night when their master's life flickered out, then the grief the old nun felt must have been boundless.

The Akashi lady was in her daughter's quarters when she heard that a letter from her father had arrived, and so she discreetly made her way to the northwest residence. She conducted herself with great dignity, and, unless she had a good reason to go there, it was normally difficult for her to see her mother. However, when she learned that something had happened, she was anxious and quietly called on the old nun, who was grief-stricken. Pulling a lamp over to look at the letter, she understood why her mother was in tears and could not hold back her own. Memories of the past came back—things that would have meant nothing to anyone else—and, in her heart, which had always been filled with yearning for her father, she knew after seeing the letter that she would never meet him again. Her sorrow was inexpressible; her tears would not cease. Reading the tale of her

father's dream made her sad, but it also gave her reason to trust in her future. She thought that she understood him at last.

If that's the case, then my father's eccentric behavior arose out of his faith in this fleeting dream and the high ambitions it inspired. That explains why he arranged a match totally inappropriate for someone of my low status and left me in precarious circumstances during that period when Genji left for the capital and I moved to Ōi.

It took some time for the nun to regain her composure.

"Because of you, we have enjoyed honors and blessings far beyond what people of our status could normally expect. Our sorrows and joys have also been greater than most. Though I am not a woman of distinguished lineage, abandoning the capital and sinking into obscurity at Akashi made me feel that our destiny was truly different from that of other courtiers. Thus, it never occurred to me that your father and I would have to spend much of our lifetimes apart from one another. We lived together many years believing that we would be reborn on the same lotus in paradise, and then the unexpected happened, and I returned to a place I had once abandoned. Of course, I rejoiced at the wonderful birth of your daughter, yet my joy was tempered by anxiety and sorrow at having to live apart from my husband. In the end, I'm filled with regret that I shall leave this world without ever seeing him again. Even when your father was at the court, he struck others as an eccentric man who had a sullen outlook on life. But when we were a young couple, the trust between us was strong, and the vows of devotion we exchanged were truly special. And so we shared a mutual faith in each other. How can it be, when we are close enough that news of him should reach my ears so quickly, that we must live apart?" Her face was contorted by grief.

The Akashi lady was crying as well.

"The prospect of some glorious future means little," she said, "and, in any case, there could never be any clear benefit from such glory for someone as insignificant as I. Instead, I'm left to grieve over my separation from Father and to regret that I shall never know what became of him. It's one thing to feel that everything that happened was the result of his extraordinary karmic destiny, but life in this world is so uncertain, and it all seems so futile since he ended up going off into the mountains where he will soon vanish forever." They talked of sad things all through the night.

Just before dawn, the Akashi lady, who wished to keep her visit a secret, prepared to go back to the southeast residence.

"My lord Genji saw that I was at the southeast residence yesterday, and he will think me frivolous for leaving suddenly and being so furtive about coming

here. I'm not all that concerned about myself, but I would feel sorry for my daughter if my actions reflected badly on her, and so it is impossible for me to do as I want."

"How is the little Prince? Is there any way I could see him?" the nun asked tearfully.

"You'll see him soon. My daughter apparently remembers and speaks quite fondly of you. Genji reportedly told someone that, even though it was unlucky to predict the future, if everything turns out the way he wants, he hopes you will live long enough to witness it. I wonder what he means."

The nun rejoiced. "Oh my ... if he really said that, then my karmic destiny has been extraordinary in both joy and sorrow!" The Akashi lady returned to the quarters of the Akashi Princess and had an attendant bring with her the box containing the letter and prayers.

There were frequent messages from the Crown Prince urging the Akashi Princess to return soon to the palace. "It's natural for him to feel this way," Murasaki said. "He must be impatient waiting like this, especially after such an auspicious event." She quietly began preparing to send the little prince to the palace. The Akashi Princess²³ was uneasy about returning, having learned how hard it was to obtain leave to withdraw from the palace, and she wanted to stay a while longer at the Rokujō estate. Because she had experienced the frightening perils of childbirth at such a young age, she had lost weight, but that only made her look more willowy and refined. The Akashi lady was worried for her daughter. "She hasn't had enough time to recover and needs to be looked after before she can go back." Genji nonetheless insisted. "When he sees how thin she looks, the Crown Prince will be moved and love her all the more."

One evening during a quiet interlude when Murasaki and her attendants had returned to the east hall, the Akashi lady appeared before her daughter and informed her of the document box that the novitiate had sent.

"I should really keep this hidden from you until your destiny is completely fulfilled," she said, "but the world is an uncertain place, and I worry that I might die before you are mature enough to judge matters on your own. Given my low status, there's no guarantee that you'll be allowed to see me in my final hours, and so even though what I'm about to tell you may sound trivial, I must make my last requests now while I'm still of sound mind."

"Please read my father's letter, even though it is written in a strange style that makes it difficult to understand ... and do keep his prayers of thanksgiving in a cabinet near you so that you may look at them at the appropriate time. Once you are Empress, you must go on a pilgrimage to have them performed. Do not let anyone know about these. Now that I've seen you reach this station in life, I feel

more and more as though I too should take vows and withdraw from the world, and my heart is uneasy and restless.

“One more thing ... never look down on Lady Murasaki. Having witnessed her remarkable character and deep sensitivity, I hope that she will live on long after me. I gave you over to her care from the beginning because my own status was too humble for me to be with you. For years I fretted, worrying that she would behave like a typical stepmother and be neglectful. I certainly never imagined that she would do so much for you. Now that I am certain she will always be a support, I am reassured about what has happened and what is to come.” She spoke of many other things as well.

As the Akashi Princess listened, tears welled up. Even though the two of them should have been close, her mother was always formal and excessively humble in her presence. Her grandfather’s letter, with its many Chinese characters, was difficult to read and offputting. It was written on five or six sheets of thick, official Michinokuni paper yellowed with age but deeply permeated with an elegant scent. She was deeply moved, and with the hair framing her face now wet with tears, she presented a lovely profile.

Genji had been with the Third Princess, but he suddenly came through the sliding doors that separated her quarters from the Akashi Princess’s. There was no time to hide the letters, and so the Akashi lady pulled a standing curtain between her and Genji to conceal the fact that she had been crying.

“Is the little Prince awake? It doesn’t take me long to start missing him,” Genji said. When his daughter failed to respond, the Akashi lady jumped in. “Your Lady Murasaki has taken the child to the east hall.”

“How peculiar she’s acting! She’s all but taken the child for herself, always holding the boy to her breast and constantly having to change her robes when he wets them. How can you just give the child over to her so blithely? She ought to just come here if she wants to see him.”

“Really ... you do go on so! What a thoughtless thing to say! It would be perfectly proper for her to look after the baby even if the child were a girl, and so I have no concerns at all about her taking care of the boy, no matter how highborn he is. You mustn’t say such things even in jest ... if Lady Murasaki hears them, it might drive a wedge between her and my daughter.”

Genji smiled.

“You think it best not to let me look after the little Prince, but leave his care to our daughter and Murasaki? How childish you’ve been recently, leaving me out of things, then saying that I’m the one who’s meddling. Look at you, slipping away to hide like this, and now cruelly criticizing me ...” So saying, he swept aside her curtain and found her leaning against a pillar of the central chamber,

looking beautiful and so dignified that he felt almost ashamed before her. It would have been unseemly to have tried to quickly conceal the box that was there, and so she left it as it was.

“What’s that?” Genji asked. “Something important, no doubt. It looks like it must hold a long poem written by one of your lovers.”

“Don’t be vulgar! Really, now ... you’re acting like an adolescent boy. Sometimes you say the most outrageous things!” Although she was smiling as she spoke, it was clear that she was sad about something. Genji thought this was odd, and he cocked his head in puzzlement. Upon seeing his reaction, the Akashi lady felt it would be more troublesome for her if she didn’t explain.

“My father sent this from his home amidst the crags at Akashi. It contains a list of sutra scrolls read out privately for the offering of prayers, as well as some prayers of thanksgiving that have not been performed yet. When the proper occasion to show these to you presents itself, I think you ought to look at them. However, now is not the time. I would rather you not open the box.”

As soon as he heard that, Genji realized that she had good reason indeed to be sad.

“It seems he was utterly devoted to his religious practices,” he observed. “He lived a long life and must have accrued considerable merit for his efforts over so many years. There are some priests who are considered learned and wise, but upon closer inspection, you realize that such men are tainted with the deep defilements of this world. Thus, as clever as they may be, their understanding of things is limited and comes nowhere near to what your father achieved. He was truly enlightened, and his personality reflected that. He never pretended to be some holy man who had abandoned this world, and yet, deep in his heart, he seemed to have already taken up residence in a place that no one else inhabits, like a young groom gone off to the house of his bride. Now it seems that he has freed himself of his troublesome fetters and gained even greater detachment from the world. If I were free to do so, I would very much like to go off discreetly and meet him.”

“I’ve learned that he has now abandoned his old abode and gone off into mountains so remote that no birds sing there,”²⁴ the Akashi lady informed him.

“If that’s the case, then those documents are his last will and testament, are they not? Have you communicated with him? How does your mother feel about this? The vows that bound her to him, even though they had to live apart as they did, are perhaps even stronger than the ties between a mother and daughter ...” He began to tear up. “As the years have piled up and I have come to know a few things about this world, your father became a man I recalled with peculiar feelings of sympathy ... if I feel that way, then it must be terribly hard on you,

since your relationship with him was so much deeper.”

Thinking that the story of her father’s dream might jibe with Genji’s own recollections, the Akashi lady took the opening provided by his kind words to show him the letter.

“It’s written in a very strange style—it almost looks like Sanskrit—but there are things in it that may be of interest to you. When I left him in Akashi, I accepted the fact that we would never meet again ... or so I thought. Now that I know he is gone, I realize my love for him lingers on inside me.” Her noble, filial tears were becoming.

Genji took the letter.

“This is extremely well written,” he remarked, “and shows no sign of the frailties of old age. He was a man who had certainly mastered many skills, calligraphy among them, but who lacked the temperament to be able to get ahead at the court. I’ve heard people say that your father’s ancestor, the Minister, was an exceptionally sagacious and unusually diligent man who did all he could to serve the state loyally. But they also say that during his time in office something untoward happened and, as a result of the workings of karma, the status of his descendants declined. Now, however, it seems that the fortunes of your father’s line have been restored through you and his granddaughter, and that is surely a sign of the sincerity with which he practiced his religious devotions.”

As he read the letter, Genji brushed away tears. Then the section concerning the novitiate’s dream caught his eye.

People were always criticizing the old man for being so eccentric or for having such absurdly grand ambitions, Genji mused, and I myself thought that my affair with his daughter was improper—nothing more than a passing fling. Then the Akashi Princess was born, and I realized the depth of our bond from a former life, though it was not clear to me at the time what the unseen future would hold for her. It was because of this vision that the novitiate clung so tenaciously to his ambitions and put his faith in arranging my marriage to his daughter. It was his prayers for the birth of a granddaughter that brought about that unfortunate scandal and led me to wander in exile. Just what kind of supplications did he make? Genji was curious to look at the prayers in the box, and so, with a sense of reverence in his heart, he picked up the sheets of paper to examine them.

“I have some prayers of my own that I must also give to you. I shall inform you about them by and by,” he said to the Akashi Princess. “You have now learned some things about your past, but you must not let that affect your attitude toward Murasaki. An act of kindness or a few words of sympathy offered by a complete stranger can be more important to you than the affection

naturally shared by those who are bound to each other by ties of family or of marriage. This holds true especially in the case of Murasaki, who thinks only of you and whose feelings remain unchanged from what they always were ... even as she sees your real mother coming to serve you ever more closely. It's probably prudent to be cautious and follow an ancient maxim: a stepmother's affections are always only for show, but if her stepchild does not think ill of her and gives affection in return, even the cruelest stepmother will reform her ways and behave kindly, wondering how she could have ever been so thoughtless.

"Assuming they share no great enmity from the past, people may clash about things from time to time, but so long as neither person is entirely at fault, they will naturally overcome their differences and restore their relationship. People who complain vociferously about things best overlooked or who always find fault with others, however trivial the failing, lack charm, and their behavior makes them seem aloof and unkind. I don't have all that much experience in such matters, but, based on my observations of the workings of the human heart, it seems that while everyone has their own individual temperament and merits, they all possess a welcome degree of fundamental decency. Everyone has some unique talent and virtue. Still, when it comes to seriously considering and selecting those on whom we rely for support, we find that ideal companions are few in number. When it comes to a truly flawless sensibility and virtuous character, I feel that Murasaki, who is so gentle and generous, is the ideal. Unfortunately, some people are thoughtless and unreliable, even though they come from an aristocratic background." He said nothing more, but it was not hard to guess the person he had in mind.

Genji turned to the Akashi lady and whispered so that their daughter would not hear.

"You seem to have some understanding of these matters, and that is most admirable. I trust that you will remain close to Murasaki and that the two of you will be of one mind in assisting the Akashi Princess."

"I need no prompting," the Akashi lady replied. "I constantly praise Lady Murasaki to others, having witnessed her exemplary virtues myself. She might well have been shocked by my presence and found my relationship with you unforgivable ... and yet, even though she did not have to acknowledge me, she has behaved so graciously that it shames me, and I feel overawed in her presence. It hurts me to know that people gossip, wondering how someone as insignificant as me could still be lingering on here, but she always defends me, as if I had no flaws at all."

"I don't imagine that she feels any special goodwill toward you in particular," Genji said, "it's just that she apparently worries about not being able to be with

the Akashi Princess and is entrusting her to your care. What's more, you don't try to assert your authority as the girl's mother, and your behavior remains modest and inconspicuous. Because that keeps everything calm and harmonious, I feel very much at ease and happy. When a person who is perversely unreasonable and insensitive interacts with others, she can create a difficult situation even over the most trivial of matters. But because neither you nor Murasaki have such flaws, I am content."

Genji went back to Murasaki's quarters in the east hall, leaving the Akashi lady to mull over what he had said. *He's right ... being modest and humble has been for the best. It seems that his special regard for Murasaki is only increasing. It's a wonderful thing to see ... she has been gifted with truly superior qualities, and so it's natural that he has such deep feelings for her. It's wonderful how carefully he looks after the Third Princess as well, but their relationship is superficial. From what I can tell, he hardly ever goes to see her, and that is intensely disrespectful and embarrassing to her. She and Lady Murasaki are related, but the Third Princess is, after all, of higher birth.*

Whenever the Akashi lady heard gossip about Murasaki and the Third Princess, she reflected on how fortunate her own destiny had been. Relationships between even the most distinguished aristocrats did not always turn out as well as hoped, and so for someone of lower status like her, who would normally never even think about mingling in such august company, there were no regrets at all. The only thing that brought her sorrow and anxiety was the thought of her father going off deep into the mountains forever. As for her mother, the nun put her faith in the exhortation to "sow seeds in the blessed garden"²⁵ in hopes of meeting her husband again in paradise, and so she was focused entirely on the world to come.

Because Genji's son had entertained thoughts of taking the Third Princess for himself, her presence at the Rokujō estate was unsettling. He would visit her quarters on those occasions when it was appropriate to provide her with some routine assistance, and so he naturally had the opportunity to observe her and the ambiance of her quarters. She was very immature and almost languorously calm, but his father's outward behavior toward her was dignified, and his attentiveness a model of propriety for the world. Still, for all that, it was fairly obvious to the son that his father felt no deep attachment. There were few mature women among her ladies-in-waiting, most of them being pretty young things devoted to bright, frivolous pursuits. Indeed, so many such women had gathered there that the quarters took on an atmosphere of carefree joy. Of course, it was impossible to discern the hearts of those ladies-in-waiting who might otherwise have been quietly reserved. Even if there were some who had secret concerns, they were

constantly mingling with companions who seemed happy and blithe, and under such an influence, their behavior meekly conformed to what was going on around them. All day, from morning to night, her page girls would be absorbed in playing the childish games that she still enjoyed, and though Genji was never pleased to observe this, he was by nature a tolerant man who never tried to impose on others the idea that there was only one right way for them to live their lives. He let them do as they pleased and looked on with forbearance, assuming that this was what they really wanted. He did not reproach them or try to change their ways, though he often instructed the Third Princess about proper comportment so that her behavior improved a little.

Observing the situation in the Third Princess's quarters, Genji's son was reminded of that unforgettable glimpse of Murasaki he once enjoyed.

Truly such flawless women as she are rare in this world. My father has kept her as his wife for many years, but not once in all that time has her behavior or disposition ever given rise to gossip or criticism. She's remarkable, always discreet and quiet, never disparaging others, conducting herself in an admirably gracious manner.

He was deeply attached to his own principal wife, Kumoinokari, but she did not possess any extraordinary merits, nor was she exceptionally gifted. Once their relationship was settled and she was finally his, his passion for her slackened as they grew more familiar with each other, and he found it hard to keep his mind off the various delights offered by the ladies that his father had assembled at the Rokujō estate. The Third Princess was especially intriguing, given her high status, yet from what he had observed, his father did not seem to have any special affection for her and was merely keeping up appearances. This is not to say that Genji's son had any wanton designs on the Third Princess, but he was very curious, wondering if he might ever have a chance to see her.

Kashiwagi had frequently gone to the Suzaku Palace and was accustomed to being in intimate service to Retired Emperor Suzaku. Consequently, he had seen up close just how much Suzaku cared for and worried about the Third Princess. At the time Suzaku was deciding on a possible match for her, Kashiwagi made it clear that he wanted to be considered, and he heard, through Oborozukiyo, that Suzaku had not dismissed his proposal as insolent. Nonetheless, he was terribly disappointed and hurt when, contrary to his expectations, Genji was chosen. Kashiwagi found it impossible to get the Third Princess out of his mind. After she moved to the Rokujō estate, he relied on one of her ladies-in-waiting, Kojijū, to fill him in on what was happening. When he heard from her how Genji was neglecting his young wife, the news brought him a fleeting sense of consolation. Then he overheard some people at court remarking, "She's completely

overwhelmed by Lady Murasaki.” Subsequently, he took to pestering Kojijū, whose mother had served as the Third Princess’s wet nurse. “Although it may be disrespectful of me to say so,” he told her, “it would never have occurred to me to treat your mistress that way. I know that someone of my status is not worthy of one whose lineage is peerless, but still ...” Because the world is an uncertain place, Kashiwagi never gave up hoping that Genji would finally fulfill his long-standing wish to take vows and go into retreat.

On a bright, balmy day in the third month, Prince Sochinomiya, who was serving as Minister of War, and Kashiwagi, who was Commander of the Right Gate Guard, gathered along with other noblemen and officials at the Rokujō estate. Genji came out and spoke to them.

“Things are so quiet at my residence that recently there has been very little to divert me from the tedium of my idleness. I no longer have public or private responsibilities, so what should I do to pass the time? My son was here just this morning ... now where has he gone? You know how fond he is of small-bow archery, and I was feeling so lonely that I thought I might have him put on a demonstration. Has he left already? What a shame, since several young men who also enjoy the small bow arrived earlier!”

When someone answered that his son had gone off with those young men to the northeast residence to play a game of *kemari*,²⁶ Genji remarked, “A somewhat unruly sport, but it certainly requires skill and coordination. Have them bring their game over here.” He sent off a messenger, and soon a crowd of officials made their appearance.

“Did you bring the ball? Who has come with you?” Genji asked his son, who then introduced each of the young men.

“Why don’t you play your game over here?” Genji suggested. The Akashi Princess, who had been residing in the east side of the main hall, had by this time left with the young Prince for the palace, and her quarters were now deserted. They found a suitable spot for the game off the east facade—a flat and elegant space where two streams ran together. Tō no Chūjō’s sons—among them Kōbai, now a Controller in the Chamberlain’s office, the Assistant Commander of the Guards, a younger son who was at the fifth rank, and several others who had yet to reach manhood—all exhibited superior skills compared to the others. As the sun slowly sank, the wind grew calm, making a perfect day for the game. Kōbai, who at first chose not to participate in order to protect his dignity, could not hold back given the ideal conditions, and he soon joined in.

“It looks as though even Kōbai could not resist the urge to enter the fray,” Genji said, encouraging his son and Kashiwagi to join in. “You two may be senior nobles, but you’re also young guard officers. Why aren’t you out there

playing with them, letting yourselves go? For some reason, when I was your age I thought it was shameful to just be a spectator. The game does make people look a bit ridiculous, though, does it not?"

Thus encouraged by Genji, the Major Captain and the Commander both went down into the garden to join the game as it moved about beneath the indescribable beauty of the cherry blossoms. They looked exceptionally handsome in the glow of the fading twilight. Although *kemari* is not at all a quiet, refined pastime, it can be charming to watch depending on the setting and the character of the people playing. The cherry trees, some with multicolored buds just beginning to open, others with fresh leaves barely peeking out, were shrouded by mist in this elegant garden, and the trivial game was played out in their shade. Each of the players strove to display his skill, and the expression on all of their faces made it clear that no one wanted to lose. The Commander, Kashiwagi, joined in only briefly, but it was soon evident that no one there could match his abilities. His features were strikingly attractive, his overall appearance refined, and since he was normally very poised and graceful, it was a delight to see him acting so boisterous. As the game progressed, the players gradually shifted from the east garden toward the cherry tree that stood beside the stairs leading down from the south side of the main hall. Everyone was so engrossed in the contest that they forgot all about the blossoms. Genji and Sochinomiya moved out to the railing at the corner of the veranda and watched from there.

The skill of the more experienced players showed as the game went on, and with each successive round of play even the men of high rank began to lose themselves in the moment, their court caps slipping back away from their foreheads. Usually so conscious of the dignity of his rank, Genji's son was now playing with abandon—though to the spectators he exuded a youthful, dashing air. His court robes, white lined with red in the cherry-blossom style, were soft and supple, and the legs of his trousers just above the cinched cuffs were puffed out a little and riding up slightly on his shins. His appearance was not vulgar in the least. When a flurry of cherry blossoms fell like snow on his splendidly trim, relaxed figure, he glanced up at the tree, snapped off a branch that had been broken by the ball, and sat down on the middle step of the stairs.

Kashiwagi followed him and remarked, "How wildly the blossoms seem to be scattering. We should stay clear of the cherry tree ... remember how the poet entreated the spring breeze."²⁷

As he was speaking, he cast a sidelong glance over at the quarters of the Third Princess in the west half of the main hall. From what he could tell, some of the more forward ladies-in-waiting had apparently stepped into the south outer aisle room, as was their wont. The various colors of their robes were faintly visible

through the translucent blinds, and their sleeves were spilling out onto the veranda. The scene made him think of those bright cloth pouches filled with swatches of cloth or paper used as offerings to Saohime, the goddess of spring.²⁸

The standing curtains had been pulled aside rather carelessly, and there seemed to be a woman quite close by, giving the scene a sensuous, worldly air. Suddenly, a small, very cute-looking Chinese cat dashed out from beneath a blind, pursued by a slightly larger cat. The women behind the blinds were alarmed, and, as they scurried about, Kashiwagi caught the loud rustling of their silk robes. The little cat must not have been fully tamed yet, because a long blind cord had been slipped around its neck like a leash. In its attempt to run off, the cat became entangled in the cord. As it tugged and tugged trying to free itself, it pulled the blind to one side, exposing the space inside. No one, however, moved quickly to try to adjust it. The women near the pillar on the veranda appeared to be flustered and frightened.

The Third Princess, dressed in casual robes, was standing further back in the space a little behind the curtain. Given her high status, it was shocking to see her standing up, but clearly she was intrigued by the game of *kemari* and wanted a better look. Because she was in the aisle space marked off by the closer of the two pillars on the veranda, she was clearly visible from the spot where Kashiwagi was seated. Her robes were layered in a progression from darker to lighter hues—were they crimson lined with purple in the red plum style? The many colors that peeked out at the cuffs of her sleeves and at the hems of her skirts were bright and cheerful, like the edges of multicolored paper bound in a book, and over all of that she wore a long outer robe of patterned silk in the cherry-blossom style. From what he could see of her hair, it cascaded voluptuously down her back—braided like threads, thick and neatly trimmed, long enough to extend seven or eight inches out onto the floor behind her. She was so slender and slight of build that her robes seemed too long for her, and as he looked at her in profile, her figure and face, which was framed by her hair, struck him as indescribably noble and adorable. Because the light at dusk was fading, he was frustrated and disappointed that he could not see more clearly into the dark recesses of the room. Her ladies-in-waiting were all intently watching the young officials, who in turn were so focused on their game that they had no regrets about scattering the cherry blossoms. As a result, no one noticed at first that the blind had been pulled aside by the cat. When the animal began to mewl in pain, however, the Third Princess turned to look at it. At that moment her youthful beauty—the open simplicity of her expression and deportment—was suddenly and completely exposed to Kashiwagi.

Genji's son felt awkward and uneasy, but it would have been disrespectful of

him to slip over and close the blind himself, and so he simply cleared his throat to let them know. When he did so, the Third Princess quietly moved back inside. Truth be told, he also felt disappointed at not being able to see more of her, and he sighed when the cat finally disentangled itself from the cord and the blind moved back into place. Kashiwagi, who had been dreaming of taking her when Genji retired from the world, had an even stronger reaction. He felt his chest tightening, for he knew, given the casual style of her robes, which made her stand out among all the women there, that the one he had seen could only have been the Third Princess. Her image was now fixed in his heart.

Kashiwagi tried to behave as though nothing had happened, but Genji's son knew that his companion must have seen her—how could he have not? He felt sorry for the Third Princess. Kashiwagi tried to console his own melancholy thoughts by calling the cat over and picking it up. Its fur was permeated with the scent of her perfume, and it was purring so sweetly that, driven by curiosity and desire, he fantasized that he was holding the Third Princess herself.

Genji noticed them sitting there. "Those steps are much too humble for my young lords. Come over here and sit with us," he said, moving from the southeast corner of the main hall to the south-facing aisle off Murasaki's quarters in the east hall.²⁹ The two young men followed, and, once they were seated again, they chatted with him and Sochinomiya. The officials who had participated in the game were seated on round mats on the veranda outside the aisle room in the order of their rank. Rice cakes wrapped in camellia leaves—fare that was de rigueur following a sporting contest—were served informally in the lids of boxes along with Asian pears, mandarin oranges, and the like. The young men cheerfully enjoyed the repast. Later, dried fish and dried shellfish were served when the wine was brought out.

Dejected and lost in his own thoughts, Kashiwagi would now and then glance vacantly over at the cherry tree. Genji's son knew his friend's heart and assumed that Kashiwagi was thinking about the figure he had glimpsed through the blind that had inexcusably been left open.

He's probably looking at her dismissively, he mused, thinking how foolish she was to come so close to the veranda. Murasaki would never put herself in such a compromising position. It's this difference that makes my father privately consider the Third Princess less impressive than her public reputation. Comparing the two women in this way, Genji's son considered the Third Princess decidedly inferior. The childish carelessness she exhibits in all aspects of her life may seem adorable, but that trait is also a matter of real concern.

As it turned out, Kashiwagi wasn't preoccupied at all with the Third Princess's faults. Instead, he took that unexpected glimpse, no matter how brief

and shadowy it had been, as a sign that his long-held dream of having her for his own would come true. He was overjoyed at the thought that they were destined to be together and could not get her out of his mind.

Genji began talking about the old days.

“Your father and I were always competing, trying to outdo one another in everything ... and the one thing I could never beat him at was *kemari*. It may be an unassuming sport with no secret teachings to pass along, but it’s wonderful to see how skill in it is inherited. I was truly amazed watching you play.”

Kashiwagi smiled.

“Unless I pass along practical abilities in administering public affairs, I’m afraid a family legacy of *kemari* won’t be much use to my descendants.”

“Really, now, I couldn’t disagree more,” Genji replied. “You must record and pass along anything that is a mark of distinction. If you write it down in your family chronicles, then it’s bound to be of interest.”

As Genji bantered playfully, Kashiwagi observed his lustrous refinement and was thrown into uncertainty. *When a woman has a man like this as her husband, he wondered, is there any way at all she would shift her affections to another? Is there any way I can move her heart so that she would take pity and yield to me?* Upon taking his leave, he was assailed by the realization that she was so far above him, so much farther away than ever. He felt his chest tightening again—this time in despair.

He and Genji’s son rode away in the same carriage, and they talked along the way.

“There’s so little to do at court during this season, it’s good to be able to spend time at your father’s estate.”

“He told me that if we have a free day like today, we should come again before the blossoms have passed their peak. He hates to let the spring go to waste, so why don’t we visit sometime later this month? Do bring your short bow with you.” He and Kashiwagi promised each other that they would do so.

They continued their conversation until they reached the spot where they had to go their separate ways. Because he was eager to continue talking about the Third Princess, Kashiwagi said some things that he shouldn’t have.

“Your father seems to spend all his time in the east hall with Lady Murasaki. He must be exceptionally devoted to her, but I wonder what the Third Princess makes of the situation? I feel sorry for her ... after all, she was her father’s favorite, and it must make her sad that she’s no longer the center of attention.”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Genji’s son shot back. “It’s nothing of the kind. From what I’ve heard, my father brought Murasaki up under unusual circumstances from the time she was a little girl, and so they’re extremely close. That’s the

only difference. Otherwise, he shows extraordinary kindness to the Third Princess in every way imaginable.”

“Please ... don’t hand me that. Everyone knows what’s going on. Haven’t people said how pathetic she looks when your father fails to show up night after night? She was so loved and pampered by her own father ... it’s unheard of, the way she’s being treated.” His feelings of sympathy led him to compose a verse:

*Why does the warbler darting through blossoms
From tree to tree single out the cherry
As the only place it will never nest*

“How capricious, this bird of spring, to disdain the cherry tree alone! Peculiar indeed!” He spoke as if he were intoning the verse to himself.

Genji’s son was annoyed. *Really now, he’s being needlessly critical. It’s just what I feared: seeing the Third Princess has him all worked up!*

*Why should the cuckoo who chooses to nest
In a tree deep in mountain recesses
Ever grow weary of the cherry’s hue³⁰*

“You’re being unreasonable,” he retorted. “Do you mean to say that he should give all of his attention to only one of his wives?” Their conversation had become a bother, and he no longer cared to talk about the Third Princess. He changed subjects, and at last they parted, each going his own way.

Kashiwagi still resided by himself in the east hall of his father’s villa. Because he had high expectations, he had remained a bachelor for many years. And even though he had chosen to live this way, he often felt lonely and miserable. Driven by a sense of pride and entitlement, he would ask himself why a man of his status and talents shouldn’t get what he wanted, and from that evening on he was in a state of terrible anxiety and depression.

I want to see her again at some point, he brooded, even if it’s only a brief glimpse like today. It’s no problem finding my way to a woman of less exalted status. I could just use some facile excuse or other to go out—some prohibition or directional taboo. But to get to the Third Princess ...

There was no way to fulfill his dreams. How could he ever inform her of his deep devotion so long as she was secluded in the interior rooms of her quarters? Because he was in such an agony of longing, he wrote, as he always did, to Kojijū, the daughter of the Third Princess’s nurse: “The other day, enticed by the breeze, I made my way to the gardens inside the hedges of your abode, but your

mistress must have looked upon me as even more unworthy than before. Since that evening, I have been in the throes of dark despair, and, alas, pass my days lost in melancholy thought.”³¹ He added, among other things, this poem:

*I gazed from afar at a branch in full bloom
And sighed that I could not pluck it ... a longing
For those twilight blossoms now lingers in me*

Kojijū had no idea that he had seen her mistress the other day, and so she assumed his poem was nothing more than a common lament about feeling melancholy.

Since there was almost no one in attendance when the letter arrived, Kojijū brought it to the Third Princess. “It appears that there’s something this gentleman has a hard time forgetting, and his petitions are annoyingly persistent. When I see him in such a sorry state, though,” she laughed, “I’m inclined to sympathize and want to act as his go-between.”

The Third Princess replied, with an innocent air, “What a terrible thing to say!” She looked at the letter spread open before her. She caught Kashiwagi’s allusion to Narihira’s poem, which contained the line “Someone I have not yet seen,” and immediately blushed as she recalled that unfortunate incident when the cat pulled open the blind. Genji had given her a stern warning to be careful about such matters. “Don’t let my son see you. You’re so childish at times, I fear that in a moment of carelessness you may expose yourself to him.” Recalling this admonition, she thought about how displeased Genji would be when his son told him that he had seen her that day. That she would be so intimidated like this, without ever considering the possibility that someone else might have seen her, shows just how immature she was.

Because the Third Princess was even less responsive than usual, Kojijū, who was looking to have fun at Kashiwagi’s expense, lost interest and did not go out of her way to pursue the matter. As usual, she wrote back to him in secret: “You certainly played it cool the other day, pretending that nothing was up. For someone like you to even hope to see my mistress is unforgivably insulting. And what did you mean by alluding to Narihira like that ... ‘yet not not seen’? You really are lascivious.” She then lightly dashed off the following:

*Let not your expression reveal your longings
Telling me you’ve set your heart upon a bough
Of mountain cherry that is beyond your reach*

“Nothing will come of your love.”

¹ This character does not appear elsewhere in the work.

² The space was called the Kaedono.

³ The word for “early spring greens,” *wakana*, gives this chapter its title. *Wakana* refers to both greens, such as turnip leaf or bracken (fiddlehead ferns), and herbs, such as water pepper or dropwort. There were twelve traditional *wakana*, and they were used for both food and medicinal purposes. Tamakazura brings them to Genji because they were thought to extend life and bring back youthful vigor. The symbolic meaning for Genji, who is forty and marrying a very young princess, is obvious.

⁴ It was customary to pull up pine seedlings by their roots as a symbol of long life and felicity. This custom arose in part because the word for “rat” (*ne*) is a homophone for the word “root.” Here, the seedlings symbolize Tamakazura’s children.

⁵ *Kokinshū* 41 (Ōshikōchi no Mitsune): “The darkness of a spring night tries in vain to obscure things ... for while we may not see the color of the plum blossoms, can their fragrance be hidden?”

⁶ *Hakushi monjū* 911, “Dawn from the tower of Yū Hsin.”

⁷ This sentence may be interpreted in a different way, as: “Your attendants didn’t open the shutter for me because they’re all so frightened of you. They are not to blame.”

⁸ *Gosenshū* 479 (Fujiwara no Kagemoto): “This light snow that blows wildly in the sky before melting away is like the heart of one lost in love.”

⁹ *Yakamochi shū* 284 (Ōtomo no Yakamochi): “On branches of plum, indistinguishable from the whiteness of the blossoms, patches of snow linger as if waiting for those flowers like welcoming companions.”

¹⁰ *Kokinshū* 32 (Anonymous): “Having broken off a branch of plum, my sleeves are scented ... is it because he thinks there are plum blossoms here that the warbler comes and sings to me?”

¹¹ Murasaki has been associated with cherry blossoms throughout the work. The poetic implication here is that if Murasaki had the scent of the plum—that is, if she had the imperial rank of the Third Princess, who is associated here with plum blossoms—she would be unrivaled in his affections.

¹² *Kokinshū* 674 (Anonymous): “How can I pretend that nothing has happened now, when rumors about me rise up like a flock of birds?”

¹³ This sentence simply means that Genji will make use of Chūnagon’s brother, the former governor of Izumi, to get to Oborozukiyo.

¹⁴ Genji’s poem and Oborozukiyo’s reply below both turn on a wordplay made possible by an orthographic convention that allowed *fuchi* (“wisteria”) and *fuchi* (“precipice”) to be read interchangeably. They also play on *korizuma ni* (“to fail to learn a lesson,” or, as I have rendered it, “heedlessly/heedless”), which aurally echoes the place name Suma.

¹⁵ The poem plays on the word *aki*, which means “autumn,” but which could also mean “to grow tired of.”

¹⁶ Genji plays on Murasaki’s use of the word *aoba* (“green leaves”) by using the homophone *aoba* (“green-tinged wings”) to claim his devotion is unchanging and turn the complaint around on her. *Kokinshū* 220 (Anonymous): “The lower leaves of the bush clover in autumn have turned colors ... will those who are alone find it hard to sleep from now on?”

¹⁷ *Gosenshū* 809 (Ise): “If you come to Yoshino and ask about my home, remember that I wear the same garland on my head as you.” Murasaki is pointing out the family connection that ties her to the Third Princess. It is important to note, as a reminder, just how carefully the author chose her poetic allusions. Ise’s poem not only provides the phrase “wear the same garland,” but also refers to Yoshino, a place famous for its cherry trees, whose blossoms are associated most closely with Murasaki throughout the narrative.

¹⁸ The *Diamond Sutra* is a short section of the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*.

¹⁹ Because Tamakazura held her banquet on the twenty-third day of the first month, it has been suggested

that this day is the date of Genji's birthday.

20 As with many of Murasaki Shikibu's depictions of formal occasions, this one is based on a historical event—in this case, the banquet celebrating the fortieth birthday of Emperor Ninmyō (810–850 CE).

21 This character is not Tamakazura's husband, but a different major captain who is not otherwise mentioned in the tale.

22 This is Mount Grdhakuta in India, also known as Vulture Peak. The place was a retreat where the historical Buddha, Siddhārtha Gautama (or Sakyamuni), preached many of his most famous sermons.

23 The Akashi Princess is for the first time identified here by the title *miyasudokoro*—the same title used earlier in the narrative to identify the Rokujō lady. The title, which may be loosely translated as “lady of the imperial bedchamber,” was not a formal one, but used rather broadly to identify a consort or concubine below the rank of empress. However, it is clear from the context of the story that it referred to a consort to the Crown Prince who had given birth to a prince or princess of the blood and who was thus in line to be empress. Although I have chosen to continue to refer to Genji's daughter as the Akashi Princess for the sake of continuity, the use of the title here is noteworthy in that it foreshadows the glorious destiny that awaits her as primary consort and then empress.

24 *Kokinshū* 535 (Anonymous): “Will she recognize that my devotion to her is as deep as those mountain recesses where not even the cries of flying birds can be heard?”

25 The exact source of this quotation is unknown, but one explanation is that it refers to Princess Yasodharā, the wife of Siddhārtha, who would become Gautama Buddha. Yasodharā eventually takes vows and lives an ascetic life.

26 *Kemari* is a traditional court game: a type of football in which the object is to keep the ball or footbag (similar to a Hacky Sack though larger and made of deerskin) from falling to the ground. This was generally accomplished by using the feet, but other parts of the body could also be used.

27 *Kokinshū* 85 (Fujiwara Yoshikaze): “O breezes of spring, stay clear of the cherry tree when you blow, so that I may see if it is the will of the blossoms to scatter on their own.”

28 An alternate spelling of this name is Sahohime. Offerings of pouches filled with slips of cloth or paper were usually made to ensure safe travel and were often presented to local gods along the way. This practice is mentioned earlier, in the *Yūgao* chapter, when Genji sends strips of paper and cloth to his lady of the molted cicada shell to offer to the gods when she journeys to the provinces to join her old husband, the governor of Iyo.

29 The text gives no reason for his move, but the implication is perfectly clear from the context of the narrative. Genji is probably worried that the Third Princess will be exposed to view, since her women are so frivolous and inexperienced. The implication of his move also presents Murasaki in a favorable light.

30 It was believed that the cuckoo (*hakodori*, literally, “boxbird”) lived deep in the mountains and would come out to search for a nest at night, returning to the mountains in the early morning. It may be that the bird named *hakodori* was not actually a type of cuckoo.

31 *Kokinshū* 476 [also *Tales of Ise*, section 96] (Ariwara no Narihira, after glimpsing a woman's face through the curtains of a carriage at an archery contest on the riding grounds): “Alas that I must pass this day lost in melancholy thought, longing for someone that I have not yet seen, yet not not seen.”

XXXV

Wakana

Early Spring Greens: Part 2

KASHIWAGI UNDERSTOOD that Kojijū's response was completely reasonable, but he was annoyed all the same. *What an irritating thing to say! Really, now ... how can I possibly get by if my only consolation is a perfunctory response like this? Will there ever come a time when I might hear a word from the lady herself and speak to her with no intermediary?* It seems that his feelings about Genji, a man whom he normally honored and admired, were becoming perversely warped.

On the last day of the third month, a crowd of young gentlemen gathered at the Rokujō estate for an archery contest with small bows. Kashiwagi did not feel up to it, but in the end he decided to go, thinking it might make him feel better to view the blossoms at the residence of the woman for whom he yearned. It was customary for the courtiers serving the Emperor to follow up the official archery contest at the palace, which was always held on the eighteenth day of the first month, with a contest of their own during the second month. That event, however, had been postponed and regrettably could not be held at the palace during the third month due to the observance of memorial rites for Emperor Reizei's mother, Fujitsubo. Thus, when they heard that Genji would sponsor an equivalent contest at his estate, they assembled there. Tamakazura's husband and Genji's son, who were the Major Captains of the Left and Right, attended; because they were closely connected by their relationship with the houses of both Genji and Tō no Chūjō, it was agreed that their subordinate officers, all Middle and Lesser Captains, would make up the competing sides. Although a contest with the short bow had been announced, foot soldiers skilled at the long bow were present as well, and they were invited to take part in their own separate contest.

All of the courtiers who were proficient enough to participate formed two

staggered lines—the team of the Left in the front, the team of the Right in the rear—and for every round an archer from each team, starting with the Left, would step forward to shoot. As the sun began to set and twilight came on, the mist-covered scene imparted a restless atmosphere to this final day of spring, and in the swirling evening breeze the men found it increasingly difficult to leave the shade of blossoms. By this time, they were all quite inebriated.

“The rewards for the contestants are elegant and demonstrate the fine sensibilities of the ladies who selected them. It would be a shame if they were all claimed only by those archers skilled enough to hit a willow leaf a hundred times in a row. Where’s the interest in that? Let’s have some of the men who are a little less devoted to perfection compete against one another.”

So saying, the Major Captains stepped down into the garden followed by their subordinates. Just then Genji’s son noticed that Kashiwagi seemed more distracted than the others. Closely observing his friend’s demeanor with knowing eyes, he grew worried, thinking, *Kashiwagi is clearly not himself. An affair with the Third Princess would be an unmitigated disaster.* Even for close friends, these two men had an exceptionally warm relationship, exhibiting an unusual degree of mutual understanding and sympathy. Because they were sensitive to each other’s moods, no matter how trivial the concern, Genji’s son pitied Kashiwagi.

For his part, Kashiwagi observed Genji with a mixture of fear and shame. *These feelings of mine are not right, he lamented to himself. I have always tried to avoid behavior that others might censure as outrageous, even in the most mundane situations. If only I could have that cat for myself. I wouldn’t be able to tell it all my longings, but it would at least bring some comfort to my lonely life.* In his desperate obsession, he thought that he might try to steal the cat somehow. That, however, would be no easy task.

He went to see his sister, the Kokiden Consort, to see if speaking with her would help distract him from his longings. She behaved in an extremely prudent, retiring manner, making sure that he did not catch the slightest glimpse of her. It struck him that if his own sister was trained to keep her distance from him, in spite of their close family ties, then the carelessness of the Third Princess was truly unsettling. It crossed his mind that the Third Princess had not acted properly, but he was too smitten to think her flighty or frivolous.

Kashiwagi then called on the Crown Prince, thinking that if he could get a close look at the face of the half brother of the Third Princess he might see some family resemblance. Although the Crown Prince’s features were not radiantly handsome, he still possessed the distinctively refined grace that one expects in a man of his exalted position.

Now, the imperial cat had recently given birth to a large litter. Her kittens were given to various people and, as it turned out, the Crown Prince had been one of the recipients. When Kashiwagi saw the adorable kitten scampering about on the occasion of his visit, he immediately thought of the little cat at Rokujō. “Your sister, the Third Princess, has a cat with an unusually cute face—I happened to catch a glimpse of it,” he remarked to the Crown Prince who, being extremely fond of cats, asked for more details.

“It’s a Chinese cat,” Kashiwagi continued, trying to rouse the Crown Prince’s curiosity, “quite different from the one you have here. All cats are alike, of course, but this one is delightfully sweet-tempered and remarkably friendly.”

Kashiwagi, who once served as a page at the imperial palace, had been a favorite of Retired Emperor Suzaku, who often used him as a messenger. Though Suzaku had retired from the world, Kashiwagi remained in close service to his son, giving lessons on the koto among other things. The Crown Prince had the Akashi Princess, his consort residing in the Kirtsubo, contact the residence of the Third Princess with a request to bring the Chinese cat to him. His attendants were enthralled, remarking on how truly beautiful the animal was. Observing that the Crown Prince seemed inclined to keep the cat for himself, Kashiwagi called again a few days later.

“So many cats!” Kashiwagi remarked when he arrived. “Where’s that little one I saw?” When he found the kitten, he took it in his arms and stroked it affectionately.

“A charming-looking little creature,” the Crown Prince remarked, “but not nearly as sweet-tempered as you said ... perhaps it’s not used to the people here. It really isn’t all that superior to my other cats.”

“Generally speaking, cats don’t have the ability to tell one person from another, but the clever ones do seem to have some spark of awareness. I must admit, you do have superior cats, and so with your permission, I’d like to keep this one a little while.”

Privately, he couldn’t help feeling ridiculous by making such a request, but in the end he got the cat. He had it lie near him at night, and when morning came he would groom, pet and feed it. As the cat became more accustomed to being with him, it would tangle itself in the hems of his robes or snuggle warmly next to him when he was lying down. Kashiwagi grew genuinely fond of the animal. Whenever he was staring outside, leaning against a pillar near the veranda, lost in pensive thoughts, the little cat would come up to him and purr. He found it adorable at such moments and would stroke and pet it, thinking, *How persistent you are!* He smiled.

*I tamed you, taking you as a memento
Of the one I love in vain ... what is it then
That you seem to be telling me when you purr*

“We must share a bond from a past life.” He peered into the cat’s face, and it purred more endearingly than ever. He held it to his chest, in the folds of his robe, and stared off into the distance, his heart distracted. His ladies-in-waiting clucked in disapproval. “How strange that he should be so taken by this cat! He’s never shown any interest in animals before!” The Crown Prince asked him to return the cat, but he never did. He kept it and made it his companion.

Tamakazura continued to feel closer to Genji’s son, the Major Captain of the Right, than to any of her real brothers or sisters. She was by nature quick-witted and friendly, and because she received him warmly and without reserve whenever he called on her, he too felt an unusually close attachment to her—closer, in fact, than he felt to his true half sister, the Akashi Princess, who in her role as the Crown Prince’s Kiritsubo Consort had to keep her distance and behave formally around him.

The Major Captain of the Left was completely estranged from his former principal wife and now more than ever treated Tamakazura as his prized treasure. He was a little dissatisfied that she had given him sons only, however, and so he wanted very much to take in and raise his only daughter, the girl who had written that poem about her “beloved pillar of cypress.” Prince Hyōbu, the girl’s grandfather, would not hear of it and gave voice to his feelings on the matter. “I shall see to it that, unlike her mother, she will never be made a laughingstock.”

Prince Hyōbu’s reputation was beyond reproach, and as the uncle to Emperor Reizei, he was one of the most trusted advisers at the palace—a man whose petitions were never refused, since His Majesty would have felt bad denying anything to him. He was possessed of a modern, stylish sensibility, and only Genji and the Chancellor, Tō no Chūjō, enjoyed more support or greater esteem among the courtiers. Because of Prince Hyōbu’s position, his granddaughter’s reputation was not one that could be lightly dismissed. Moreover, the girl’s father, the Major Captain of the Left, was a man in line to assume the highest positions of power, and so there were many suitors who wanted her for a wife. Prince Hyōbu, however, could not decide what to do, in part because he was hoping that Kashiwagi might show some interest. Regrettably, Kashiwagi gave no indication that he was keen on marrying her—indeed, he seemed to think more of his cat. For her part, the young lady thought it a shame that her mother continued to suffer from her strange malady and that her behavior was so odd

that she had practically disappeared from court society. She very much longed to be closer to her stepmother, Tamakazura, who possessed a more worldly, up-to-date sensibility.

Now, as it turned out, Genji's half brother, Prince Sochinomiya, had remained a bachelor following the death of his principal wife. Because every courtship he had pursued to find her replacement had ended in failure, he began to think the world a dreary place and fretted that he was becoming an object of ridicule. Nonetheless, he also felt that it was improper for him to continue leading the indulgent lifestyle of a bachelor, and so he inquired about Prince Hyōbu's granddaughter.

"Well, now, why not Sochinomiya?" Prince Hyōbu remarked. "It seems that the next best thing to sending a young lady one cares for into service at the court is to marry her off to a prince of the blood. People nowadays assume that marrying off their daughters to some earnest, mediocre commoner is the only clever thing to do, but such thinking is vulgar."

So saying, he decided not to tantalize Sochinomiya, but accepted his proposal of marriage at once. Prince Sochinomiya was a little disappointed that things had been settled so quickly, leaving him no chance at all to enjoy the pleasure of voicing a lover's complaint. Given the prestige of Prince Hyōbu's house, however, he couldn't very well take back his proposal now, and so he began to call on the young woman, whose family welcomed him with unprecedented generosity and kindness.

Prince Hyōbu had many daughters. "They've been the cause of so many disappointments that I should have learned my lesson by now," he stated, "but still, I simply cannot ignore my granddaughter. Her mother is so eccentric and her condition just gets worse with each passing year. And that father of hers ... he never listens to a thing I say. It's heartbreaking the way he has so thoughtlessly abandoned her." With these considerations in mind, he made tremendous effort to personally ensure that her quarters were splendidly furnished and decorated and that all her needs were met.

Not a moment passed when Sochinomiya did not recall his late wife with a sense of nostalgia, and all he wanted was to find a woman who resembled her. Thus, even though he did not find fault with Prince Hyōbu's granddaughter, he was disappointed when he realized that she was no substitute for his lost love, and he seemed reluctant to visit her very often. Prince Hyōbu was shocked and upset by this unexpected turn of events. The young woman's mother may not have been in her right mind, but in those lucid moments when she came back to reality, she was filled with regret that her own peculiarity was responsible for her daughter's unhappy marriage. As for the young woman's father, the Major

Captain of the Left was not at all pleased, since he had opposed the match from the beginning. “I warned them all along,” he said. “Sochinomiya is simply too fickle and frivolous!”

Tamakazura, hearing rumors about the unhappy marriage of a young woman so close to her, wondered with a strange mix of sadness and amused relief how her adoptive father, Genji, and her real father, Tō no Chūjō, might have reacted had she married Sochinomiya and had he neglected her in the same way. *Even back then, she mused, it never occurred to me that I should want to be married to him. Whenever he communicated with me, his words were nothing if not sensitive and sincere, but, in the end, he no doubt disparaged me as someone unworthy.* The thought that he might think poorly of her had embarrassed Tamakazura for years, and she felt the need for caution now that Sochinomiya was likely gossiping about her to her stepdaughter.

As stepmother, Tamakazura did what she properly could to be of help. Using the young woman’s brothers as her messengers, she frequently asked after her in a most solicitous manner, all the while feigning ignorance of her difficult marital relationship. Sochinomiya felt sorry for his bride and certainly had no intention of abandoning her, but the young woman’s maternal grandmother nonetheless found his behavior unforgivable. She spoke as spitefully about Sochinomiya as she once had about Genji: “One would think that even if a Prince is unable to provide a lavish lifestyle for his wife, the least he could do is give her his undivided attention and not cause her any anxiety!”

When word of his mother-in-law’s grumbling reached Sochinomiya, he was taken aback and, yearning more than ever for his late wife, withdrew to the old villa they had once shared to brood in melancholy solitude. “I’ve never heard such talk as this before!” he exclaimed. “I had a wife who was dear to me in the old days, but that did not preclude occasional dalliances with other women, and I certainly was never subjected to such barbed criticism as this!” Even as such complaints were being exchanged, two years passed and the newly wed couple slowly grew accustomed to the arrangement—he did not abandon her, and she accepted his long absences.

Time is fleeting, and four more years went by as if in an instant. Genji was now in his forty-sixth year, while Emperor Reizei, who had entered the eighteenth year of his reign, was twenty-nine. He frequently spoke about his dreams for the future. “With no son to succeed me and with nothing to look forward to, I feel that the world has become a tedious place. I would rather live a peaceful, easy life with those I am close to, doing all the things my heart desires.” Then, following a serious illness that lasted several days, he suddenly abdicated. Everyone at court regretted his decision to step aside before his

glorious reign had reached its peak, but because the Crown Prince was now a young man, the succession went smoothly and the governance of the state experienced no discernible disruption.

With the ascension of a new sovereign to the throne, the Chancellor, Tō no Chūjō, submitted his resignation and went into retreat at his villa. “Life is uncertain,” he declared, “and when a sagacious Emperor abdicates, why should an old man feel any regrets about taking off his official cap and stepping down?” Tamakazura’s husband, the Major Captain of the Left, was promoted to Minister of the Right and took over the reins of government as Regent. His sister, the Shōkyōden Consort, had not lived long enough to see her son achieve his noble destiny as the new Emperor, and so she was promoted posthumously to the highest rank as Imperial Mother.¹ This gesture, however, did not mean all that much, since she had been relegated to obscurity during her lifetime. His Majesty’s first son by the Akashi Princess was named the next Crown Prince. This had been expected for a long time and yet, when the novitiate’s auspicious prediction was finally realized, it was still a cause for wonder. Genji’s son was promoted from Major Captain of the Right to Major Counselor,² and in that capacity his relationship with the Minister of the Right grew even more harmonious.

Genji was privately disappointed that Retired Emperor Reizei had not produced an heir to the throne. Of course, the new Crown Prince was Genji’s grandson, and so his relationship with the boy was the same as it would have been with any son of Reizei—still, he felt a sense of lonely regret. Because Reizei managed to complete his reign without giving any indication that he was troubled knowing the truth about his father, the secret of Genji’s great transgression had remained hidden. As things turned out, Genji and Fujitsubo were not destined to found an imperial line that would last for generations. Because he could speak to no one about his disappointment, he felt depressed.

The Akashi Princess had given His Majesty a large number of children, one after another, and was now the most highly favored woman at court. Some people were disgruntled that another woman from the Genji faction appeared destined to become Empress. Aware of such grumblings, the Umetsubo Empress pondered the kindness that Reizei had shown by elevating her to the highest rank, even though she had not given him a son, and she felt immense gratitude for all that Genji had done to support her over the years. As for Reizei himself, now that he no longer had official duties it was much easier for him to make excursions to the Rokujō estate, which he had long wanted to do; as a result, his life was much happier and more fulfilling.

His Majesty was concerned about the situation with his half sister, the Third

Princess. She was widely respected among the courtiers, but she had never been able to displace Murasaki in Genji's affections. If anything, Genji's love for Murasaki had grown stronger and their relationship more ideal as the months and years went by. Apparently, no sense of dissatisfaction ever came between them, though from time to time Murasaki would speak seriously to Genji about certain matters. "I've come to the point where I'd prefer the life of quiet religious devotion to this mundane life I'm leading. I'm at the age when I've experienced enough to know that this is all there is to this world. Please permit me to take vows."

"What a terribly cruel idea! I myself have a deep desire to take vows and retreat from the world, but because I worry that you might be lonely and that your life would be very different if I left you behind, I keep putting it off. If I should finally take that step, then of course you may choose to do as you like." So saying, he prevented her from acting on her wishes.

The Akashi Princess continued to think of Murasaki as her true mother, but the admirable humility that the Akashi lady demonstrated by toiling in obscurity to assist her daughter provided a sense of security for the future. As for her grandmother, the old nun's eyes were red from wiping away a constant flood of joyful tears, and she now served as an example of the happiness that can come with a long life.

With the appointment of his grandson as Crown Prince, Genji thought that the time had come to offer prayers of thanks to the deity at Sumiyoshi. Because the Akashi Princess would have to make the pilgrimage to offer the prayers, Genji opened the box that the novitiate had sent years earlier and examined the documents. There were numerous solemn vows of all sorts. The novitiate had promised that in exchange for granting his descendants lasting glory in this world he would offer the deity *kagura* rites of music and dance every year during the spring and autumn seasons. He had obviously assumed that only a man of Genji's wealth and power would be able to arrange for these offerings. The gracefully fluent lines of the novitiate's calligraphy displayed the old man's learning and discipline, and the wording of his vows, which Buddha and the gods were certain to heed, was clear and bright. Genji was greatly moved and awed as he looked over the documents, wondering how such ideas could have ever come to a simple hermit who had withdrawn from the world to live in the mountains. *Was he a holy man in a previous life, whose karmic destiny was to be reborn into this world in the temporary guise of the novitiate?* As Genji came to understand more and more how intertwined their fates were, he felt that he could no longer look down on the novitiate.

Genji kept the contents of the novitiate's vows a secret and pretended that he

was setting out on the pilgrimage for his own reasons. After all, even though he had long since fulfilled the vows that he had made at Sumiyoshi during that tumultuous period of exile in Suma and Akashi, he now enjoyed such high status, glory and honor that he could never forget the assistance he had received from the deity there. Murasaki would accompany him. News of his plans caused a sensation among the courtiers. He wanted to avoid making this an ostentatious event, and he did not want to inconvenience anyone, but there are limits to what someone in his position can do to keep things simple. Consequently, the pilgrimage proved to be a remarkably grand affair.

All of the high-ranking officials accompanied Genji except for the Ministers of the Left and Right, who by custom did not participate in such occasions. Ten Assistant Commanders from the six Guards Headquarters were chosen to be dancers—selected because they were all attractive-looking and about the same height. Some of the young officers were ashamed and unhappy that they had not been chosen. Genji summoned the best musicians who regularly participated in the festivals at Iwashimizu, Kamo and other shrines. In addition, he summoned two famous musicians from among the Palace Guards. A large number of men performed the *kagura* dances. His Majesty, the Crown Prince, and Retired Emperor Reizei all sent delegations to be in attendance and to serve Genji. The horses and saddlery of the high-ranking nobility had been carefully caparisoned in an infinite variety of ways; their grooms, escorts, pages, and even lower-ranking servants were all beautifully decked out, creating an unequaled spectacle.

The Akashi Princess and Murasaki were riding in the same carriage. The Akashi lady was following in the carriage behind them with her mother, the old nun. Because of her low status, the nun had boarded the vehicle discreetly, accompanied by the nurse who had served them in the old days at Akashi and thus knew all that had happened.³ The procession was magnificent, since all of the vehicles were exquisitely adorned—both the Akashi Princess and Murasaki had five carriages each for their ladies-in-waiting, while the Akashi lady's retinue consisted of three carriages.

“If your mother is to participate in this pilgrimage,” Genji had told the Akashi lady, “then she should enjoy the same privileges—enough to smooth out the wrinkles of old age.”

The Akashi lady, however, tried to discourage the idea.

“It would be an embarrassment to have her mingling with others amid the hubbub of such a public occasion. Perhaps when all of my father’s dreams have been realized ...”

Still, she worried that her mother did not have all that many years left to live,

and, since the old nun was so impatient and curious to see the event, the lady relented in the end and brought her along. Judging from the way the nun's life had turned out, it was evident that her destiny was more extraordinary than even those blessed from birth with glorious good fortune.

Because it was the middle of the tenth month, the kudzu vines twining about the sacred enclosure of the shrine had turned color;⁴ their reddish leaves were every bit as much a sign that autumn had ended as the sound of the rustling wind in the pine trees above them.⁵ The native music that accompanied the *Azuma*-style dances of the Eastern Provinces seemed familiar and more warmly appealing than the formal, sophisticated music from Korea or China. It resonated with the sounds of the waves and wind, and the notes of the flutes, which rose up to mingle with the soughing of the wind in the towering pines, were thrilling, since the combination of sounds created a mode different from what one would normally hear elsewhere. The rhythm was marked not by beating drums, but by plucking koto strings. Though the effect was not as grandly stirring as that produced by drums, it was exceptionally elegant and appealing and was made all the more delightful by the character of the setting. The musicians' robes had been dyed in a bamboo-stalk pattern using a rich *yamaai* green identical to the color of the pine trees, while their headdresses had been bewitchingly adorned with various flowers of different hues that were indistinguishable from the grasses of autumn. When the musicians reached the concluding section of the *Azuma* dance "The Lover I Seek," the more youthful of the senior officials stepped down to join in, slipping their outer cloaks off their right shoulders, as was the custom for this dance. When they did so, they suddenly revealed from beneath their somber black cloaks sleeves of maroon and purple that, together with the deep scarlet of hems soaked by a late autumn shower, called to mind a scattering of autumn foliage and drew the attention of the spectators away from the pine trees in the background. The dancers, who cut such splendid figures, decorated their headdresses with long, pure white plumes of withered reeds and performed one last turn of the dance before concluding and returning to their seats. All in all, it was a marvelous spectacle that the onlookers wished could go on forever.

As memories came to Genji, all the misfortunes he had experienced during the period of exile seemed as vivid to him as if they were happening again right before his eyes. Because there was no one with whom he could share such memories, he felt a wistful nostalgia for Tō no Chūjō, now the retired Chancellor, who had dared to visit him at Suma. He went back inside his carriage, then secretly sent a note to the nun in the second carriage behind him:

*Who else but you and I could truly know
Why we come to Sumiyoshi and pray
To pines alive since the age of the gods*

The poem was on the back of a piece of paper used for writing out a vow. The nun broke down and wept. She had lived to see her granddaughter achieve glory, but whenever she recalled that day when Genji left them on that shore in Akashi to go back to the capital—a time when her daughter was already pregnant with the Akashi Princess—she could not help but reflect on how wonderful her own destiny had been, underserved though it was. She longed for her husband, who had abandoned this world, and she was moved by all manner of sorrows. Nevertheless, her reply avoided any inauspicious words:

*On this day, it seems an old nun has learned
What fisherfolk at Suminoe know
That these inlets give abundant blessings*

She thought it might be bad form to be slow in answering Genji, so she simply wrote what came to mind. She then murmured another verse to herself:

*Seeing signs of blessings bestowed
By the god of Sumiyoshi
Could I ever forget the past*

The music and dances continued on through the night. A twentieth-night moon shone exceptionally clear, the surface of the sea was sublimely beautiful, heavy frost settled, turning the fields of pine white, and a penetrating chill created a profoundly moving aura of elegance and melancholy. Murasaki was not unaccustomed to seeing and hearing marvelous seasonal music and dances, since they were always being performed in her own garden, but she had hardly ever ventured outside her gates, and so she was amazed and enthralled by what she saw.

*The frost settles late at night on the pines
Of Suminoe like sacred garlands
Of white mulberry cloth bestowed by gods*

The scene brought to mind the morning snow that Lord Takamura alluded to in his poem with the line “Mount Hira as well,”⁶ and it made her feel increasingly confident that the offerings of *kagura* music and dance had been accepted by the

deity of Sumiyoshi.

The Akashi Princess replied:

*The frost that falls late at night hangs sacred ribbons
Of white mulberry cloth on sakaki branches
That priests take in hand and offer up to the gods*

Nakatsukasa, one of Murasaki's ladies-in-waiting, added the following:

*Do we not mistake it for the white cloth priests use
As sacred ribbons ... this frost that is a clear sign
The gods have truly accepted our offerings*

Many other poems followed these, but what purpose would it serve to recite them all here? As a rule, poems that are composed on occasions such as this—even those by men who consider themselves masters of the art—are never particularly distinguished or memorable. Given that the setting was Sumiyoshi, no one could escape clichéd allusions to thousand-year-old pine trees, and in failing to come up with something fresh and modern, the poems were tediously repetitious.

As the faint light of dawn gradually appeared, a deeper frost fell, and the *kagura* dancers, who were so drunk that they could no longer tell if they were singing the verse or the chorus, the harmony or the melody, were absorbed in the pleasures of the moment, oblivious to how their own faces looked. As the light from the cresset fires slowly waned, they continued long after the dance should have ended to wave wands adorned with leaves of *sakaki* and to shout out the words of the response chorus, “Ten thousand years ... ten thousand years!” The celebration was so auspicious that one could envision the fortune of Genji’s line lasting for generations, and the occasion as a whole was so pleasant that the revelers wished it could last for a thousand nights. The evening, however, soon gave way to dawn, and all of the young courtiers thought it a pity to have to return home. Their desire to stay on made them feel as though they were struggling against returning waves that kept them on those shores.

The colors of sleeves and hems, which could be seen when the breeze gently lifted the blinds of carriages lined up through fields of pine far into the distance, gave the appearance of a brocade of flowers spread beneath the shade of evergreens. Gentlemen of the court, each one dressed in a cloak designating by color the rank of the lord or lady he was serving, came bearing delightful-looking trays of food to those carriages, while lower-ranking servants, who were

not allowed to wear such cloaks, stared in amazement at the beauty of the display. Vegetarian fare, appropriate for a religious devotee, was brought out to the nun on a simple tray of unfinished aloeswood covered with bluish-gray paper. Servants could be heard murmuring, "She is truly a woman of astonishing good fortune."

The procession to Sumiyoshi had been a showy affair, and the party felt pressed by the burdensome duty to make offerings to the various gods along the way. On the return trip, however, they were free to travel as they liked and thoroughly enjoy the pleasures of sightseeing. It would be troublesome and tedious to recount all that took place on the way back to the capital, and so I shall forego setting down the details here. The only thing missing was the presence of the novitiate, who had withdrawn to a world where he would neither hear nor see such an event as this. It had certainly been a terribly difficult thing for him to do, but then again, it would have been awkward had he participated in the pilgrimage. Taking the novitiate as an example, it seemed to the people at the court that this was an age marked by high ambitions. And whenever people gossiped about "the Akashi nun," stunned and amazed as they were by her destiny, they would cite her as the very epitome of good luck. Indeed, Tō no Chūjō's uncouth daughter, the lady of Ōmi, would always intone "Akashi nun ... Akashi nun ..." whenever she was playing backgammon and needed a fortunate roll of the dice.

After taking his vows, Retired Emperor Suzaku had intently pursued his religious practices and paid no heed to goings-on at the palace. The only times that he thought about the past were when his son visited him on imperial excursions in the spring and autumn. The one worldly attachment from which he could not free himself was his lingering concern for the Third Princess; though he had entrusted Genji with looking after her affairs generally, he privately asked His Majesty to do what he could for her. As a result, she was promoted to the second rank, her stipends increased accordingly, and she enjoyed greater glory and prestige than ever.

As the years went on and the fortunes of the Third Princess and the Akashi lady rose, Murasaki was convinced that even though her own position had not declined, secured as it was by Genji's special devotion to her, his affection would inevitably wane because of her age. She was constantly preoccupied by the desire to take matters in her own hands and withdraw from the world before he abandoned her, but she could not bring herself to explicitly state her wishes, since she was mindful that it would be considered impertinent for a woman to speak out in that way. Because His Majesty was especially concerned about the welfare of the Third Princess, Genji would have felt sorry if the new Emperor

ever thought his sister was being neglected, and so gradually he began spending as many nights with his young wife as he did with Murasaki. While Murasaki accepted this arrangement as proper and reasonable, it still made her anxious to realize that her relationship with Genji had come to this—though she maintained the same old outward composure, never letting on that she was troubled. She devoted herself completely to raising the First Princess, His Majesty's oldest daughter and second child—after the Crown Prince—by his Kirtsubo Consort, the Akashi Princess. By assuming such responsibility, Murasaki was able to find some relief on those tedious nights when Genji was away. Indeed, all the imperial children were dear to her heart.

Hanachirusato envied Murasaki for having so many grandchildren to look after, and so she pressed the Major Counselor, Genji's son, for permission to raise his sixth daughter, Roku no kimi, who was born of the Principal Handmaid.⁷ The little girl had the most adorable air about her, and because she was clever beyond her years, Genji was fond of her as well. He had always fretted that he himself had had so few children, but now his family line had grown and spread, and he had so many grandchildren that just looking after them provided distraction from the boredom of his quiet life.

Tamakazura's husband, as Minister of the Right and Regent, visited the Rokujō estate more frequently than in the past and was now on friendly terms with Genji. Tamakazura herself had matured into a distinguished lady, and since she considered Genji's amorous feelings for her a thing of the past, she too would visit on appropriate occasions, meeting with Murasaki and engaging her in perfectly delightful conversations. Of all the women in Genji's life, the Third Princess was the only one who remained unchanged, an immature and careless young woman. Because he felt confident that he could leave his own daughter in the care of His Majesty, he felt very sorry for the Third Princess and was protective of her, treating her as if she were his young daughter.

Meanwhile, Suzaku was feeling anxious and lonely, sensing that his own death was imminent. He had resigned himself to his devotions with the intent of severing all attachments to this world, and yet he wanted to see the Third Princess one more time. Worried that he might have lingering regrets if he did not meet her, he sent a request to Genji asking him to arrange for her to visit without making a great show of the occasion. Genji set about making plans for the trip. "Your father's request is certainly proper and understandable," he told the Third Princess. "I suppose I really should have sent you to see him earlier and spared him the trouble of having to make this request. It makes me feel worse knowing that he has been waiting to see you."

Genji mulled over the situation. *She can't just go there on a whim ... there has*

to be some reason for her to make the visit. What sort of event would make the occasion look proper? It then occurred to him that Suzaku was coming up on his fiftieth year, and his daughter could bring him a gift of early spring greens. Preparations would be unusual, since priestly robes, simple vegetarian fare, and humble accoutrements would be required, and so Genji turned to his ladies for advice in making plans.

Suzaku had been very fond of musical diversions in the old days, and so Genji gave careful consideration to the selection of musicians and dancers, choosing only the most skilled. Among those he selected to be dancers were two of the Minister of the Right's sons and three of the Major Counselor's sons, one of whom was born of Koremitsu's daughter, the Principal Handmaid. Despite their tender age, each of these boys had been sent off to the court to serve as pages when they turned seven. In addition, Genji selected the young sons of Prince Sochinomiya and of other distinguished princes and nobility. Finally, he chose sons of courtiers serving at the palace, boys who were especially handsome and who could dance as well as their aristocratic peers. He then set about rehearsing a large number of dances. All of the participants recognized that this would be a special event, and everyone did his best to ensure that it would be a spectacular success. The master dancers and musicians were kept busy the whole time.

The Third Princess had from an early age learned to play the seven-string koto, but because she had been taken from her father when she was very young, Suzaku was anxious about her skills, since she would be compared to the other ladies at the Rokujō estate. "I would love to hear her play when she visits me. At the very least, she must have mastered the seven-string koto by now, what with Genji teaching her." He privately let his wishes be known, and when His Majesty heard about them, he remarked, "He's right; my sister's skills must be quite special by now ... I very much want to hear her myself when she performs before our father and exhibits her mastery." When all this was conveyed to Genji, he felt sorry for the Third Princess.

For years I've given her lessons at every opportunity, but while her skills have improved, just as her father and brother imagined they would, her technique lacks the depth and subtlety expected for a performance before His Majesty and Suzaku. It would be excruciatingly awkward for her if she were to go unprepared and they insisted on hearing her play for them. With those worries in mind, Genji turned all his efforts to tutoring her.

He gave special attention to two or three virtuoso pieces as well as several major works, imparting all of his secrets for producing overtones to convey the changing of the seasons or for setting modes that suggested coldness or warmth.⁸ Although the Third Princess did not seem confident at first, as she gradually

grasped the techniques he was teaching, she became quite skillful. “There are so many people bustling around in the daytime,” he told her, “that you are still self-conscious each time you try to produce a tremolo or create overtones, and so we’ll have to practice every night when things are quiet and settled.” During that period, he took his leave of Murasaki and spent all his time, day and night, tutoring the Third Princess.

Because he had never given lessons on the seven-string koto to either the Akashi Princess or to Murasaki, they were very curious about the rarely heard songs Genji and the Third Princess were practicing at the time. It was always difficult for the Akashi Princess to obtain permission to leave the palace, but she was so eager to hear the music that she was allowed to withdraw to the Rokujō estate—though His Majesty told her that she could only be gone for a short time. She had given His Majesty two children already, the Crown Prince and the First Princess, and she was pregnant again. Since she was in her fifth month, she was able to use the concern that her condition might defile the religious observances held during the eleventh month as an excuse to visit the Rokujō estate. When the eleventh month passed, His Majesty sent her message after message insisting she return. She felt envious thinking she might be missing the fascinating musical performances that took place every night in preparation for the upcoming celebration, and she resented her father, wondering why Genji had never taught such wonderful skills to her.

Unlike others, Genji had a deep appreciation for the sublime beauty of the moon on a winter night. Playing a koto tuned to a mode proper for the winter season, when radiant moonlight reflected off the snow, he would have the most musically talented of the Third Princess’s ladies-in-waiting take turns performing in concert on whatever instruments they preferred. As the end of the year approached, Murasaki was busy with preparations for the New Year’s celebrations. Because there were various tasks to see to—getting robes ready for the change of season and the like—she had to inspect them personally to make sure they were carried out. “How I would love to hear those performances on some balmy spring evening when I am at my leisure,” she remarked wistfully.

The New Year arrived. The celebrations of Retired Emperor Suzaku’s fiftieth year would start in the first month with magnificent events at the palace sponsored by His Majesty. Genji thought that it might prove awkward if the festivities he was planning conflicted with the celebrations at the palace, so he decided to postpone the Third Princess’s offering of early spring greens from the first month, when it would normally be held, to just after the tenth day of the second month. Accordingly, he assembled the musicians and dancers that he had selected and had them begin rehearsing diligently.

“Since my lady in the east hall is very eager to hear you play,” Genji said to the Third Princess, “I’d like to have the women here hold a concert ... you on your seven-string koto with others accompanying on the *biwa* lute and the thirteen-string koto. It seems to me that all of you are as skilled and talented as any of our present-day virtuosi. I myself have mastered hardly anything of the great tradition of music, but when I was young, I thought I wanted to learn all I could. I studied under prestigious masters and set about acquiring secret techniques from the best players among the nobility. Yet, for all my efforts, I never met anyone who seemed so remarkably skilled that I was awestruck by the depth of their knowledge and technique ... and younger musicians nowadays are so pretentious and mannered that their performances are really quite shallow in comparison to the past. That’s especially the case with the seven-string koto ... perhaps because so few people seriously study the instrument any more. I doubt if anyone has learned to play it as well as you.”

The Third Princess smiled ingenuously, happy to think that she had become good enough to garner such praise from him. She was about twenty-one or twenty-two, but still gave the impression of being hopelessly childish and immature. Her one attractive feature was her adorably thin, frail figure.

“Many years have passed since your father last saw you. You must prepare yourself so that when you meet him again he will see that you’ve matured into a splendid young woman.” Genji was always telling her that, and her ladies-in-waiting would look on as he did so thinking how right he was and how truly difficult it would have been for them to conceal her immaturity without someone like their lord looking after her.

As the twentieth day of the first month approached the skies were delightfully clear, the early spring breezes were warm and gentle, and the plum tree in the front garden of the southeast residence was in full bloom. The other flowering trees were also coming into bud, their faint hues mingling with the hazy mist that hovered all around. Genji sent Murasaki over to the main hall, which housed the quarters of the Third Princess. “Starting next month we will all be extremely busy with preparations,” he told her, “and if you have a concert with the Third Princess then, the gossips will just assume that I am having her practice. It would be best if you had the performance now, while things are still relatively quiet.” All of Murasaki’s attendants wanted to accompany her, but she chose only those with some knowledge or appreciation of music, even if they were a little older. She also chose four exceptionally lovely page girls and dressed them in the cherry-blossom style in white jackets lined with red over red outer robes. Their middle robes were of light purple, their trousers a swirled pattern, and their singlets, which had been fulled to a high gloss, scarlet.

The Akashi Princess's chambers in the main hall, which had been redecorated recently for the New Year, had a bright, lively charm, and each of her women vied to do her best to select outfits with a fresh, unrivaled appeal. Her page girls were also all dressed in the same manner—jackets in the sappanwood style of light brown lined with maroon over light green robes. Their outer trousers were made of Chinese damask, and their middle robes were also of Chinese weave in a rich mountain rose yellow.

The page girls accompanying the Akashi lady were more modestly attired—two of them wore jackets in the red plum style of red lined with purple, while the other two wore jackets in the cherry-blossom style. All four of them wore celadon green robes and middle robes of varying shades of light and dark purple with singlets fulled to an indescribably beautiful luster.

When she learned that all of these ladies would gather in the main hall for the concert, the Third Princess gave special attention to the appearance of her own page girls. She had them wear outer robes in the willow pattern of white lined with light green over robes of darker green tinged with yellow and middle robes of grape purple. Their outfits lacked originality, but they possessed a formal dignity and a refinement that was unequaled.

The sliding panel doors that partitioned the front aisle room in the main hall had been removed, and only standing curtains separated the groups of women. Genji's seat had been set up in the middle, flanked by curtains to his right and left. He had summoned two pages to sit out on the veranda and play wind instruments to set the pitch for the concert: the boy playing the pipes was Tamakazura's oldest son—the third son of her husband, the Minister of the Right—and the page playing the flute was the oldest boy of the Major Counselor, Genji's son. Cushions were lined up just inside the blinds under the eaves, and the instruments to be presented to each of the performers had been placed on them. Genji selected only the finest instruments, which had been stored in elegant indigo cloth covers, and had them brought out from the collection he reserved for his private use—a *biwa* lute for the Akashi lady, a Japanese-style six-string *koto* for Murasaki, and a thirteen-string *koto* for the Akashi Princess. Genji himself tuned the seven-string *koto* that the Third Princess always used in practice, thinking that it might be risky to have her use a superior instrument she was unaccustomed to playing.

"The thirteen-string *koto* usually remains taut and holds its pitch," Genji remarked, "but the bridges have a tendency to shift during a concert, and the performer has to be aware of that. And even if one *does* take that into consideration, women are generally incapable of stretching the strings tight enough. It's probably best to ask my son for assistance. Also, I'm rather doubtful

that our little pages here will be able to set and maintain the pitch.” He smiled and added, “So, yes, inform the Major Counselor that I require his presence here.” Hearing this summons, the women felt tense and embarrassed at the prospect of having to perform for such a distinguished gentleman. Genji was nervous as well, since all of the women, with the exception of the Akashi lady, had been his prized pupils, and he felt that they had to be very careful and perform impeccably in front of his son. He wasn’t all that concerned about his daughter, the Akashi Princess; as the Kiritsubo Consort she was accustomed to performing the thirteen-string koto in concert before His Majesty. The six-string koto, however, was a different matter—it wasn’t as complicated to tune, but then again, there were no set guidelines for how to play it in concert, which made it more difficult for a woman to follow along. He would feel very sorry for Murasaki if she went astray and was unable to harmonize her koto with the notes of spring produced by the others.

The Major Counselor seemed tense as well. The ladies were all distinguished, and he was feeling greater pressure for the event today than he did when he had to participate in a formal rehearsal in front of His Majesty. Arriving just after sunset, he cut a dashing figure, carefully groomed and dressed in a striking court cloak and scented robes with richly perfumed sleeves. Against the backdrop of the twilit sky, which seemed to foreshadow what was to come, the white plum blossoms were blooming in such profusion that it made one think that last year’s snow was lingering on. The indescribable fragrance of various perfumes wafting on the gentle breezes from inside the blinds mingled with the scent of the plum blossoms to create a sweet aroma that would surely entice the warbler.⁹ Genji pushed the thirteen-string koto out under the blinds so that the end protruded a little and said to the Major Counselor, “I’m sorry to trouble you with such a trivial task, but could you please tighten the strings and then tune the instrument? It’s for one of the ladies here, and I can’t very well ask a stranger to do it.” His son bowed in deep respect and dutifully took up the instrument, handling it with admirable care as he tuned the tonic string to the *ichikotsu* mode.¹⁰

When he did not play right away, however, Genji pressed him.

“At least give us a little prelude to check your tuning—just one song—and don’t be halfhearted about it.”

“I don’t think that I’m skillful enough to be included in the concert today,” his son modestly demurred.

“You may be right,” Genji laughed, “but you’ll regret it if you gain a reputation as a man who failed to perform because he was no match for female musicians!”

The Major Counselor completed tuning the koto, played a prelude most

charmingly, and returned the instrument. Meanwhile, Genji's grandsons, looking precious in their robes, were playing the pipes and flute; though they were still young, their delightful performance gave promise of future greatness.

When the instruments were tuned at last and the concert began, all of the ladies showed exceptional talent—though it must be said that the Akashi lady was especially skillful on her *biwa* lute. Her venerable style of playing produced a lovely clarity of tone that stood out. The Major Counselor listened with rapt attention as Murasaki played the six-string koto, combining an unusual, modern plucking technique in her right hand with more traditional fingering in her left to produce a warm, gently alluring effect. He was startled to hear the Japanese koto played in this manner, for it was a style every bit equal to those displayed by affected masters of the art whose performances of songs and modes strove to dazzle. Genji, his anxieties dispelled, felt a tremendous sense of gratitude toward her, since it was evident from the elegance of her playing just how deeply to heart she had taken his exhortations to practice.

The thirteen-string koto, which the Akashi Princess was playing, has a distant, reserved quality that emerges through the musical rests of the other instruments, producing a fresh, elegant effect. The Third Princess's performance was still immature, but since she was at the very height of her training with Genji, it was crisply assured and harmonized well with the others. The Major Counselor found it gracefully accomplished. He kept rhythm and began to sing solfège in accompaniment. His father also joined in from time to time, tapping out the beat with his fan. If anything, Genji's voice was much finer than in the past, a little huskier and more distinguished. His son was equally blessed with a superior singing voice, and as the night deepened and grew still, the concert was indescribably pleasant.

The moon rises late during this part of the month, and so Genji had lanterns hung around the space to provide just the right amount of lighting for the occasion. Peeking in through the curtain at the Third Princess, he thought her sweetly attractive. She was much slighter in build than most women, and it seemed to him that there was nothing to her but a set of robes. She lacked the lustrous quality of a mature woman, though she did possess the refined charm of highborn nobility. Indeed, she gave the impression of a willow tree just barely beginning to send forth fresh shoots around the tenth day of the second month, its drooping branches so slender they looked as though the breeze from a warbler's wings might be enough to toss them about. Her hair cascaded down to the left and right over her white robe lined with red, further calling willow fronds to mind. She seemed the very image of a woman of the highest rank, and yet ...

His daughter, the Akashi Princess, certainly shared that same quality of refinement, but her beauty was now enhanced a little with the glow of full womanhood. Her demeanor and looks had an appealing allure that imparted an elegant, courtly grace. To Genji, she was like a luxuriant cluster of wisteria blooming on into the summer, bathed in dawn light with no other flower to rival her. Now in the seventh month of her pregnancy, she was quite visibly heavy with child, and because she was feeling uncomfortable, she had pushed her koto away and leaned on her armrest for relief. She too was slight of build and supple, and because the armrest was a normal size, it looked as though she had to stretch up just to recline on it—a rather pathetic-looking sight that made him wish he had had a smaller one made for her. Her hair was swept out exquisitely over her outer robe, which was red lined with purple, and her figure looked incomparably beautiful in the light of the lanterns.

Murasaki had on a dark-colored robe—was it a shade of purple?—and over that a long gown of light brown lined with maroon. Her thick tresses fell in soft undulations over her robes, her figure was ideally proportioned, and it seemed as if her lambent, fragrant beauty illuminated the very space around her. If he were to compare her to a flower, he supposed it would be to a cherry blossom—and yet she was so much lovelier than any flower.

One might have expected the Akashi lady to be overwhelmed by such distinguished company, but that was not the case. In looks and bearing she seemed to possess a refinement that put one to shame, an intriguing sensibility and an ineffable grace and vivacity. She wore a long robe, white lined with green, over a robe in a matching color—was it a light bud green? In acknowledgment of her lower status, she wore a modest train of silk gauze, but her looks and character were so admirable that no one could ever look down on her. It was a mark of her modesty that she did not sit directly on her cushion, which was trimmed with a border of the finest green Korean brocade, but simply rested her knees on it with her *biwa* lute out in front of her. Her technique with the plectrum, which she used so gently that it barely touched the strings, created a curious sense of intimacy that made watching her performance even more pleasant than listening to it. She put Genji in mind of the fragrance of a branch of mandarin orange during the fifth month, heavy with flowers and fruit.¹¹

As the Major Counselor listened to the concert and sensed the presence of each of the women performing with such propriety, he was curious and very much wanted to see inside the curtains. His heart was aroused at the thought of seeing Murasaki, who had no doubt matured and was even lovelier than that day of the tempest when he caught a glimpse of her. Then there was the Third Princess. *If only our destinies had been a little different, I might have had her for*

myself. How fainthearted I was! Her father often dropped encouraging hints and even mentioned privately to others that I would have been a suitable match. With such thoughts running through his mind, the Major Counselor was annoyed with himself until he recalled the signs that he had observed of her immaturity and carelessness. While he did not think less of her for those flaws, he had never been seriously attracted to her either. His interest in Murasaki, however, was a different matter. Because he had spent so many years yearning for her from afar—though, of course, his feelings were in no way improper—he sighed in regret that he had had no choice but to maintain their relationship as stepmother and stepson and was thus never able to give expression to his admiration and love. Despite his frustration, he managed to suppress his feelings and never did anything rash or untoward.

As the night deepened, the air grew chill. The late rising moon of the nineteenth—the moon one must wait for while lying down—was pale and ghostly.

“It’s rather wan and inadequate, is it not ... this misty moon on a spring night?” Genji said. “When music is performed during the melancholy of autumn, the notes weave together with the chirring of crickets to produce indescribably moving overtones.”

“In the moonlight of a clear autumn evening,” Genji’s son replied, “everything is illuminated, and the notes of a koto and flute sound bright and clear. The appearance of such a sky, however, can seem contrived, as if it were made expressly to serve as the setting for a musical diversion, and the clarity of the scene draws the eye to the dew clinging to various flowers, distracting the heart so that it may not fully or deeply appreciate the music. Why should a concert in which the sound of a flute mingles softly beneath the indistinct light of the moon peeking through the mists of a spring sky be thought inferior to music played in autumn? The notes of the flute do not rise up any more clearly or beautifully in the autumn. People of old insisted that women are more in sympathy with the spring, and I, for one, am inclined to accept their wisdom on the matter. Music achieves an especially warm, gentle harmony on an evening in spring.”

“Here we go again ... the old argument about which is better, spring or autumn,” Genji remarked. “We who live in a late, degenerate age are not likely to answer a question that people have been unable to resolve since antiquity. When it comes to songs and modes, though, you do have a point ... the *richi* mode of autumn is not as valued as the *ryō* mode of spring.”

“Still, I suppose that debate is neither here nor there,” Genji continued. “His Majesty frequently summons gentlemen famous for their musical talents to

perform for him, but the number of truly superior musicians seems to be declining—a trend that makes one wonder if the masters those gentlemen look up to are really all that adept or knowledgeable. The women who have performed here tonight may be amateurs, but if they were to play in concert with some of the more renowned musicians, I very much doubt that you would be able to discern all that great a difference between them. Then again, I have spent so much time hidden away from the court that perhaps my ear for music is not what it was. It would be a shame if that were so. In any case, it amazes me that this place has such talented people who, after even a short period of practice, can become extraordinarily skilled at almost any art. So tell me, how do you think they would compare with those masters who are selected to perform before His Majesty?”

“I was thinking I should say something about that very thing,” his son replied, “though I worry I might sound pretentious, given how little I know of the subject. I have not heard some of the great masters of the past you mentioned, but it seems to me one might look to Kashiwagi on the six-string koto and Prince Sochinomiya on the *biwa* lute as extraordinary masters in our time. And yet, even though they are truly exceptional, I was startled that the performers I heard tonight were every bit their equal. Did I react that way because I was tense? After all, I came here not very well prepared, thinking it would be an informal concert. It proved very difficult for me to accompany them by singing the notes of the scale. With regard to the six-string koto, the retired Chancellor, Tō no Chūjō, is special in that he alone can produce tones exactly as he wants, using all of his techniques to make them appropriate to the occasion. Usually that particular instrument is rather inconspicuous in a concert, but the way it was played tonight was really quite special.”

Hearing these words of praise, Genji said, “Come, now, it wasn’t all that impressive. You’re being excessively polite with your praise, aren’t you?” He smiled, a self-satisfied expression on his face. “It is true, though, that my pupils aren’t all that bad … I shouldn’t really speak about the performance of the *biwa* lute, of course, but I must say that just being here at the estate has made a difference for her. When I first heard my Akashi lady play the instruments in the provinces, I was amazed to hear such a marvelous tonal quality produced in such an unlikely place … since then, she has only gotten better and better.”

His ladies exchanged brief, knowing glances as they heard him boast about himself, taking credit where it was not due.

“When trying to master any art,” Genji continued, “one comes to realize there are a limitless number of approaches, and it’s very difficult to learn enough to completely satisfy oneself. But perhaps that way of thinking isn’t relevant these

days, since no one seems to study anything deeply any more. I suppose a person who has managed to gain adequate skill in some aspect of an art is justified in feeling a sense of pride for having acquired a little talent, but is that really such an achievement? Take the seven-string koto, for example ... a complex instrument that demands careful attention. People in antiquity who learned to play it as it was truly meant to be played were able to charm all of Heaven and Earth and calm the hearts of gods and demons. All other instruments have followed its lead, and there have been many cases where those who achieved mastery gained fame and fortune by giving joy to those in deep sorrow or bringing high status to those who were lowly and poor.¹² Those who sought to acquire a deep understanding of the instrument in those days long before knowledge of how to play it was transmitted to our land had to spend many years in unknown countries ... and even then, though they were devoted to studying it with no regard for themselves, they found it difficult to master. There were certainly examples in ancient times of people who, by their music, were clearly able to move the moon and stars in the heavens, to cause unseasonal snow to fall or frost to settle, or to call up thundering clouds. Given all there is to learn, people who can play it as it is meant to be played are rare indeed. I suppose that's because we live in the corrupt world of the latter age of Buddha's law.

"But tell me ... where can you find even a little of the secret teachings of the ancients? The seven-string koto originally captivated the ears of gods and demons and moved them, but then came people who trained halfheartedly, who failed to master it as they had expected and thus did not achieve fame and glory. Consequently, it came to be considered a flawed and overly troublesome instrument. Is that why there is now hardly anyone to carry on the tradition? The situation is truly lamentable. For if you take away this instrument, what else would you rely on to know how to adjust the tuning for all the others? In a world where everything seems to be in a state of decline, one would have to be strange and eccentric indeed to go off on one's own and pursue one's dream, leaving parents and children behind to go wandering through Korea and China like Toshikage. So why not learn the very basics—at least what you need to know to journey along the way of this instrument? The difficulty of learning to play a single mode thoroughly is immeasurable; what's more, there are many modes and numerous songs. Still, back when I was young and my heart was eagerly set on learning all I could, I scoured every score that had been brought to this land and studied so thoroughly that eventually there was no one left who could teach me anything. Yet I know that I am no match for the masters of antiquity. What's worse, it makes me sad to realize that there's no one after me to pass on what

I've learned to later generations." After hearing his father's disquisition on music, the Major Counselor felt both regret and shame.

"If any of the young princes born of my daughter should grow up with a talent for music, as I hope," Genji continued, "and if I live long enough, I shall teach them all I know about music when they reach the appropriate age ... though, as I admitted, I don't know all that much. The Second Prince already seems to show some ability."

The Akashi lady felt deeply honored, and her eyes welled with tears when she heard him speak like this about her grandson.

The Akashi Princess yielded her thirteen-string koto to Murasaki, then reclined to rest. Murasaki in turn pushed her six-string koto in front of Genji, and together they performed the *saibara* "Kazuraki" in an informal style that was bright and appealing. Genji's voice, as he sang the lyrics a second time, was inexpressibly charming and auspicious-sounding. The moon gradually rose, the color and fragrance of the blossoms seemed more attractive than ever, and the scene was the very essence of courtly beauty.

The Akashi Princess's touch on the thirteen-string koto had produced gentle, dulcet tones, and the deep resonance and extreme clarity of her notes showed traces of her mother's influence. Murasaki's performance was striking when she played in concert with Genji and the Third Princess; her touch, calm and appealing, enchanted her listeners and made them feel strangely exhilarated. Her ornaments—her glissando, or her rapid, light strokes along the lower strings—all produced accomplished tonal colorations. When she reached the section where the modes change, her shift from the major *ryō* to the minor *richi* created a familiar, stylishly modern effect.

Of all the styles of playing the five modes of the seven-string koto, the one in which the fifth and sixth strings must be plucked requires supreme concentration, but the Third Princess acquitted herself very well, to Genji's relief, and her notes were precise and clear. The mode they had been playing was a neutral one, appropriate to any subject, spring or autumn, and she made the proper transitions to play in harmony. She was attentive and did not stray from anything Genji had taught her. He was delighted and proud at how well she had grasped his instructions.

The little boys had played superbly, putting their hearts into their performance, and Genji thought them adorable.

"You two must be sleepy," he said. "I intended to keep the concert this evening brief and not let it drag on, but it was hard for me to stop ... everyone played so wonderfully that I wanted to keep listening to determine who was best. But my ears weren't good enough to make a clear judgment, and, while I

dawdled, the hour grew very late. It was thoughtless of me, and I'm sorry."

The one who had played the pipes—the son of Tamakazura and the Minister of the Right—was now ten years old, and so Genji offered him the winecup and draped one of his own robes across the boy's shoulder. The other boy, who had played the flute, was a little younger, and so Murasaki tactfully presented him with long woman's robe in a woven pattern and trousers without making a great show of it. The Third Princess presented the Major Counselor with a winecup and a set of women's robes. When she did, Genji complained, "This is most irregular! I should think that you would reward your teacher first. Ahh ... the cruel ingratitude!"

Immediately, a flute was presented to him through the Third Princess's curtain. He smiled and took it. It was an exceptionally fine Korean flute. Although everyone was just about to retire for the night, Genji tried playing a few notes on it, and when he did the Major Counselor could not resist. He took up the flute that his little boy had been playing and performed a magnificent piece that was so elegant it made Genji realize his own genius for music—after all, he had trained all of the accomplished musicians gathered around him that evening.

The Major Counselor had the two boys get in his carriage, and together they returned home in the clear light of the moon. Along the way, the sounds of Murasaki's unusually splendid performance on the koto lingered in his ears, and he thought of her longingly. His principal wife, Kumoinokari, had received lessons from Princess Ōmiya, but she had been separated from her grandmother before she had the chance to master the instrument and, consequently, was unable to perform with any ease. She was even embarrassed to play for her husband, despite having grown up with him. Though Kumoinokari was gentle and openhearted, looking after their many children left her little time for herself, and thus Genji's son found her lacking in those talents that would make her alluring. Indeed, she seemed most attractive and fascinating to him when she was angry or jealous.

Genji retired to the east hall that evening, while Murasaki stayed behind to talk with the Third Princess. She did not return to her quarters until it was nearly dawn, and they slept until the sun was high. "The Third Princess is rather adept at the seven-string koto, don't you think? What did you make of her performance?"

"The first time I overheard her playing I was a little concerned," Murasaki replied, "and wondered how she would do. But now she's quite accomplished ... it's almost as if she's a different person. Of course, that's to be expected. After all, you've been spending all of your time with her."

“Yes, you’re right, she *has* improved. I’ve been a responsible tutor, leading her by the hand every step of the way. The seven-string koto is a demanding and troublesome instrument to learn, which is why I’ve not bothered teaching it to the other women. However, both Suzaku and His Majesty have indicated that they expect me to teach her at least this much, and when I heard what they said, I felt sorry and decided that this was the least I could do for her, since Suzaku chose me specifically to be her guardian and placed her in my care.

“Back when you were still a child, before I took you as my wife,” Genji continued, “I looked after you carefully as well. However, it was hard to find free time in those days, and I was never able to give you special attention and teach you at my leisure. More recently, I seem to be distracted by one thing or another and have let the time slip away without ever taking a moment to listen to you play ... you brought honor to me by performing so flawlessly last night. The look of surprise and admiration on my son’s face made me happy. The concert was all that I had hoped it would be.”

She was exceptionally talented, and she handled her duties looking after His Majesty’s children with great maturity despite Genji’s marriage to the Third Princess. In short, she was perfect in every way. Because she was such a rare, remarkable figure, who gave him absolutely no cause for complaint or worry, he felt a little ill at ease thinking her perfection might be inauspicious, since he knew of many examples of accomplished people who did not live long. Having been with women of so many varied personalities and temperaments, he was certain that when all of her virtues were taken into account, she was incomparable. She would be thirty-seven this year—the same age Fujitsubo was when she died.

Thinking back over all the years they had been together, he was deeply moved.

“Give special attention to your prayers this year ... thirty-seven is an unlucky age, and you must take care. I shall be preoccupied with my responsibilities and may be inattentive at times, and so you really must look after these things yourself. If you are going to commission any major prayer services, then please leave the planning to me. It’s a shame that your great-uncle, the bishop, is no longer with us. He was an enlightened man who could have been relied on to handle such things for you.

“From the time I was born, I was shown special favor, I grew up in splendor, and few others have ever experienced the honors that I’ve been granted in this world. Even so, I have also experienced more exquisite sorrows than most. To begin with, I’ve lost many people who were dear to me, and, having been left behind in my later years, I continue to suffer from much disappointment and

grief. I feel strangely anxious about the sins I've committed, and yet, perhaps because I've been afflicted by my restless nature over the years, I've come to realize that in recompense for all those worries, my life has been longer than I ever expected it would be. In your case, however, I believe that you have never experienced anything that brought serious turmoil to your heart ... except, of course, for the time when my exile took me away from you. Even the most distinguished women, from the Empress on down, have experiences that cause worry. The tensions that come with having to mingle with other noble women, competing against them, never knowing a moment's peace ... those women never know the tranquility you have enjoyed, the tranquility of living with someone who has been like a father to you. From that perspective, you do know that your destiny has been exceptionally fortunate, do you not? I know that it must have been an unpleasant shock when I brought the Third Princess here, but since this is a personal matter for you, perhaps you haven't noticed how much my affection for you has grown since she arrived. You are so deeply sensitive to everything, surely you understand at least that much."

"Just as you say," Murasaki replied, "it appears that I have a reputation among outsiders as someone who has enjoyed good fortune disproportionate to my precarious status. Still, I also carry unbearable sorrows in my heart ... perhaps my unhappiness tempers my good fortune and thus has been more effective in extending my life than any prayer I might offer." It seemed as if she had more to say, but she was too embarrassed to go on in this vein. Instead, she added, "If I may speak seriously, I have a feeling that I have little time left to live, and I'm very anxious at the prospect of making it through the year while pretending that there is nothing to my premonition. I have mentioned time and again my desire to take religious vows; if you could somehow see your way to granting me permission..."

"I simply cannot allow such a thing," Genji cut her off. "My life would be meaningless if you were to leave me behind in this world. We may have passed these months and years together doing nothing all that special, but there's been no greater joy in my life than simply being with you day and night. In the end, you'll see just how extraordinary my feelings for you are." She was hurt that he gave the same answer as always. Seeing her eyes fill with tears, Genji felt terribly sorry and tried to console her by turning to other subjects.

"I have not known that many women in my life, but, all the same, I have come to understand that every woman possesses some merit or virtue. I have also come to realize that those who possess a truly calm, gentle disposition are few and far between. I was married to the mother of my son when I was just a boy, and while I considered her a woman of distinguished birth that I had to honor

and respect, we never got along. By the time she passed away, we were alienated from one another ... even now, when I think about our relationship, I am filled with pity and regret. The situation wasn't entirely my fault, but I will keep the memory of the details to myself. She was proper and dignified, and so in that respect I never felt dissatisfied with her. And yet—how shall I say it?—I found her too inflexible, too serious and reserved, a little too clever for her own good. While I could rely on her as a wife, as an intimate companion she was impossible.

"Then there was the lady at Rokujō ... the mother of the Umetsubo Empress. She is the first one I think of when I look for an example of a woman of extraordinary refinement and deep sensibility. Seeing her, however, was awkward, and our relationship was fraught and vexing. She was no doubt justified in resenting my behavior toward her, but eventually she became so obsessive, so deeply bitter that it was much too painful to bear. I felt embarrassed, never able to relax when we were together ... and because we were both always too conscious of what others might think about us to ever comfortably engage in normal intimacy, I thought that if I got too close or let down my guard, she would despise me. And, to the extent that I put up a front for the sake of appearances, we eventually grew estranged from one another. It was pitiful how she grieved over the ignominy of having her reputation ruined over that notorious business ... and, to tell the truth, when I considered her status, I felt that it was my fault. In the end, in order to console her, I made a promise to look after her daughter. Of course, the Umetsubo Empress was destined by her karma to rise to her position of glory, but I supported her, paying no heed to the criticism and resentment that I faced at court. I would hope that her mother, who has gone on to the next world, has changed her opinion and thinks better of me as a result. There are so many things past and present that I regret about my impulsive heart."

Little by little, he spoke about other women in his past.

"At first, I looked down on the Akashi Princess's mother and considered her a dalliance because of her low status, but the fathomless depths of her heart are impossible to plumb. She may appear docile and meek, but hidden beneath the surface is an unyielding sense of propriety that can be rather daunting."

"Since I never met the first two women," Murasaki said, "I can say nothing about them. Naturally, there have been occasions when I had an opportunity to observe the Akashi lady—though we've never met directly face-to-face—and her tremendous reserve *was* discomfiting. I, on the other hand, am rather excessively open, and so I felt embarrassed, wondering how I must have come across to her. I only hope that her daughter looks on me with more indulgent

eyes."

Considering just how much Murasaki had once resented the Akashi lady as an outrageous upstart, Genji admired her for now forgiving and associating with her formal rival out of a purehearted wish to do what was best for the Akashi Princess.

"Despite your exceptional qualities," Genji told her, "you are not above hiding your thoughts and feelings in the recesses of your heart ... though you always manage to exercise great tact and say just the right thing depending on the person or the situation. Of all the women I've ever known, there is absolutely no one like you. When you get jealous, though, it shows quite clearly in your demeanor." He smiled as he spoke.

That evening, he decided to go over to the quarters of the Third Princess. "I must go tell her how pleased and grateful I was with her performance."

It never occurred to the Third Princess that anyone might resent her; young and utterly guileless, she put all her heart into practicing the seven-string koto. "I hope that now you will permit me some time off to rest," Genji told her. "Your teacher needs a break. All those days of hard work have paid off for you, and you are accomplished enough that I don't have to worry." He pushed the koto away and retired to the bedchamber.

On those nights when Genji was away, Murasaki made it a habit to stay up late and have her ladies-in-waiting read stories to her.

These old romances are told as if they're examples of events that really happened in the world, she mused, and so many of them seem to focus on a woman involved with a man who is either faithless, lascivious, or torn between two women ... though things always work out for her in the end. How strangely unsettled my life has been compared to these stories! Genji may be right to say that I have been exceptionally fortunate, but am I fated to have to live the rest of my life with frustrations and longings that others would find unbearable? How terrible that would be!

Mulling over these concerns, she went to bed very late that night. Shortly after dawn, she began to experience pains in her chest. Her women did what they could to help her, and asked if they should notify Genji of her condition. Murasaki would not let them, insisting that it was nothing serious. She put up with the intense pain until the full light of morning, her body feverish and flushed. Although she was ill, Genji did not come over to her quarters right away, and her attendants couldn't inform him of her condition so long as he tarried in the main hall.

A message arrived from the Akashi Princess. When she learned from the reply that Murasaki was seriously ill, she was shocked and informed Genji. Alarmed,

his own chest feeling tight and constricted, he rushed over to the east hall. She appeared to be in great pain. "How are you feeling?" he asked. When he touched her, she was burning hot, and he was terrified as he recalled that just yesterday he had warned her about the dangers of her thirty-seventh year and told her that she would have to take precautions to protect herself. Food was brought in for him, but he didn't even look at it. He stayed by her side the whole day and, in his grief, did everything he could for her.

Days passed during which Murasaki was unable to take a bite of food or rise out of bed. Genji, who was in a panic and frantic at the thought of what might become of her, commissioned numerous prayers. He also summoned priests and had them perform esoteric healing rites. The cause of her illness was unclear, but she was in terrible distress, and the pain she suffered when her chest was seized with spasms seemed unbearable. Although many different rituals were performed continuously for her, none of them had any effect. No matter how grave an illness may appear, one can take heart so long as there is some indication that the patient is recovering. Genji, however, could see that Murasaki was not improving, and he felt terribly distraught and sad; he could barely think about anything else. As a result of this crisis, the Rokujō estate, which had been echoing with the bustle of preparations for the banquet to honor Suzaku, grew quiet. Suzaku himself sent numerous messages expressing his condolences and inquiring after her health.

The second month passed with no change in her condition. Grief-stricken beyond words, Genji decided to have Murasaki moved to his old villa at Nijō, thinking that a change of scenery might help. The Rokujō estate was badly shaken, and many people there grieved over the situation. Retired Emperor Reizei was saddened by the news, as was Genji's son, who did everything he possibly could to help. The Major Counselor was fully aware of his father's stated intention to withdraw from the world should Murasaki die, and so he saw to it that special services were commissioned in addition to the prescribed esoteric rites already being performed.

In those intervals when her suffering eased a little and she was lucid, Murasaki spoke only of her resentment. "It's cruel of you to deny my request," she would implore Genji. Despite her pleas, however, the prospect of having to watch with his own eyes, if only for an instant, as she willingly donned the robes of a nun and renounced the world struck him as sadder and more regrettable than being parted from her by death. Thus, he could not bring himself to grant her request, but would merely repeat his reasons for denying it: "For a long, long time I've wanted to take vows myself, but the pain that I felt at the thought of how lonely you would be were I to leave you behind has held me back, and I

have let time pass without acting on my true wishes. And now here you are, apparently wanting to desert me instead!"

As she continued to weaken, it was hard for him to believe that there was any hope for recovery. Many times it looked as if she were on the verge of dying and, in his distress, he wavered, uncertain what he should do. Should he accede to her request? He was so preoccupied with caring for Murasaki that he did not go back to his Rokujō estate even for a brief visit to be with the Third Princess. He lost interest in music, his instruments were stored away, and all of the members of his household gathered at the old Nijō villa. Only his other ladies remained behind at Rokujō, which now seemed dark, as if a light had been extinguished. It was apparent that Murasaki's presence alone had brightened the estate.

His Majesty's Kirtsubo Consort, the Akashi Princess, arrived and assisted Genji in caring for his beloved. Despite her suffering, Murasaki managed to voice some of her concerns. "Malignant spirits are frightfully dangerous to a pregnant woman ... you must hurry back to the palace at once." Seeing the darling little girl that the Consort had brought with her, Murasaki broke down and wept bitterly, saying, "I shall never see you grow to womanhood. And you will have no memory of me!" The Consort was so deeply moved that she found it hard to hold back her own tears.

"This won't do at all," Genji admonished Murasaki. "Such ominous thoughts will bring misfortune. In any case, you are not as ill as all that. How things turn out for a person depends on one's state of mind. Fortune smiles on those who have a kind and magnanimous character, while those whose spirits are pinched and guarded are never able to relax or feel at ease, even if karmic destiny has blessed them with high rank and status. I can point to numerous examples of restless, impetuous people who've been unable to last very long, while those who are calm and gentle live to old age." He prayed to Buddha and the gods, fervently telling them of her extraordinarily virtuous character and averring that her sins were slight.

The ascetics who performed the esoteric healing rites, the priests who were in attendance at night, and the eminent prelates in service nearby were all able to gather from Genji's words and behavior the extent of his torment. Moved by intense pangs of sympathy for him, they roused themselves to pray with all their hearts. There were times when, for five or six days at a stretch, she would seem to be a little better—but then her condition would worsen again. Months went by with no indication of when her suffering would end, and Genji was left to grieve, wondering how things would turn out and doubting if his beloved would ever recover. No malignant spirit emerged to announce itself, and so it was not at all

clear what was causing her illness. She appeared only to weaken further with each passing day, and his heart had no respite from his terrible sorrow and anxiety.

I must now turn back to Kashiwagi, who had been promoted to the post of Middle Counselor in the interval since I last spoke of him. Being a trusted adviser to His Majesty, he was now among the most influential officials at court. Yet, despite his outstanding reputation, he remained unhappy, having failed to realize his dream of making the Third Princess his wife. He had settled instead for marrying her older sister, the Second Princess. Because this woman had been born to one of Suzaku's lower-ranking wives, Kashiwagi's attitude toward her was somewhat dismissive. Of course, the Second Princess, being an imperial daughter, could hardly be compared to women of average breeding, and in looks and demeanor she was exceptional. Still, his affection for the Third Princess, who had first stirred his heart, remained deep, and while he treated his wife properly and gave no one cause to censure him, his yearning for her younger sister made him think of a verse: "Inconsolable, I gaze at the moon shining on Mount Obasute."¹³

He had been unable to suppress those feelings that he kept hidden away in his heart. Kojijū, the young woman whom he had approached some years earlier to be his go-between, was the daughter of Jijū, who had served as nurse for the Third Princess. It just so happened that Jijū's older sister had been Kashiwagi's nurse, and so he had heard firsthand accounts of the Third Princess from an early age—how beautiful she was even when she was still a child, how her father pampered and favored her. Such details first stirred his yearnings.

He knew that Genji had withdrawn to the villa in Nijō to take care of Murasaki and reckoned that the Rokujō estate would be deserted and quiet. So he repeatedly summoned Kojijū and passionately pleaded with her.

"I've been in love for so long," he told her, "that I feel my passions will surely shorten my life. You have served as my one close connection to her, and I have relied on you to let me know how she is doing and to convey in turn my feelings of eternal devotion to her. But, since nothing has come of any of this, my suffering is unbearable. I heard that someone informed Retired Emperor Suzaku of the situation—how Genji was preoccupied with his many wives, how apparently the Third Princess was being pushed aside by one of those wives in particular and was now idly passing the time shut away alone in her chamber, night after night. And I was told that when Suzaku heard this he looked unmistakably disappointed and said, 'All things being equal, if I was going to pick a commoner to look after her and set my mind at ease, I ought to have chosen one who would take the role seriously.' My source also told me that

Suzaku added that the Second Princess was in a more secure situation and could look forward to a long stable marriage. Well, you might imagine how that disturbed me ... I was filled with remorse and regret. The truth is, I asked for the Second Princess assuming that she would be just like her younger sister, since they come from the same lineage, but"—here he sighed in frustration before adding—"they couldn't be more different."

"Reckless words from someone of your status!" Kojijū replied. "You already took one Princess for a wife, and now you want another? Your desire knows no bounds."

Kashiwagi smiled.

"That's exactly right. When I let it be known that I wanted the Third Princess, unworthy though I am, both her father and her brother were gracious enough to hear me out. At one point, Suzaku even said there was no reason not to let me have her. If only he had shown me a little more consideration ... or if you had tried harder on my behalf ..."

"But it was absolutely impossible," she protested. "And, in any case, it wasn't meant to be. It's karma that determines our destinies. Thus, when Lord Genji expressed his sincere wish to take her, did you really think a man of your status could have put himself forward and done anything to interfere with his plans? Recently, you've gained a little more prominence at court and donned robes of darker hues, but still ..."

She was so quick and firm in her dismissal of him that he was unable to tell her all he wanted to say.

"Enough already! I don't want to talk about the past any more! All that matters is that Genji's absence gives me a rare opportunity. You must arrange some way for me to get close enough to her that I may tell her directly what's in my heart. That I would lose myself completely to reckless emotions—well, just look at me—the possibility of behaving rashly with her is so daunting that I can't even conceive of it."

"Could there be anything more reckless than what you're asking?" she objected. "What you're contemplating is strange and frightening. Why did I ever come here?"

"Seriously, what a disagreeable thing to say. You're making far too much of all this. Relationships between men and women are unpredictable ... do you really think there's never been a case of a woman of high status like an Imperial Consort or Empress getting involved with a man if the right circumstances present themselves? It's even more unlikely that there would be no such affairs among women of your mistress's status. If you think about her situation, her remarkable fortune may be unrivaled, but privately many things must trouble

her. Her father favored her over his other children, and yet here she is, having to associate with women who are beneath her. No doubt she has experienced things that must be shocking to her sensibilities. Don't think I haven't heard all about it. The world is an uncertain place, but it's always been that way, so don't be speaking to me in that blunt, cold manner of yours."

"Even if my mistress were being pushed aside by another lady," Kojijū countered, "would she necessarily have to find some splendid new man to turn to? Her marriage to Genji hardly seems undistinguished. She was in a precarious position with no one to look after her. That's why her father gave her to Genji with the understanding that he would act as a surrogate father. Apparently the two of them think of their relationship in those terms. It's presumptuous of you to criticize their marriage."

By this time, she was now genuinely angry, and he did all he could to soothe her feelings.

"The plain truth is that it never occurred to me that she would deign to look warmly on someone as insignificant and inadequate as me, especially when she is accustomed to gazing on a man as splendid and peerless as Genji. So tell me, what possible harm could it do to let me speak a few words to her with a curtain between us, just to let her know how I feel? After all, is it counted a sin to tell the Buddha and the gods what we desire?"

He continued to make grand vows to her, and for a while she was able to fend him off, dismissing his request as outrageous. In the end, however, Kojijū, who was young and shallow, was unable to refuse a man who spoke so passionately about his love, as if he were prepared to sacrifice his very life for it.

"All right, then," she reluctantly agreed, "if a suitable opportunity presents itself, I'll make the arrangements. She has many ladies-in-waiting in service near the curtains of her bedchamber on those nights when Lord Genji is not around, and some of her more senior attendants will always be nearby. I'll do my best to find an opening for you, but I have no idea when that might be." She returned to the Rokujō estate feeling troubled and confused.

Kashiwagi pressured her day in and day out, putting her in such an awkward position that at last she sent him a message telling him that an opportune moment had arrived. He was filled with joy and excitement as he made his way in strict secrecy, dressing informally and choosing an inconspicuous carriage to disguise his identity. He understood that his behavior was utterly outrageous, but it never crossed his mind that the chance to be near the Third Princess would intensify his emotional turmoil. He simply imagined that once he had a closer look at her figure, which he remembered vividly from that spring night several years earlier when he vaguely glimpsed the hems of her robes, that once he let

her know how he felt, well ... would she not take pity on him and grant him the boon of a single line in reply?

It all happened shortly after the tenth day of the fourth month. On the night before the Purification Ritual that precedes the Kamo Festival, twelve of the Third Princess's attendants, who had been chosen to accompany the Priestess on her procession to the Kamo River, were preparing for the outing. Because they and a number of lower-ranking young women and pages were busy sewing their robes and applying their makeup, the chambers of the Third Princess were quiet and virtually deserted. Azechi, one of her closest ladies-in-waiting, had been urgently summoned by the Minamoto Middle Captain—a young man who visited her frequently—and, when she went off to her own quarters, Kojijū was the only one left in service. Seizing the moment, she quietly guided Kashiwagi to a seat on the east side of the bedchamber. Was it proper for her to bring him so far into the room?

The Third Princess had retired to her bed without a care, but then she sensed the presence of a man close by. Although she assumed it was Genji, the man displayed an extremely reverential attitude toward her as he took her up in his arms and carried her down from the curtained dais. She wondered if this was all some horrible nightmare, and when she finally forced herself to open her eyes, she realized that it wasn't Genji. The man made all sorts of queer, incomprehensible statements. Stunned and frightened, she called for her women, but with no one there to hear her cries, no one came to help. She was trembling all over and bathed in sweat. On the verge of fainting, she looked both pitiable and adorable.

"Though I am a man of no significance," Kashiwagi told her, "I never imagined I was so worthless that you would respond to me in this manner. Years ago I harbored a presumptuous aspiration in my heart and, had I kept it buried there, it would have withered away. However, I let intimations of what I hoped for slip out. When your gracious father heard about it, he did not dismiss me out of hand. I then began to hold out hope that I might realize my dream and was thus shaken by the bitter regret I tasted when my devotion to you, which was deeper than any other man's, came to nothing on account of my lowly position. Although I tried to convince myself that it was useless to obsess over the past, especially in light of your present circumstances, it would seem that my devotion has seeped to the very core of my being, for with the passing years, all the regrets, the pain, the fear, and the sorrows I suffered have built up inside me and I can no longer contain them. Because I feel foolish and ashamed to be so presumptuous by appearing before you like this, you may rest assured that I will commit no further outrage."

As he continued to speak, she finally recognized that the man was Kashiwagi. Shocked and fearful, she did not respond.

“Your reaction is perfectly reasonable, but it’s not as if I’m doing anything unheard of in the world. It would upset me greatly if you were to treat me with uncommon cruelty—then I would lose all sense of decency. If you could just tell me that you’re moved to pity, I shall accept that and withdraw.” He said all manner of things to put her at ease.

Having imagined what she was like from afar, he had assumed with some trepidation that she would be proudly dignified and aloof when he approached her. For that reason he had planned to simply let her know how he felt about her and leave it at that. Yet the woman before him was not at all haughty and unapproachable; she exhibited instead a sweetly endearing quality, seemingly soft and submissive, and she struck him as incomparably refined and elegant. He lost all self-control and in the wild turmoil of his emotions desperately wanted to carry her off somewhere—anywhere—and spend his life with her hidden away from the world.

For a brief moment he drifted off, not quite asleep, and had a fleeting dream of the pet cat he had taken as a memento of the Third Princess. It was adorable-looking as it purred and mewed. He was, apparently, returning the animal to her, and just as he was wondering why he would be doing such a thing, he startled awake.

Why, he asked himself, did I have such a dream?

She was in a daze and couldn’t believe that this was actually happening. Anxious and fearful, she was at her wits’ end.

“You must resign yourself to the deep, inescapable destiny that has brought us together,” he told her. “I’m not sure myself that this is real.” He then went on to recount the events of that early evening years ago when the cat got tangled in the cord and pulled the blind to one side.

So that’s what happened, she thought, mortified that her misfortune had been fated by karma. Sad and forlorn, wondering how she would ever be able to face Genji again, she wept like a young girl. Kashiwagi looked on her with a mix of awe, shame and pity, and his sleeves, already damp from his own dewy tears, grew damper still from wiping hers away.

There were signs of dawn approaching, but he couldn’t bring himself to leave. It was now the prospect of being apart from her that threw his heart into turmoil. “What should I do? If you despise me so intensely, how will I ever be able to talk to you again? Please say something … just one word in your own voice.” He harassed her so much with his persistent pleas that she felt put off and miserable and could not bring herself to speak to him. “Your silence is terrifying. Has any

woman ever been this cruel?" He gave vent to his grief and anguish. "If that's how things stand, then it seems that my life is meaningless. I've no choice but to die. So long as the hope of meeting you sustained me, I could never throw my life away ... how sad that this night will be the end! If you would at least give some indication of forgiveness, then I shall be able to face death."

Kashiwagi lifted her up in his arms and went out with her, and she wondered, in shock, what he was intending to do. He spread open a folding screen in the corner of the outer room, then pushed open the hinged doors behind it and stepped out into the passageway. He saw that the door leading off to the south side—the very one he had used to enter last night—remained open. He wanted to catch a glimpse of the Third Princess, but it must have been hard for him to see in the faint light just before the dawn, for he quietly lifted one of the lattice shutters.

"Your cruel coldness is driving me mad. If you wish to calm my passions a little, at least tell me that you pity me."

She considered his intimidating demeanor to be beyond the pale, and though she wanted to say something, she trembled, looking like a very young girl.

As it grew light outside, he became frantic. "I should tell you about a dream that touched my heart, but since you despise me so ... still, you will figure out soon enough what I'm referring to." Setting forth with a sense of foreboding, the faint light of the sky just before dawn struck him as more heartrending than any autumn sky.

*In the darkness before dawn as I rise to leave
Even the skies cannot show me what lies ahead ...
From where does it fall, this dew that has soaked my sleeves*

He held out his sleeve as proof of his sorrow.

The Third Princess, taking comfort in the fact that he was about to leave, finally managed a reply:

*I long to disappear with my sorrows
Into the predawn darkness of the sky
To dismiss all of this as a mere dream*

Her fragile voice was youthful and enchanting. Since he had started off while she was speaking, the desire to stay behind and listen to every word she said made him feel as if his soul were leaving his body.

Kashiwagi did not return to his wife's residence, but made his way quietly to

his father's villa. He tried in vain to go to sleep. Thinking it unlikely that the dream he saw earlier had any chance of coming true, he longingly recalled the image of the cat. He felt terrified and ashamed. *How reckless I've been. How can I ever show myself at court?* He secluded himself and would not go out. Reflecting on the possible consequences of his outrageous behavior—to say nothing of what it might cost the Third Princess—a shudder of fear raced through him. In such a frame of mind, he could no longer bring himself to mingle in the company of other courtiers. Had he committed an offense with one of the Emperor's wives and the affair was exposed, he would have welcomed the punishment of death, since it would spare him the fear and embarrassment he was experiencing now. Alas, what he had done was not punishable by death, and the prospect of being reviled and shunned by Genji made him afraid and ashamed.

There are examples of women of the absolutely noblest lineage who, though somewhat worldly in the ways of love and calmly gentle on the surface, are so childishly willful at heart that when they are attracted to another man they give themselves to him. The Third Princess, however, did not possess such depth of feeling—indeed, she was extremely timorous by nature and felt awkward and ashamed, as if her clandestine affair had already become grist for the rumor mill at court. Consequently, she could not bring herself to go out to brightly lit rooms where she might be seen, but brooded alone over her miserable fate.

She appeared to be ill, and Genji was informed of her condition. Already deeply preoccupied with Murasaki's illness, the news alarmed him, and he came to call on her, wondering what new crisis he would have to face. He could not tell exactly what was wrong with her—she seemed uncomfortable and embarrassed and would not look at him directly. He assumed that she was resentful of his neglect, since he had not visited in such a long time. Feeling remorseful, he tried placating her by explaining how serious Murasaki's condition was.

"This may be the end for her. At a time like this, I simply cannot act as if nothing is amiss. I began looking after her when she was just a child, and so it's impossible for me to turn away from her now. That's why I have been paying attention to nothing else the past few months. When this crisis is over, you will come to see my actions in a different light."

She was overcome with pity and despair at the realization that Genji had no idea what had happened between her and Kashiwagi. Deep inside, she felt as if she were about to break down and cry.

The torment was, if anything, worse for Kashiwagi. The conviction that he should not see her again grew stronger, and he was assailed mornings and

evenings, whether awake or asleep, by grief and anguish. On grand occasions such as the Kamo Festival, officials who wanted to go out and compete for the best spots to view events would drop by and urge him to accompany them. He would pretend, however, that he was ill and lie down and mope. Though he continued to treat his wife, the Second Princess, with respect and courtesy, he was not intimate with her at all. Instead, he kept to his own quarters, where he passed the time in idle boredom, lost in forlorn thoughts.

Gazing on the leaves of wild ginger a page had brought for him to adorn his cap for the Kamo Festival, he composed the following in his mind:

*Bitterly I regret the sin I committed
When I took her, like plucking leaves of wild ginger ...
Leaves that would offend the gods if worn on my cap*

It hurt him to think that he should not see her again. Listening to the bustle and clamor of the carriages outside, they seemed to have nothing at all to do with him, and so he passed the day lost in the tedious misery that he had brought on himself.

Seeing how distracted and depressed he always looked, but unable to fathom the reason for his dark mood, the Second Princess also came to feel downcast and ashamed, as if she were at fault. She also felt unfairly put upon. Since her women had all gone off to view the festival, her quarters were deserted and quiet. In a pensive mood, she took her thirteen-string koto and gently played a melancholy tune. She looked beautifully refined, but Kashiwagi couldn't help himself. *They may be sisters, he thought, but I prefer the Third Princess. Destiny has kept me from achieving my dream.*

*Why did I pick this fallen leaf¹⁴ from a garland
Of katsura and wild ginger, reputedly
As dear an adornment as the other, and yet ...*

He scribbled this down—an utterly disrespectful and insulting thing to say of his wife.

Since Genji visited the Third Princess so rarely, he couldn't just suddenly leave her to return to his old Nijō villa. Still, he remained anxious about Murasaki. Then, a messenger arrived and told him that his beloved lady had stopped breathing. Almost out of his mind, his heart shrouded in darkness, Genji left at once. The journey seemed to take forever, and when he arrived at last it was just as he feared. People were milling about, raising a racket in and around

the villa and the adjacent streets. Inside, he could hear the ominous sounds of weeping and lamentation. When he entered, he felt distracted, as if no longer himself. “Our mistress had seemed a little more comfortable the past few days,” one of her ladies-in-waiting told him, “but then suddenly she suffered this seizure!” All of her attendants were upset beyond measure, confused and crying out how they wanted to follow their mistress in death. The altars set up for the esoteric healing rites had been removed, and all of the priests—except for those who were needed for the final services—were hurriedly making preparations to leave. When Genji saw what was happening, he assumed that Murasaki must have died, and the shock and despair were like nothing he had ever experienced before.

“This is obviously the work of a malignant spirit,” he said, trying to calm the situation. “You must all stop carrying on like this!” He prayed, making additional vows that were more solemn than ever, then summoned the most efficacious exorcists to gather there. “She may well have reached the end of her life,” he told them, “but do all you can to extend it for a while longer. Appeal to that fundamental vow made by Fudō, the Immovable King of Wisdom, to extend the life of any devoted believer for six months. You must make sure that she stays with me at least that much longer.”

The prayers and supplications of the exorcists were so fervent that black smoke truly rose above their heads as if they were Fudō himself. *Let me look into her eyes one more time*, Genji desperately pleaded in his heart. *The regret and sorrow at not being with her in her final moments would be too much to bear.*

One can only imagine the feelings of those who were watching him. Given how devastated he seemed to be, they must have thought that he would soon either follow her in death or renounce the world. Perhaps the Buddha looked into Genji’s heart, saw how terribly he was suffering, and took pity, for the malignant spirit that had for months stubbornly refused to show itself was driven out at last and moved into the body of a little page girl. As soon as the spirit began to scream and curse, Murasaki gradually began to breathe once more. Genji’s heart was in chaos, a confusion of joy and dread.

After the spirit was firmly subdued, it cried out: “You must all withdraw. I have words for Lord Genji’s ears alone. For months you have cruelly subjected me to the torments of the exorcists’ prayers, and so I thought that I would cause you to suffer in equal measure by taking the life of your beloved ... but then I saw that you were broken and distraught to the point that your own life was in danger. Though I have been transformed into the hideous being you see before you, when I saw how much you were suffering because of your love for her, the

old feelings I once had came back, and I pitied you ... and so I relented and revealed myself, though I never intended to let you know my identity.”

The little page girl was shaking her hair wildly and weeping loudly until she began to take on the appearance of that spirit Genji had seen long ago. An ominous feeling swept over him—a feeling no different from the dread and horror that had chilled the very core of his being that earlier time—and so to prevent the spirit from doing or saying anything that might reflect badly on him, he grabbed the girl’s arms and restrained her.

“Is it really you? I’ve heard that evil creatures such as fox spirits will bewitch people who, in their madness, will say things that besmirch the honor of the dead. So tell me clearly who you are ... or tell me something no one else would know, something that only I would be sure to remember! Do that and I will trust you a little.”

The page girl broke down in a flood of tears.

*I am no longer who I was
But all the while you remain you
Feigning ignorance as always*

“You are too cruel ... too cruel!” Although the spirit was crying and wailing, traces of the modest refinement that had distinguished his lady at Rokujō remained unchanged. Still, the effect of such elegance was not pleasant, but sinister and disturbing. He no longer wanted to hear her speak.

“Doomed though I am to wander through the heavens, I saw all that you did for my daughter, the Umetsubo Empress, and was happy and deeply grateful. Yet she and I inhabit different realms now, and I no longer feel any deep attachment to my child. What truly impedes my release from suffering is my lingering desire for you, which has filled me with bitter resentment. Of all the things that I resent, the worst wasn’t anything you did while I was still living in this world, not even the way you slighted and abandoned me in favor of another. No—it was the way you disparaged me that night when you were talking with your Lady Murasaki, telling her how unbearably obsessive and bitter I was. I had thought that you might have forgiven me, now that I am dead ... that you would have concealed my faults and protected my reputation from censure. But you didn’t, and my grievance over your behavior has transformed me into this hideous figure and brought about your wife’s crisis. I harbor no deep hatred of her, but I possessed her because the protection that the Buddha and the gods bestow on you is so powerful that I feel as though I am kept at a great distance and cannot approach you. Your voice is barely audible to me. Very well, then ...

you must have services performed for me to lighten the burden of my sins. These rites of exorcism and readings of the sacred texts are no more than a noisy disturbance that enfolds me in an agonizing torment of flames. How wretched it is to no longer be able to hear the noble scriptures at all! Tell my daughter what I have said to you. Warn her that for as long as she serves Retired Emperor Reizei she must never jealously vie with other women for his favor. She must also commission services and make offerings to gain merit and lighten the sin of having neglected the Buddha during the time she served as the High Priestess at Ise. It's most regrettable that she held that position."

The spirit continued speaking on and on, but the situation was awkward for Genji, since it might give rise to gossip, and so he had the page girl shut away and Murasaki discreetly moved to other quarters.

Genji thought it inauspicious that the world was full of rumors of Murasaki's death and that people were arriving to express their condolences. Senior nobles and officials who had gone off to see the return procession of the Kamo Priestess were on their way home when they heard people talking about what had happened.

"This is terrible news," one of them remarked forthrightly. "On a day when the radiant light of a woman for whom life was so blessed and fortunate has been extinguished, it is only fitting that a light rain should be falling."

Another whispered, "Those who are as perfect as she never live long. As that old poem puts it, 'If cherry blossoms held to their branches and did not scatter when we told them to tarry, why would we treasure them over other flowers?'¹⁵ When a woman like her lives a long life enjoying the blessings of the world to the full, her presence must surely bring grief to others around her. Now the Third Princess will enjoy at last the honor and glory that should have been hers all along. It's pathetic the way she's been shunted aside in his affections."

That day Kashiwagi, who had spent a restless time at home avoiding the Kamo Festival the day before, boarded his carriage and went with his younger brothers, including the Major Controller of the Left and the Fujiwara Consultant, to view the Priestess's return procession. On hearing the rumors about Murasaki, he felt his chest tighten. "Nothing ever lasts in this world of woe," he muttered to himself as he headed for Genji's Nijō villa. He thought it would be inauspicious to offer condolences on the basis of unconfirmed rumors, and so he went simply to inquire after Murasaki's health. Thus, when he arrived, he was shocked and grieved to find that the rumors must have been true, since everyone was weeping and wailing.

Murasaki's father, Prince Hyōbu, arrived. He looked deeply stricken as he

entered, and was incapable of passing along messages of condolence from others.

When Genji's son stepped out, wiping a tear from his eyes, Kashiwagi spoke to him.

"How is she? What's happening? I heard that something terrible happened. It's hard to believe. I came here to tell you how sorry I was to hear that she's been ill for so long."

"She has been seriously ill for several months now," the Major Counselor replied. "She stopped breathing just after dawn this morning. I was told an evil spirit was the cause. I heard, however, that she has gradually begun to recover, and it seems that everyone is feeling relieved that the crisis is now over. Still, her condition remains precarious. It's worrisome."

His face showed that he had been weeping inconsolably and his eyes were still slightly puffy. Kashiwagi found his appearance suspicious-looking. *Perhaps it's my own outrageous desires that make me sensitive to such things, but how strange it is for him to be upset over a stepmother who is not all that close to him ... unless ...*

Hearing that various people had come to the Nijō villa to inquire after Murasaki, Genji sent out a message: "The patient here has been seriously ill, and she suddenly stopped breathing. Because her ladies-in-waiting panicked, I myself found it impossible to stay calm and keep my wits about me. Nonetheless, I shall properly express my gratitude to you for coming here like this at a later, more appropriate time."

Kashiwagi felt his chest tighten again on hearing Genji's words. He would certainly never have been able to come to the Nijō villa had it not been for this emergency. That the atmosphere of the place should make him feel so awkward was surely the result of a guilty conscience.

Even after Murasaki came back to life, Genji remained fearful and redoubled his efforts to protect her, commissioning additional prayers and solemn rites. It upset him greatly to recall how frightening the appearance of the lady at Rokujō had been when she possessed his wife and to imagine how much weirder her transformed figure must be in the realm of the dead. As a result, from that moment on he found it difficult to look after her daughter, the Umetsubo Empress, concluding in the end that all women alike are a source of sin and that virtually all relationships between men and women are repugnant. The spirit had spoken about his intimate conversation with Murasaki, revealing details that no one else had been privy to, and he felt that proved beyond doubt that it really was the spirit of the lady at Rokujō. This was deeply troublesome, for he would now have to watch everything he said.

Murasaki desperately wanted to become a nun, and so Genji, thinking that the act of renunciation might give her merit enough to help her recover, permitted a few locks to be snipped from the top of her head and allowed her to take vows as a lay devotee who promised to uphold the Five Precepts¹⁶ as a symbolic renunciation of the world. With lofty eloquence, the priest who administered the vow prayed to the Buddha, extolling the virtuous merits of Murasaki's decision. Genji was sitting perhaps a little closer to Murasaki than propriety warranted and, as he wiped tears from his eyes, he and Murasaki called on the Buddha with one heart. Even the wisest men in this world find it impossible to control their emotions when they experience extreme anguish such as this. As Genji anxiously exerted himself from morning to night trying to do everything to save her and keep her in this world, his face grew slightly gaunt and took on a distracted, vacant expression.

During the fifth month the skies were increasingly overcast and gloomy, but Murasaki began to recover little by little. Even so, she continued to suffer. In order to expiate the sins of the malignant spirit and lead it to salvation, Genji commissioned daily readings of the *Lotus Sutra*, section by section, until the entire scripture was recited. Every day he had some noble service or good work carried out, and he also had priests known for their sonorous voices constantly reading sacred texts near Murasaki's bedside.

After finally showing itself, the spirit would from time to time speak mournfully of various things, and since its attachment to Genji remained strong, it never went away. Murasaki struggled to breathe and her condition weakened as the weather grew hotter and more stifling. Genji's torment was beyond description. Even in her near-cataleptic state, Murasaki was moved to pity whenever she observed the suffering in Genji's face. She herself would have no lingering regrets about her own death, but she thought it would be unpardonable if he were to witness her death when he was in such a state of despair. She thus summoned the will to drink a little of the medicinal infusions she was given and, by the sixth month—perhaps because of those medicines—she was able to raise her head now and again. Genji watched her with a mix of joy and wonder, yet because he continued to dread what might happen next, he could not bring himself to leave her even temporarily to visit his Rokujō estate.

The Third Princess was heartsick at having been ravished by Kashiwagi, and soon after the incident she felt ill and was not her normal self. Her condition, however, was not all that worrisome until the sixth month, when she stopped eating and grew extremely thin and pale. Kashiwagi, driven by uncontrollable passion, would occasionally come to see her, but she considered these visits—so unreal and dreamlike to her—utterly scandalous. She held Genji in awe, and

there was no way that she could even compare Kashiwagi's looks and character to him. Kashiwagi was exceptionally courtly and refined, and so in the eyes of most people he looked far superior to other men. Nonetheless, to the Third Princess, who had grown accustomed since childhood to being with a man as peerless as Genji, Kashiwagi was nothing more than an upstart, and it was a sad, lamentable fate that she should have to suffer this way. Her nurses realized that she was pregnant, and they muttered in resentment about how infrequently Genji came to call on their mistress.

Hearing that the Third Princess was feeling ill, Genji thought he must go to her. Murasaki had had her hair washed to provide some relief from the sultry weather, and she was feeling somewhat refreshed. Because her hair was spread out behind her as she lay in her sickbed, it was very slow to dry, but it had been beautifully combed out into gentle, lustrous undulations with no tangles and with not a lock out of place. She was pale and gaunt, but her complexion had a lovely glow, and her skin, white and translucent as alabaster, looked incomparably precious to him. Her condition still seemed extremely delicate, fragile as a molted insect shell. The interior of the Nijō villa was a little dilapidated, since no one had occupied the place for many years, and the quarters struck him as cramped beyond words. Murasaki had recovered her senses over the past few days and was more alert at that moment; as she gazed out at the delightful scene provided by the stream and garden, which, on Genji's orders, had been carefully restored and tended to, it touched her to think she had managed to live to see it.

The pond looked refreshingly cool, the lotuses were in flower, and drops of dew glistened like jewels on their vibrant green leaves. "Just look at them," Genji said. "They seem to be showing off, as if they alone enjoy the coolness of the pond!" Murasaki raised herself to look out at the pond. It had been so long since she had been able to sit up that Genji was moved to tears of joy. "It feels like a dream, seeing you this way. So many times of late I've been afraid that the end had come ... for me as well as for you."

Murasaki was affected by his show of emotion.

*Will I live even as long as the dew
That lingers on, clinging to a lotus
Or fade away before it vanishes*

Genji replied:

*Let us swear that though we must leave this world
Our hearts will be together in the next
Two swallows on one lotus leaf*

Although Genji was not especially eager to leave Murasaki's side, he was mindful of what His Majesty and Retired Emperor Suzaku might hear regarding his conduct. After all, he had hardly left the Nijō villa during the period of Murasaki's illness, which had so preoccupied him with grief and worry; several days had already passed since he received the news that the Third Princess was indisposed as well. Deciding that he couldn't very well stay secluded now that Murasaki was feeling better and there was at last a break in the clouds, so to speak, he made his way over to the Rokujō estate.

Bothered by the demon of guilty conscience, the Third Princess could not bring herself to even look at Genji when he arrived. Because she did not respond to him when he spoke to her of various things, he felt bad, assuming that her apparent indifference was a cover for the pain and resentment that she harbored over his long absence. He tried to cheer her up, and then, later, he summoned some of her more mature attendants and questioned them about her condition.

"It appears she's with child," they said, describing what was bothering her.

"How odd ... what a remarkable thing to happen after all this time." Genji said nothing more, but privately he thought that their diagnosis strained credulity. *So few of the women I've been with over the years have ever gotten pregnant.* He did not bring up the matter to the Third Princess, but was touched by how endearing she looked in her delicate state.

It had taken him so long to decide to come to the Rokujō estate that he felt he simply couldn't rush back to the Nijō villa, and so he stayed on for several days. However, he was so anxious about Murasaki that he sent a constant stream of letters asking how she was doing.

"He certainly has a lot to say for someone who's been away only a couple of days," some of the attendants complained.

"How terrible that our mistress's relationship with him should be so insecure!"

These women, however, knew nothing of the young woman's transgression. Kojijū was the only one who knew the truth, and she was in a frightful panic.

When Kashiwagi heard that Genji had gone to visit the Third Princess, he was driven by jealous resentment—a presumptuous attitude for someone of his station—to send a long letter that explicitly expressed his lover's complaints. During a moment when Genji had gone over to the east hall and there was no one else around, Kojijū showed the letter to her mistress.

"Why must you show me such annoying things ... it's most upsetting. It makes me feel worse than ever." The Third Princess lay down.

“But you must at least look at the beginning ... he sounds so miserable!” Kojijū opened the letter and spread it open. Just then, however, she heard someone approaching and, flustered that her role in all this might be disclosed, quickly pulled a standing curtain over in front of her mistress and withdrew. Genji entered, and the Third Princess, having had no time to hide the letter properly, stuffed it under her seat pillow, her heart beating wildly.

Genji had come to take formal leave of her, since he was to return to the Nijō villa that night. “You do not seem to be seriously ill, and the thought of having abandoned the other lady while she is still so weak makes me feel extremely sorry for her. People may spread malicious gossip, but you mustn’t pay any mind at all to what they say. You will come to see soon enough just how faithful I am to you.”

Usually she would banter playfully, conversing at her ease, but today she was sullen and subdued, and couldn’t even make eye contact with him. Again, he merely interpreted this as a sign of her resentment over their relationship.

Genji reclined in the sitting room that the Third Princess used during the day and talked with her about various things until the sun set. He dozed off a little and was eventually awakened at dusk by the shrill cries of cicadas. “Well, then,” he said, “I suppose I ought to be on my way before my path is obscured by the dark.”

“Doesn’t the poet say ‘Wait for the moon’?”¹⁷ The youthful manner in which she responded so appropriately was not at all displeasing to him. He tarried, thinking that she was looking rather sad and that she wanted him to stay a while longer, as the poem she alluded to suggested. She added the following:

*Hearing the cicada’s insistent cries
You seem to want to leave ... are you saying
I must wet my sleeves with evening dew*

She conveyed her feelings in a gentle, meek tone, as if she still retained part of her childish innocence.

Genji found her adorable, and, taking his seat again, sighed, “Ah, this is so difficult.”

*How does it sound at the village
Where she waits ... the cicada’s voice
That agitates hearts here and there*

He wavered, uncertain what to do, but he would have felt bad if he had just

coldly abandoned her, and so he stayed on. Feeling anxious and lost in a melancholy reverie, he ate very little—just some fruit—and retired for the night.

Thinking that he would leave in the cool of the dawn, he arose early. “I seem to have misplaced my good fan last night,” he said. “This one does not produce a cool breeze.” He put down the fan that he was holding and went to the sitting room where he had been napping the previous day. Searching around, he noticed the edge of a letter written on two thin, light green pieces of paper protruding from beneath the Third Princess’s seat pillow. Believing that it was nothing important, he innocently pulled it out and saw that it was written in a man’s hand. The paper was scented in a delightfully elegant manner, and the careful calligraphy seemed to impart a sense that this was no ordinary letter. As he looked over both pages, which were completely covered with writing, he recognized beyond any doubt that it was Kashiwagi’s hand. The lady-in-waiting who was opening up the lid of his mirror for his morning toilet had assumed that the letter was Genji’s and had paid no heed to it. However, when Kojijū saw him holding pieces of paper that were the same color as the letter she delivered yesterday, she was terrified and felt her heart pounding loudly in her chest. In shocked disbelief, she could not bring herself to look at Genji as she served his breakfast. *That cannot be Kashiwagi’s letter! That would be too terrible to contemplate. No ... it cannot be! Surely she would have hidden it away!*

The Third Princess was still innocently asleep in her bedchamber. *She really is childish*, Genji thought, losing all respect for her. *To leave something like this lying about ... what if someone else had found it? It’s just as I feared. I’ve long worried about her lack of maturity and judgment.*

After he left, the Third Princess’s attendants scattered to other rooms and she was by herself. Kojijū went to see her. “What did you do with the letter I brought you yesterday? This morning my lord was looking over some papers of the exact same color.” As soon as the Third Princess heard this she was deeply shocked and broke down, weeping uncontrollably. Kojijū felt extremely sorry for her, but she also regarded her mistress as utterly hopeless. “Come now, you must have put it somewhere. Women were arriving when I was with you yesterday, and I didn’t want to look suspicious, as if I had some secret reason to be in close service with you, and so I withdrew, feeling guilty. After I left you should have had a little time before his lordship came in. I assume you must have hidden it somewhere secure.”

“No, I didn’t. I was reading it when he came in. I had no time to put it away properly, so I slipped it under my seat cushion ... but then I forgot about it.”

Kojijū was struck dumb. She searched her mistress’s quarters, but, of course, it was nowhere to be found. “This is a disaster,” she said, freely speaking her

mind to the Third Princess. “The young lord was terrified of your husband, wary lest even the slightest hint of his affair with you reached Genji’s ears. Yet it took no time at all for it to come to light. You really are so immature ... you exposed yourself to him all those years ago, and he found it impossible to forget you. He was always complaining to me about how much he suffered yearning for you, but it never occurred to me that things would turn out like this. It won’t end well for anyone.”

Apparently, Kojijū could speak so directly because her mistress was young and easygoing by nature. In any case, the Third Princess said nothing in response, but continued to cry. She seemed to be in genuine pain and refused to take even a bite of food. Her attendants were miffed and grumbled about the situation.

“Here she is, suffering like this, and yet Genji leaves her and gives all of his attention to someone who has already recovered.”

Genji was still not sure what to make of the suspicious letter, and so he pored over it repeatedly when no one was around. He considered the possibility that one of the Third Princess’s women had tried writing in imitation of Kashiwagi’s hand, but the letter’s dazzling use of language ruled that out. It couldn’t have been written by anyone else but the young gentleman. Kashiwagi had written eloquently of how he had finally realized his greatest desire after many years of longing for the Third Princess and of how much he had suffered since they had consummated their affair. The extraordinary beauty of the sentiments he expressed touched Genji, but in the end he lost all respect for Kashiwagi as well.

Did he really have to give such an explicit account? Genji fumed. For a man in his position to send a letter like this is reckless. Long ago, in my younger days, I was always mindful that letters could go astray, and so even on those occasions when I wanted to fully express my emotions, I wrote in a vague, ambiguous manner. I suppose that it’s hard for people to exercise the proper degree of caution.

His thoughts turned to the Third Princess.

How should I deal with her now? Her pregnancy is obviously the result of her liaison with Kashiwagi. What an awful situation! Having learned of this hurtful affair on my own, should I go on supporting her as I have? Despite his feelings for her, Genji felt that he would be incapable of reconsidering, or of letting the matter pass.

It’s unpleasant and offputting enough just to think that a woman of mine would give her heart to another man. I’d feel that way even if I thought of her as just a plaything, someone who never meant all that much to me in the first place. What makes this situation intolerable is the reckless behavior of a man who

doesn't know his place. It was not unheard of in ancient times for a man to seduce one of the Emperor's women, but the circumstances in those cases were different. Both the man and woman would be in close service to His Majesty and would grow accustomed to being together. Naturally, in the course of what would otherwise be appropriate service, they would begin to develop feelings for one another. There must have been many such affairs. Even among consorts and concubines there have been women who have gone astray for one reason or another. Of course, not all of them were necessarily women of serious temperament or good judgment, and untoward incidents did occur ... but so long as nothing egregious took place and the affair remained secret, the man and woman could continue in service, and their liaison would not soon come to light. Yet, even if I accept that such affairs take place, there has never been a case like this ... to think that I treated the Third Princess with the utmost devotion and even considered her worthy of greater respect than the woman I truly love, and then she betrays me for Kashiwagi? He flicked his fingernails against his thumb in exasperation.

No matter how stoically a woman performs her formal duties at court, if she knows that she will never fully enjoy the Emperor's affections, she may tire of such service. In those cases, even an imperial wife may be vulnerable to the seductive words of a man who has deep feelings for her. Reciprocating his feelings, she begins to reply to his pleas when she can no longer silently ignore him, and so naturally an affair happens. Such a relationship may be as outrageously presumptuous as the one between my wife and Kashiwagi, but one can at least understand and even sympathize with the motives. But it's unthinkable in this case! How could the Third Princess ever give her heart to a man like Kashiwagi when she had me for her husband?

Genji was extremely put out, but his heart was in turmoil, since he could not let his feelings show. He recalled another case of infidelity—this one closer to home. *Did my father know of my affair with Fujitsubo and merely feign ignorance of it? Contemplating it now, what a terrifying, wicked thing I did back then.* Genji realized that he was in no position to censure others for straying on the mountain path of love.¹⁸

Genji tried to pretend that nothing was amiss, but it was evident that something was bothering him. Murasaki assumed that in the same way he had taken pity on her when she was on the verge of death, he now felt sorry for having neglected the Third Princess for so long. "I'm feeling much better," she told him. "It's a shame that you hurried back here when the Third Princess seems to be in distress."

"Perhaps. It's true that she was not her normal self, but then again, there

didn't seem to be anything particularly wrong, and so I wasn't all that concerned when I left her. His Majesty has been dispatching one messenger after another to inquire after her health. I heard that he sent yet another letter today. I imagine that he's expressing such concern because Suzaku has asked him to show her special consideration. I would feel sorry for both of them if even the slightest neglect of the Third Princess on my part should make them anxious." He sighed.

"I should be less troubled about what His Majesty thinks," Muraskai replied, "than about the resentment the Third Princess might be feeling. She may not worry about things all that much on her own, but it makes me uncomfortable to think that some of her women could put thoughts in her head by reporting nasty rumors to her."

"It's so true—you have no relatives who pester me to look after you and treat you as a precious treasure, and yet your understanding of such matters is profound. Here you are, giving consideration to the various thoughts and feelings of her ladies-in waiting, while I'm preoccupied with nothing more than shallow public concerns, worried only about how His Majesty might feel about my treatment of his younger sister."

Genji smiled ruefully and then changed the subject. "In any case, when the moment is right, we shall go back to Rokujō together," he told her. "In the meantime, let's pass the time quietly here."

"I should like to relax here for a while longer. You should go on ahead, and I shall follow once you have assuaged the Third Princess's feelings." Several days passed while they were discussing their plans.

In the past, the Third Princess had always considered Genji cruel whenever he let several days go by without a visit, but now she assumed that he was staying away on account of her own transgression. She felt constrained and worried about what her father might think if he ever found out.

Driven by the urgency of his obsessive passion, Kashiwagi had continued sending letters to the Third Princess until Kojijū, her heart aching over his troubling persistence, informed him that Genji found one of his letters.

He was stunned and terrified. *When could it have happened? I felt insecure, fearful at the thought that our affair would inevitably come to light, as if Heaven itself were closely watching me ... but this is worse, for Genji has seen irrefutable proof of my offense.* In a restless confusion of shame and trepidation, it seemed as if a chill had penetrated to the core of his being, even though it was the time of the season when mornings and evenings were warm. There was no way for him to express his feelings. *For years, Genji invited me to both official ceremonies and frivolous diversions, and I grew accustomed to attending. I was grateful and happy that he so favored me over others, but how can I show my*

face to him now that he must consider me an insolent upstart? Of course, people will think it odd if I completely fade away and don't visit him, and it would be unbearable if Genji concluded that my absence was proof of guilt. His restless, worried thoughts made him seriously ill, and he stopped going to the palace. His crime was not so serious that it would incur heavy sanctions, but he believed his life was in ruins. With his worst fears now made real, he was overcome with self-loathing.

He began to put things together in his mind. It would seem that she's not a woman of reserved refinement after all. First, there was that careless incident with the blinds ... was that in any way appropriate behavior on her part? It was clear from his expression that the Major Counselor considered her frivolous. It may have been that he wanted to think the absolute worst of the Third Princess as a way to force his passion to cool. But then his sympathy at her plight made it impossible to give her up. *Elegance and refinement are all well and good, but she's excessively gentle and docile and knows nothing of the ways of the world. She paid little attention to controlling the women who serve her, and such carelessness will have horrific consequences for the poor Princess ... and for me.*

Genji felt sorry for the Third Princess, whose suffering made her all the more sweetly endearing. Though he was considering ending their relationship, the compassion he felt for her in her distress stirred pangs of longing and moved him to go to her. When he arrived, she looked heartbreakingly pathetic. He commissioned various prayers to ensure a safe delivery of the child, and outwardly there was no change in his demeanor—if anything, he treated her with even greater dignity and respect. His behavior was merely for show, however, since he was estranged from her, and the Third Princess privately suffered all the more knowing that Genji's feelings were so ambivalent. He never clearly indicated that he had seen that letter, and it was a sign of her childishness that she found his silence unbearable, since she had no idea what else to do.

She is who she is, and that's why this happened, Genji thought, reminding himself of the uncertainty of relationships between men and women. *She may be gentle and docile, but her worrisome lack of prudence means that she can never be trusted. Even my own daughter is too kind and yielding, and she too might well lose her heart to a man of high rank who is as powerfully attracted to her as Kashiwagi is to my wife. It may be that men look on a compliant woman as an easy conquest and immediately set their sights on her even though their status may not be high enough, embarking on an improper affair that they are no longer strong enough to resist.*

Genji recalled Tamakazura. *She grew up without the support of either parent, set adrift in an unpredictable world from the time she was a child ... and yet, she*

was quick-witted and prudent. I made an outward show of being a father to her, though my heart was filled with improper feelings ... but, in that case, she was still able to fend off my advances by remaining aloof and by discreetly pretending that she didn't notice anything. And when the Minister of the Right managed to get one of her more impulsive attendants to conspire with him and arrange a secret tryst, she made sure everyone recognized that she had nothing to do with the affair, that it had the tacit approval of me and Tō no Chūjō, and that she was completely above reproach. When I think back on her actions now, I'm struck by how masterful she was in controlling the situation. She and her husband obviously share a deep karmic bond, and now that they've been together so long it doesn't matter either way how their relationship began. But if at the time people had thought that she was scheming to get him all along, they might well have looked down on her. Instead, she handled the situation perfectly.

Genji had never stopped thinking about Oborozukiyo, but having learned the sorrowful price to be paid for a troublesome affair, he now looked with slight disdain on that weakness of character that had made her so willing to yield to him. When he heard that she had finally fulfilled her long-held desire and become a nun, he was moved to great sorrow and regret and sent a letter inquiring after her. He expressed his deep resentment at the cruel way she had failed to give him even the slightest hint that she was about to take religious vows:

*Am I to think your becoming a nun
Is nothing to do with me ... for whom then
Did I shed briny tears on Suma's strands*

“As I contemplate the mutability of this world, I regret that even now I put off taking vows myself. Though you have left me behind, I am touched to think that of all the sentient beings you will offer prayers for, I will no doubt be the first.” He wrote many other things as well.

Oborozukiyo had decided on this course long ago, but she held back in deference to Genji’s objections. Although she gave no indication to anyone that she was about to take this step, her heart was filled with sorrow, for as various memories of their relationship came back to her she realized that the painful bond they shared for so many years was anything but shallow. It occurred to her that this would likely be the last correspondence they would ever exchange. Moved by that thought, she put her whole heart into her response. The alternately light and dark flow of the ink from her brushstrokes was utterly enchanting. “I thought that I alone had experienced the fleeting quality of this

world, but when you tell me that I am leaving you behind, then it is truly as you stated ...”

*Why were you so late in wishing
To board the nun's boat ... you who went
Fishing along Akashi's shores¹⁹*

“Since my prayers are for all sentient beings, how could they be for you alone?” Her letter was written on the dark, bluish-gray paper appropriate for a nun’s use and attached to a branch of Japanese star anise.²⁰ It was an ordinary presentation, but her extraordinary calligraphy had not changed over the years—it remained as unforgettably delightful as ever.

He showed the letter to Murasaki during a visit to the Nijō villa—after all, now that Oborozukiyo was a nun, his relationship with her was truly over.

“I’ve been severely reprimanded by her—and, of course, she’s right. To tell the truth, I’m disgusted with myself. I’ve lived long enough to have fully witnessed the many forms a difficult relationship can take. Of all the women I could chat with casually about the beauty of each time and season—sensitive women who appreciated elegant appearances and maintained a close companionship with me even when we were apart—the only ones left were Princess Asagao and Oborozukiyo. However, both have now withdrawn from the world. Princess Asagao in particular has dedicated herself to religious austerities, letting nothing distract her from focusing on her devotion to the Buddha. Still, of all the women I’ve come to know, there was no one who had such a deep understanding of things while also being so warm and kind.

“Raising a daughter is such a difficult task. Her karmic destiny is impossible to clearly discern, and so she isn’t always brought up just as the parents might wish. Nonetheless, it seems that they must still put all of their effort into her care as they raise her to womanhood. I was fortunate, I suppose, that my destiny spared me the troubles that come with having many children. When I was younger, I often complained about the loneliness of having so few children and would wistfully think, ‘If only I had more to look after!’ Please do everything you can to take care of my granddaughter. My daughter may be His Majesty’s favored consort, but she is still inexperienced and lacks a profound grasp of things. She’s always in service at the palace, and so she has little time for herself and cannot be relied on to see to everything as carefully as she should. One really wants to raise imperial princesses in particular to be beyond reproach by others and to be able to live their lives serenely without giving anyone cause for worry. A Princess’s position puts constraints on her not faced by women of

commoner status who have various means of support or who can turn to a husband for help.”

“I doubt if I can help the girl all that much,” Murasaki replied, “but for as long as I live, I want to do everything I can for her ... though I’m not sure how things will turn out.” There was something forlorn about her expression. She envied Oborozukiyo and Asagao ... they were able to follow their heart’s desire and pursue their devotions unhindered.

“Since Oborozukiyo has just become a nun,” Genji said, “I really should do something to help her out. She’s probably not yet accustomed to handling things like changing the robes that she’ll have to wear. Do you know how to sew a surplice? In any case, please have some made for her. I shall ask Hanachirusato to help as well. Robes that are a bit too dull and—how shall I say?—nunlike might strike her as unpleasant and lacking refinement. Of course, they have to have a properly religious feel to them.” He asked Murasaki to have a set of bluish-gray robes prepared. He then summoned craftsmen from the Office of Palace Works and privately commissioned the accessories and implements that a nun would need. He also discreetly ordered them to make seat cushions, floor coverings, folding screens, and standing curtains for her use.

With all that had happened, the celebration of Retired Emperor Suzaku’s fiftieth year had been postponed to the autumn. But when the season arrived, the eighth month was ruled out because it was the anniversary of Princess Ōmiya’s death and thus a period of mourning and abstinence for Genji’s son, who was in charge of directing the musicians for the memorial services. The ninth month was also out of the question since that was the month Suzaku’s mother, the former Kokiden Consort, had passed away. Thus, the tenth month was chosen. Unfortunately, by that time the Third Princess, who was in the eighth month of her pregnancy, was not feeling well and was unable to make her visit. It was decided that Kashiwagi’s wife, the Second Princess, would visit Suzaku in her place. Tō no Chūjō, the former Chancellor, saw to the arrangements, and the ceremony was the most dignified, elaborate and spectacular event of its kind. Kashiwagi roused himself to attend, but he continued to suffer from his illness, which was most uncharacteristic for him.

The Third Princess remained in seclusion. Beset by feelings of shame and sorrow, her distress seemed only to grow worse with each passing month until it reached the point where Genji, who otherwise found her repugnant, began to lament that a young woman so tender and frail should experience such anguish. He worried about what would become of her if this continued. Thus he spent the whole year commissioning prayers and rites of healing.

Word of his daughter’s condition reached Suzaku in his mountain retreat, and

the news moved him to longing and pity for her. He had reports that Genji had been away for months looking after Murasaki exclusively and had rarely called on the Third Princess during that period. Suzaku was heartbroken at the news, anxiously wondering what was happening. Despite having renounced the world, he resented the uncertainty that marked relations between a husband and wife. He felt a sense of unease when he first heard that Genji had moved to his old Nijō villa to tenderly care for Murasaki at the height of her illness.

Later, however, he reconsidered the situation. *Genji stayed with her even after she recovered. He did not change his behavior, but continued to ignore my daughter. Did some untoward incident take place while he was away? Did one of those careless attendants of hers hatch some romantic scheme on her own that my daughter knew nothing about? I've heard of cases where a simple, elegant exchange between a man and a woman can give rise to the most outrageous gossip.*

Suzaku may have abandoned the world, but he still found it hard to leave behind his role as father, and so he sent a detailed letter to the Third Princess. She read it in Genji's presence. Her father admonished her as follows:

Since I have few excuses to contact you, I have not written like this very often. It makes me sad to think how much time I've spent wondering anxiously how you are doing. After hearing reports of your illness, I have been preoccupied with thoughts of you when I should be focusing instead on my prayers. Though you may feel lonely and your marriage may not be everything you expected, you must be patient. Even the slightest expression of resentment or a vague indication that you know of something that displeases you would be unrefined and unbecoming.

Genji felt that Suzaku's feelings were at once pathetic and unbearable. Suzaku certainly knew nothing about his daughter's shocking liaison with Kashiwagi and had only been told that Genji was neglecting her. "How do you plan to respond? It is truly unpleasant to read such a complaint. Things have happened that give me cause to feel aggrieved, but I do not want to treat you in a way that others may criticize as negligence on my part. Who could have told him such things?"

She looked sweetly endearing as she turned away in embarrassment. Her face was thin and haggard, and she was lost in melancholy thought. She seemed more elegant now, and he found that trait attractive.

"I gather from the letter that your father knows that you have not entirely rid yourself of your childish ways, and he is clearly troubled by that. So from now

on, you must exercise caution in everything you do. I wanted to avoid, if at all possible, talking about such matters as this, but I must let you know here and now how unsettling it is for me to find out that your father has been informed that my treatment of you is not what he had expected. You never carefully think things through on your own, but tend to be swayed by what your attendants say to you, and in your heart you think that everything I tell you is tedious and superficial. More than that, you seem to have concluded that I'm nothing more than a despicable, tiresome old man. I find it disappointing and cruel that you should think such things of me, but as long as your father is alive, you have no choice but to put up with me ... after all, it was your father who decided I should be the one to look after you. Decrepit though I am, you must set aside your contempt and treat me with the courtesy that you have obviously extended to others.

"For a long time, it has been my devout wish to take vows and follow the path of religious devotion ... but now I find that I've fallen behind women who have already set out on that path, even though by nature their understanding of such profound matters is shallow. I have been unreliable in many ways, but there is nothing in my heart any more to lead me astray and keep me from taking vows. I was touched and very happy when your father, just before he took vows himself, chose me to look after you once he retreated from the world. I have respected his feelings and been mindful of his wishes, and so if I were now to turn my back on the world and abandon you as he did, he might think I am vying with him and consider my actions a betrayal of trust. I no longer have anyone who would suffer if I were not there to care for them, so who is there to keep me from taking vows? I cannot know what the future holds for my daughter. Nonetheless, since it appears that she will have many children, I may be permitted to think that as long as I'm alive she will get along just fine. As for my other women, they have all reached the age, each according to her own circumstances, when they will not likely have any regrets about abandoning the world with me, and so I feel relieved knowing that I'm free of my responsibility to them."

"Your father probably does not have many years left. He has always been sickly and his maladies have grown more severe. He also seems quite depressed. You should not cause him further distress by letting rumors of any untoward incident reach his ears. This world is worthless. It means nothing. It would be a fearful sin were you to become a hindrance on your father's path to salvation."

He did not explicitly mention her affair with Kashiwagi, but as he went on talking in sad, quiet tones, the Third Princess began to cry. Despair was nearly driving her out of her mind. Genji cried as well. "In the old days it would annoy me to hear some officious old busybody talk about other people's affairs, and

now look at me ... what a disagreeable old man I have become. You must find me more unpleasant and irritating than ever.” Feeling a little reticent as he spoke, he took her inkstone and, rubbing charcoal over it, began to prepare ink himself. He took out a piece of paper and tried to make her write a reply, but her hands were trembling and she couldn’t do it. He felt the sting of jealous resentment at the thought that she had probably not exhibited such hesitation in replying to Kashiwagi’s passionate letter. The sympathy that he had felt a few moments earlier completely dissipated, but he told her what to write all the same.

And so this month passed as well, and she had still not gone to her father to celebrate his fiftieth year. The ceremony held on the occasion of the Second Princess’s visit had been magnificent, but the Third Princess was worn and haggard-looking, and she was reluctant to go lest she suffer by comparison.

“My father died during the eleventh month,” Genji told her, “and so this is a time of mourning for me. And with the end of the year approaching, we will all be very busy the following month as well. By the time you appear before your father, who has been waiting eagerly to see you, you will be even less presentable than you are now ... but that cannot be helped. We cannot continue to postpone your visit. Don’t be so downhearted. Be more cheerful. And do something to fix up your face ... you look tired and drawn.” Despite what he said, she still looked sweetly attractive to him.

Genji had always gone out of his way to summon Kashiwagi and speak with him whenever there was an occasion, official or private, that seemed likely to prove an interesting diversion. He stopped doing that, however, and all communication between the two men ceased. Genji did worry that people might find the change in his behavior strange, and he even reconsidered his position. But the prospect of meeting Kashiwagi caused him to lose his nerve, afraid that he might come across like some pathetic, senile old cuckold or, worse, that he might lose control of himself altogether. As it turned out, his concern was misplaced, for no one criticized him for not summoning Kashiwagi over the past few months. Most courtiers simply assumed that the situation was the result of Kashiwagi’s illness and, in any case, Murasaki’s seizure and the Third Princess’s pregnancy had prevented Genji from sponsoring entertainments that year. Genji’s son, however, guessed that something else was at work. *There has to be some explanation for this*, he thought. *Kashiwagi is a passionate man, and perhaps that glimpse of the Third Princess stirred desires that he was unable to suppress.* Of course, it never occurred to him that the situation had gone as far as it had.

It was now the twelfth month. The celebration was scheduled for a date just

after the tenth, and the sounds of people practicing music and dances echoed throughout the Rokujō estate. Murasaki had remained at the Nijō villa, but she couldn't stay knowing that such rehearsals were taking place, and she finally made her way over to Rokujō. Genji's daughter, the Kirtsubo Consort, was in residence there as well. She had just given birth to yet another child—a boy this time, the Third Prince. Genji found each of her children so charming and adorable that he would spend the entire day playing with them and rejoicing at this sign of the good fortune of old age. Tamakazura also arrived for the rehearsals. Because Genji's son, the Major Counselor, had spent so much time day and night directing preparations for the musical concert in the northeast residence, Hanachirusato did not attend the rehearsal held in Genji's presence.

Given Kashiwagi's talents as a musician, the occasion would not have felt complete if he were not included. In addition, Genji was concerned that people would be puzzled that an invitation had not gone forth, and so he summoned the young man. Kashiwagi, however, did not show up, excusing himself on the grounds that he was seriously ill—though, in truth, there didn't seem to be all that much wrong with him. Genji assumed that his distress was the result of a guilty conscience. Moved to compassion, he sent a special invitation urging him to attend. Kashiwagi's father, Tō no Chūjō, also pressed him to go. "Why are you declining the invitation? This must seem rather perverse to Genji. You aren't seriously ill. Just put up with it and go." In the face of his father's repeated urgings to accept Genji's invitation, Kashiwagi finally gave in and attended, though it was torture for him.

The senior officials and nobles had not yet gathered. Kashiwagi was seated near Genji in his usual spot just inside the veranda blinds in the aisle room. The blinds to the main chamber, where Genji was sitting, had been lowered, separating the two men. Genji had heard that Kashiwagi was thin, pale and wasted, and the sight of him confirmed those rumors. Even when Kashiwagi was healthy, he was no match for the proud bearing and lively behavior of his younger brothers; what had always distinguished him was the calm demeanor evident in his thoughtful face. As Genji studied Kashiwagi, who seemed more subdued than usual, he could not help thinking that the younger man would be an appropriate match for any of the imperial princesses. Yet, at the same time, he could not get past the one unforgivable offense of Kashiwagi's affair with the Third Princess, which was how indiscreetly they had both behaved. Their carelessness suggested a complete lack of consideration for him.

Genji greeted Kashiwagi warmly, with a seemingly casual air.

"Since we've had no occasion to bring us together, it's been a long time since we last met. For months I've been looking after various patients and have had no

time for myself. In the meantime, the celebration for Retired Emperor Suzaku, which my wife here was to arrange for her father, was postponed several times. Now, with the year drawing to a close, it's impossible to honor him in the grand style I would have preferred. A true celebration would be a sumptuous affair, but all I can offer is a banquet in name only, with a few simple dishes befitting the lifestyle of a religious devotee. Thinking that I might show off the many children being raised in this house, I had them begin practicing their dances. I want to make sure that we manage to do at least that much for him. I then began to consider who might be best at marking rhythm for the dancers, and you were the obvious choice. You see, I've set aside the grudge that I held against you for being out of touch all those months."

Nothing in Genji's manner of speaking suggested any hidden meaning in his words, but Kashiwagi still felt extremely awkward and could sense the color of his face change. He was unable to answer right away.

"I was very sorry to hear that two of your ladies were indisposed for several months," he finally replied, "but during the spring an old condition flared up that affected my legs so severely that I was unable to walk steadily. The condition worsened until I could no longer go to the palace, but had to seclude myself at home as though I had cut all ties with the world. My father, however, reminded me that he had better reasons than most people at the court to make sure the celebrations of Retired Emperor Suzaku's fiftieth year were conducted properly. He said to me, 'Having retreated from the world by taking off my court cap and putting away my official carriage, I am in no position to take the lead in serving him. It is true that you are still at a low rank, but you owe Suzaku the same deep gratitude as I, and so you must let him see how you feel.' With those words, he urged me to attend, and so I pulled myself together despite the seriousness of my illness and made my way to the banquet. While I was there, I observed that Suzaku now leads an increasingly quiet, humble lifestyle as a way to clear his mind and achieve enlightenment, and so it seems to me, at the risk of sounding presumptuous, that having a grand banquet in his honor may not be what he really desires. It would be much more appropriate to go ahead with your plans to have a simple affair and grant his deep desire to speak quietly with his daughter."

Genji thought Kashiwagi was most considerate for not mentioning the other banquet that the Second Princess had sponsored, for he had heard it was a magnificent occasion.

"Yes, I think you are right about that," he said. "People at the court will likely interpret a simple banquet as a sign that my regard for Suzaku is shallow. But now that you've shared your understanding of his situation, I feel more confident

I am doing the proper thing. My son seems to have come into his own in administering state affairs, but matters requiring a more refined sensibility, such as this celebration, have never been his forte. Suzaku is a connoisseur of virtually every form of art, but he is especially enthusiastic about music and is a true virtuoso himself. As you noted, he seems to have completely retreated from the world, but it's because he will be listening intently and serenely that we must give special care to rehearsing for the musical performance. See to it, along with my son, that the children who will be dancing are properly trained and ready. Each of the tutors may have mastered his own individual art but, unfortunately, they don't see to the larger details."

Kashiwagi was happy that Genji was speaking so warmly to him, but at the same time he felt painfully overawed. He said very little after that, wanting desperately to withdraw from Genji's presence as soon as possible, and he eventually slipped out without engaging in their usual tête-à-tête. He went over to Hanachirusato's residence and added various new touches to the costumes and other items that Genji's son, the Major Counselor, had prepared for the dancers and musicians. Although all of the preparations had been undertaken with the utmost care, it was apparent from the little details Kashiwagi added that he was truly a man of very refined aesthetic sensibility.

Today was the day of the dress rehearsal. Only the Third Princess would be attending the banquet for her father, and because this rehearsal would be the one chance for the other ladies at the Rokujō estate to see the performance, Genji wanted the event to be impressive. On the day of the formal banquet, each of the young dancers would wear a pale reddish-brown outer robe over layered robes of grape purple, but for the rehearsal they wore green robes over those in the sappanwood style, pale brown lined with dark red. Thirty musicians, each wearing layered white robes, were stationed in the gallery that led out to the fishing pavilion on the southeast corner of the residence. While performing an instrumental piece, "Immortals Wandering in the Mist," the dancers wound their way around the landscaped hill in the garden in order to appear before Genji. A faint scattering of snow fell, and the branches of plum were bursting with new buds, making everyone think that spring was right next door.²¹ Genji was seated in the aisle room of the main hall just inside the blinds, with only Prince Hyōbu and Tamakazura's husband, the Minister of the Right, attending him. The other lesser-ranking officials and nobles were seated out on the veranda. It was an informal occasion, and so a light meal was casually served.

The fourth son of the Minister of the Right, the third son of the Major Counselor, and two grandsons of Prince Sochinomiya danced "Ten Thousand Years"; they were still quite small, but their striking features were captivating.

These four scions of aristocratic households were all equally attractive in looks, splendidly attired and extraordinarily refined—though perhaps the people there were naturally inclined to think of them that way. Next, the Major Counselor's second son—a boy born of Koremitsu's daughter—danced “The Emperor's Deer” together with Prince Hyōbu's grandson—the son of the Minamoto Counselor who formerly served as Commander in the Palace Guard. The Minister of the Right's third son performed “The Masked Warrior King,”²² and the Major Counselor's oldest son danced “Two Dragons.” Boys and men of the same families performed various other dances, “Peace” and “Joyful Spring” among them. When the sun went down, Genji had the blinds raised to watch the rehearsal, which was even more entralling. His exquisitely handsome grandsons, their faces unadorned, performed dances never seen elsewhere. The tutors had imparted all of their secret techniques, and their instruction, coupled with the innate talents of the boys, resulted in a remarkable performance. Genji thought that all of the lads looked adorable. The older officials shed tears of joy. Prince Hyōbu, thinking about his own grandson, wept until his nose turned red.

“The older you get,” Genji remarked, “the harder it is to hold back drunken tears. Take the Middle Counselor here—in control of his emotions, smiling—he puts me quite to shame.” Genji was merely acting drunk as he singled out Kashiwagi. “Still, he won't be in control much longer. Time never runs backward, and no one can escape the ravages of age.” His gaze fell on the younger man who, being more pensively sober than the others and feeling genuinely ill besides, had been indifferent to the wonderful performances. Though Genji's manner seemed playful, Kashiwagi felt his chest pounding more and more intensely. His head was throbbing by the time the winecup came round to him, and so he took a sip, pretending to drink. His action did not go unnoticed, and Genji made him hold onto the cup, insisting that he drink again and again. Even though Kashiwagi was in extreme distress, he looked most attractive—not an ordinary figure at all.

Because his condition worsened and he could no longer bear the pain, he withdrew before the banquet was finished. In a state of utter bewilderment, he chided himself. *I didn't get as drunk as I usually do, so why do I feel this bad? Did the tension and awkwardness make me dizzy? I'm not so weak-willed that I should lose my nerve over a few words ... really, it was unmanly.* As it turned out, he was not suffering the temporary effects of inebriation, but was gravely ill. His father and mother were alarmed and worried about his living apart from them while he was in such serious condition. They urged him to move back to their villa to care for him, which greatly upset his wife, the Second Princess.

The uneventful days Kashiwagi had spent with the Second Princess led him to

quietly accept the unfulfilled expectations of their relationship. Still, even though he had no special feelings for her, the thought that he might now be leaving her for the last time made him sad, and the shame of disrespecting an imperial princess by abandoning her to her grief was more than he could bear.

The Second Princess's mother, who had served Suzaku as his lady of the bedchamber, was upset over this turn of events. "As a rule, parents usually take precedence, but it's also accepted that the relationship between husband and wife cannot be broken regardless of the circumstances. It would cause my daughter great anguish should you separate from her and stay with your parents until you improve. Won't you stay on here a while longer?" She pleaded her case with only a standing curtain separating her from her son-in-law.

"What you say is perfectly reasonable," Kashiwagi replied. "I had hoped to live long enough for you to see me rise from my lowly rank and achieve a more honorable position at court. It was the only way I could repay the debt of gratitude I owe you for allowing a man of my insignificant status to marry your daughter, who is far above me. But now my life has taken this turn, and I fear your daughter may never see the true depths of my regard for her. The regret I feel knowing that I may not live much longer will surely be an impediment to my rebirth in the next world."

They both began to weep, and because he delayed the move, Kashiwagi's mother was anxious and sent a message: "Why do you not think of your parents first and let me see you? Whenever I'm feeling a little out of sorts or forlorn, you're the one I want to see first, the one on whom I rely the most. This situation makes me very nervous ..." Her complaint was also understandable.

"I'm the oldest son," he told the Second Princess, "and so my parents have always had special expectations for me. They are unhappy and upset whenever I go for some time without visiting them, and so it would be a terrible sin if I did not see them at a moment when I feel I'm nearing the end of my life. If you hear that I am drawing closer to death, come to see me in secret. We will certainly meet again. I am by nature a strangely indecisive, foolish man, and I regret that I have given you cause to think me unkind. It never occurred to me that my life might be short ... I had always assumed that a long future was before us." Weeping uncontrollably, he left for his parents' villa. The Second Princess suffered indescribable despair.

With all of the preparations made and healing prayers offered in anticipation of Kashiwagi's arrival, his father's household was noisy and bustling. Once he arrived, he did not experience any sudden, shocking deterioration, but he had not eaten much of anything for months and would no longer touch even a slice of mandarin orange. It looked as though something or some spirit was slowly but

surely pulling him inward and draining his life. Everyone at the court lamented that one of the most gifted young men of his generation should have fallen ill in this way, and they all paid visits to inquire after him. Both His Majesty and Suzaku sent frequent messages, and their profound concern for Kashiwagi made his parents' anguish all the more intense, for they now realized the high regard in which their son was held. Genji was also shocked at this most unfortunate turn of events, and he sent letter after letter expressing his heartfelt condolences to Tō no Chūjō. Genji's son had always been Kashiwagi's boon companion, and because he was closer to his stricken friend than anyone, he grieved deeply and went about in a daze.

The quiet celebration for Retired Emperor Suzaku was finally held on the twenty-fifth day of that month. But because one of the most distinguished officials was seriously ill at the time, and because his parents, members of his large family, and other relatives of high rank were all feeling sad and despondent, it seemed somehow inappropriate to gather for such a joyous event. Genji, however, was worried how it might look if the banquet were called off, since they had already postponed it so many times. Moreover, he would have been sorry for the Third Princess and concerned about how she might have reacted if the celebration were canceled. As was customary for such events, readings of scripture were commissioned at fifty temples. The sutra to Dainichi Nyorai²³ was read out at the temple where Suzaku resided.

¹ Had she lived, her status as Imperial Mother would have been effectively equivalent to that of an empress.

² The original text continues to refer to Genji's son as the Major Captain (he holds both posts), but to avoid possible confusion with other characters I have decided to refer to him as the Major Counselor from this point on.

³ This nurse appears in the *Miotsukushi* chapter. She is selected by Genji to go to Akashi as nurse to his daughter.

⁴ *Kokinshū* 262 (Ki no Tsurayuki, seeing autumn foliage on the sacred enclosure of a shrine that he was passing): "Even the kudzu vines that twine about the sacred enclosure of an august deity have no choice but to change colors in autumn."

⁵ *Kokinshū* 251 (Ki no Yoshimochi): "The mountain of evergreens that puts forth no autumn foliage ... does it hear the arrival of autumn in the rustling of the wind?"

⁶ Ono no Takamura (802–853) was a poet and scholar of Chinese who lived in the ninth century CE. The poem may be misattributed here. According to *Fukurososhi* (*The Book of Folding Paper*), a twelfth-century work by Fujiwara no Kiyosuke (1104–1177), the poem was written by Sugawara no Fumitoki (899–981), the grandson of Sugawara no Michizane: "The gods in their sacred spaces seem to have accepted our offerings, for they have placed a sacred garland of snow on the peak of Mount Hira as well." Mount Hira is on the western shore of Lake Biwa.

⁷ Roku no kimi has not been mentioned earlier. The Principal Handmaid is Koremitsu's daughter (and

secondary wife to Genji's son) first mentioned as one of the maidens of the Gosechi dance in the *Otome* chapter.

8 Musical pieces were classified as major, intermediate, and minor. The reasons for this classification are obscure, but may have been connected to the specific mode (or key) of the piece. Each month and season had a conventionally appropriate mode, which is why Genji is focused on teaching those techniques that convey the seasonal mood of a piece.

9 *Kokinshū* 13 (Ki no Tomonori): "Like a branch attached to a letter, I shall set the fragrance of the plum wafting on the breeze and make that scent my guide to entice the warbler here."

10 One of the six modes of court music (*gagaku*), *ichikotsu* corresponds to the key of D.

11 *Kokinshū* 139 (Anonymous): "The fragrance of the orange blossoms awaiting the fifth month brings to mind the perfumed sleeves of a lover from long ago" (also alluded to in the *Hanachirusato* chapter).

12 In the comments that follow, Genji alludes generally to the example of the character Toshikage in *The Tale of the Hollow Tree* (referred to earlier in the *E-awase* chapter).

13 *Kokinshū* 878 (Anonymous): "Inconsolable, I gaze at the moon shining on Mount Obasute in Sarashina." Mount Obasute (*obasute* meaning, literally, "abandoned old woman") is the legendary peak where old women (and, in some variations of the story, old men) were brought and left to die, usually by their eldest son, when they became a burden on society. At first glance, the implication of the allusion seems at odds with the import of the source poem, but it makes sense in the context of Kashiwagi's emotional turmoil, since he is disconsolate that the one he loves is beyond his reach.

14 This poem gives the Second Princess her traditional name, Ochiba—Princess "Fallen Leaf." However, since this character is initially introduced as the Second Princess, I have decided to use that appellation for her throughout.

15 *Kokinshū* 70 (Anonymous).

16 To become a full-fledged nun, Murasaki would have had to swear to uphold the Ten Great Precepts: refrain from taking life, from stealing, from sexual misconduct, from gossiping, from drinking (or intoxication), from lying, from praising oneself, from meanness, from aggression, and from slandering the Three Treasures—the Buddha, the Dharma (the Law), and the Sangha (the community of the enlightened, i.e., the priesthood). Instead, she vows to uphold the first Five Precepts from this list and is thus a lay devotee.

17 The Third Princess takes up Genji's words "before my path is obscured by the dark" and alludes more explicitly to *Kokin rokujō* 371 (Ōyake no Iratsume): "Your path, my love, will be obscured in the evening darkness ... so wait for the moon to rise before you leave that I may gaze on you a while longer" (alluded to in the *Utsusemi* chapter as well). A similar poem is *Man'yōshū* 709.

18 *Kokin rokujō* 1980 (Anonymous): "How deep the recesses of the mountain of love ... it seems that people who enter them always lose their way."

19 The word *amabune* ("fishing boat/nun's boat") in Oborozukiyo's poem picks up the play on the word *ama* ("nun/fisherman") in Genji's poem. She parries the accusation in his poem that she caused the grief that he experienced in exile by pointedly reminding him that he forgot about her in his pursuit of the Akashi lady.

20 This plant (*shikimi*), which is native to Japan, is toxic and thus not edible. It was used in topical medicines and incense and as a decoration for Buddhist altars. Like the dark paper, it symbolizes Oborozukiyo's new life as a nun.

21 *Kokinshū* 1021 (Kiyowara Fukayabu): "Though it is still winter, spring is right next door, which is why white blossoms scatter over the enclosure."

22 This Chinese-style *bugaku* (the dance music category of court music, or *gagaku*) was performed with an elaborate mask and tells the story of the military exploits of Gao Su, the king of Lanling. Gao Su reportedly took to wearing a frightening mask into battle because he was so handsome that he distracted his own soldiers and failed to strike fear in his enemies. It was common for a Chinese-style dance to be followed by one in the Korean style, as happens here.

23 Dainichi Nyorai is the Japanese name for Mahāvairocana (or Vairocana). Mahāvairocana was the central

deity in the esoteric sect of Shingon Buddhism. The largest image of Mahāvairocana is the great statue at Tōdaiji in Nara. During the Heian period, the worship of Dainichi Nyorai largely gave way to the worship of Amida.

XXXVI

Kashiwagi

The Oak Tree

KASHIWAGI'S SUFFERING continued without relief, and the New Year arrived with no sign that his condition would improve. He observed his parents, how distraught and anxious they were, and pondered his predicament. *Giving in to my desire to leave this world would do nothing to assuage their grief and, in any case, it's a terrible sin to precede one's parents in death. On the other hand, why should I want to cling unreasonably to life under these circumstances? Ever since I was a boy, I had great ambitions for myself ... I wanted to outshine others in every endeavor and took extraordinary pride in all that I tried to accomplish, whether in public or private. But when my dreams did not turn out as I had hoped, and I suffered one or two disappointments, I came to realize that my pride was misplaced. I lost confidence and regarded the world as dreary and tedious. That's why I was drawn to the idea of taking religious vows to prepare for the next world—until, that is, I imagined how unhappy my parents would be if I chose that path. It was then that I realized my concern for them would be a serious hindrance to achieving enlightenment by wandering in fields and mountains as a priest.¹ What with one thing or another, I continued to distract myself from my true wishes, and now, as a result of that outrageous affair, I am beset by an extraordinary unease that will not let me show myself at court. Of course, I have no one to blame but myself ... this is all the result of my own transgressions.* Taking all of these things into consideration, there was indeed no one for whom he should harbor any resentment.

In his idleness, he continued to reflect obsessively on his life. *I cannot complain to the gods and Buddha either, for apparently all of this was meant to be. We must all pass away in the end ... no one in this world is like a pine that lives a thousand years.² Since this is the way things are, so long as there is*

someone who should fondly remember me a little—perhaps the Third Princess herself might give a passing, sorrowful thought to my memory—that would be at least some indication that she acknowledges my love, which burned with a single flame.³ If I were to live on, the affair would come to light, my reputation would be ruined, and both she and I would be subjected to a painful storm of condemnation. No, it would be better to die ... for even though Genji will consider me a scoundrel, once I'm gone he might somehow find it in his heart to forgive me. After all, all resentments fade away at the moment of death. Since I committed no other offenses against him, perhaps he will think back in fond sorrow on all those occasions over the years when he would summon me and have me near. The more such thoughts ran through his head, the more miserable he felt.

Lost in these dark musings, he wondered why he found himself caught in such a bind. He shed so many tears over things for which he was responsible, it seemed that his pillow would surely float away.⁴ During a brief respite when he was feeling better, his family withdrew from his bedside, which gave him a chance to send a letter to the Third Princess. “Perhaps you have heard that my death is drawing near. Though it is perfectly reasonable for you not to inquire how I’m doing, your silence is very hurtful to me.” Because his hand was trembling uncontrollably, he could not write down all that was in his heart.

*When my end comes at last and the flames of my pyre
Have died out, leaving behind only plumes of smoke
The fire of my undying love will smolder still*

“Tell me that you pity me. Such words would comfort my heart and be a light for me as I wander in darkness along the path I chose of my own accord.”

As if he had not yet learned his lesson, he sent a desperately passionate appeal to Kojijū as well. “I wish to talk to her myself one last time.” From the time she was a page girl, Kojijū had had close connections, through her mother and aunt, with the households of both Kashiwagi and the Third Princess, and she was accustomed to running errands between them. She had strongly disapproved of his outrageous infatuation for her mistress, but now felt profoundly sad when she heard that he was near death. “You really must reply to him,” she tearfully told her mistress. “This may be the last chance you will have to do so.”

“I feel as sorry for him as I would for anyone in his condition ... after all, I feel alone and helpless as well, not knowing if I may die today or tomorrow. But what happened between us brought such terrible consequences ... I consider it a bitter lesson, and so the thought of sending him another letter is too frightening

to contemplate.” And with that, she refused.

The Third Princess was by nature weak-willed and flighty, but she was no doubt extremely frightened by the occasional hints of displeasure dropped by her husband, who was such a daunting figure. Nonetheless, Kojijū persisted, preparing an inkstone and pleading until finally her mistress gave in and wrote a reply. Kojijū then secretly delivered the letter that evening under the cover of darkness.

Tō no Chūjō summoned a wise ascetic from Mount Kazuraki and, after receiving him, had the man begin healing rituals for Kashiwagi. He also commissioned esoteric rites and readings of scriptures, and the voices of priests resounded throughout the villa. On the recommendation of others, he dispatched his younger sons to seek out and summon various holy men, hermits hidden away deep in the mountains and virtually unknown at court. Soon after, a large crowd of rather disgusting-looking, uncouth mountain ascetics arrived. The patient was downcast and would from time to time weep and sob for reasons that weren’t entirely clear. Most of the yin-yang masters divined the possessing presence of the spirit of a woman, and Tō no Chūjō agreed that it must be so. Still, it was perplexing that the spirit refused to reveal itself, which is why holy men were sought in every mountain recess.

The wise ascetic from Mount Kazuraki was a man of imposing stature and fiercely stern visage, and he chanted *dharani*⁵ in his wild, booming voice. “Ah how dreadful!” Kashiwagi cried out. “Are my sins really so deep? That chanting voice is so loud and terrifying, I feel my death is imminent.” He quietly slipped out of his chambers and spoke with Kojijū.

His father was unaware of what was happening, and when told that Kashiwagi was asleep, he believed it. Careful not to wake his son, he had a quiet conversation with the ascetic. Although Tō no Chūjō was getting on in years, he still had a bright, outgoing personality and was much given to laughter. He would now meet directly even with people of low status such as this ascetic. He described to the healer the course of his son’s malady—how it had begun, how it had progressed from vague symptoms, which would come and go, to a grave, chronic illness—and his heartfelt plea to the ascetic to do all he could to drive the malignant spirit out was keenly affecting.

“Just listen to them,” Kashiwagi said to Kojijū. “They have no idea that I’ve committed a terrible sin. They’ve simply decided it must be the spirit of some woman possessing me. To tell the truth, if that spirit were the Third Princess’s, it would transform me from the detestable man I am to someone distinguished and noble. I’ve tried to reconsider my situation, telling myself that there have been others who have reflected in torment on the serious errors they committed as a

result of presumptuous passions ... errors that besmirched the reputation of the lady involved and destroyed their own lives. And yet, the situation remains unbearable, for Genji knows what I've done, and I am ashamed to live on in the world exposed by the dazzling light of his special radiance. Even if my offense is not that serious, ever since that evening when my eyes met his gaze, my soul began to wander in turmoil and has not yet returned to my body. If it should be wandering around the Rokujō estate, do what you can to bind it.”⁶ Alternately weeping and laughing as he spoke, he seemed weak and spent, empty as a discarded shell.

Kojijū described to him how the Third Princess looked as she wrestled with her own feelings of shame and fear. To Kashiwagi it seemed as though he could see her figure right in front of him—her thin, haggard face lost in thought. And if he could see her like this, then truly his spirit must be wandering from his body—a realization that only brought him more torment. “I must speak no more about her,” he said. “We passed a few fleeting moments together in this world, and it is sad to think my attachment to her will hinder my salvation in the world to come. Since her pregnancy has been the source of so much anxiety, all I want to know before I die is that she has safely given birth. All this time, while I’ve been straining to come to some understanding about that dream I saw, I’ve had no one to confide in, and my isolation has been terribly depressing.” Even though Kojijū previously found his behavior repellent and frightening, when she saw how deeply consumed Kashiwagi was by grief and anxiety, she was no longer able to control herself and wept bitterly along with him.

He called for a small wooden hand torch and in the dim light read the Third Princess’s reply. Although her calligraphy still had a hesitant, uncertain air about it, the writing was charming all the same. “I have heard that you are not well, but how should I console you? I can only guess how you feel. You wrote about ‘leaving only plumes of smoke’ and yet ...”

*I would rise with your smoke and disappear
But whose smoldering anguish, yours or mine
Will produce thicker billows of sorrow*

“How could I linger on after you?” That was all she wrote, but he was deeply touched and grateful.

“Ah, it seems that this ‘smoke’ is the only keepsake that I shall have of this world. How fleeting and insubstantial it is.” He wept uncontrollably now. Still lying down, he composed his reply during those few lucid moments when he had regained his composure. His words were broken and disjointed, and his

calligraphy looked like the footprints of strange birds.

*Though I may turn to smoke that dissipates
In the infinite skies, I shall never
Be separated from the one I love*

“Gaze up at the sky, especially in the evenings. Though *he* may look at you with disapproving eyes, have no fear once I am gone ... and never stop taking pity on me, useless though such sentiments may be after my death.” As he was writing down his tangled thoughts, his condition worsened. “Enough already,” he said to Kojijū. “You should return before the night gets too late and inform your mistress that I am nearing my end. It is painful to imagine that after I die people will likely figure out what has happened and censure my reprehensible behavior. What sort of bond do we share from a previous life that this love should have taken possession of my heart in this way?” Still weeping, he crawled back to his chambers. Normally he would have kept Kojijū seated before him for hours on end, chatting on and on about nothing in particular. She found his reluctance to talk sad and could not bring herself to leave.

Kashiwagi’s nurse broke down in tears as she described his condition to her niece, Kojijū. The look on the faces of Tō no Chūjō and the others was one of considerable alarm, and the former Chancellor made a great fuss over his son. “But you were feeling better the last two days,” he said. “Why should you have weakened so much?”

“I don’t know why, but I’m not sure I’ll be able to hold out much longer,” Kashiwagi tearfully replied.

At around dusk that same day, the Third Princess began to experience severe pains, and her ladies-in-waiting, who recognized that she was going into labor, raised a great commotion. When Genji heard, he was startled and immediately made his way over to the Third Princess’s quarters. *How regrettable this is*, he thought to himself, *and how happy I would have been if I could have helped her through the birth without being conflicted by my doubts about the child’s paternity*. He did not want to give any indication that he was suspicious, however, and so he called for exorcists and commissioned esoteric healing rites, which were to be performed throughout the labor. All of the most efficacious healers arrived and began noisily offering prayers.

The Third Princess suffered all night, giving birth to her child just around dawn. Upon hearing that it was a boy, Genji reflected on the situation: *Their affair is still a secret, but it will be an awkward problem if the baby looks like Kashiwagi. A girl would have been much easier to deal with, since she could be*

kept behind curtains and blinds where not many people would see her. Then again, I'm so tormented by doubts that perhaps it's best that the child's a boy. He won't need nearly as much attention as a girl. In any case, this is all so strange ... it must be retribution for my own transgression, which has been a constant source of terror for me. I never expected to be given my just deserts in this world, but perhaps it will lighten the burden of my sins in the next.

The Third Princess's ladies-in-waiting had no inkling of the truth. They went about carefully tending to the baby's needs, assuming that Genji would have special affection for a boy born so late in his life to a mother of special lineage.

The ceremonies and rituals attending the birth—the cutting of the umbilical cord, the first bath and the like—were all conducted with dignified splendor. On the third night following the birth, the other ladies at the Rokujō estate seemed to vie with one another as they presented their carefully prepared gifts of food on the flat trays and various pedestal bowls and cups customarily used for such an occasion. On the fifth night, the Umetsubo Empress sponsored an official ceremony, presenting robes for the mother and gifts for the Third Princess's ladies-in-waiting, each in accord with the woman's status. Umetsubo made sure that absolutely everything—from the gruel, to the fifty sets of steamed rice dumplings, to the celebratory meals provided the servants and household staff around the Rokujō estate—was carried out according to proper, dignified form. All of the officials from Umetsubo's staff—including the Master of her Household office—as well as Retired Emperor Reizei's privy staff were in attendance.

His Majesty sponsored an official celebration on the seventh night. Tō no Chūjō would normally have been expected to attend and celebrate wholeheartedly, but at the time he was so preoccupied with his son's illness that he managed only to send a message of congratulations. A large crowd of princes, nobles and high officials was present. Genji lavished his attention on the little boy for the sake of appearances at a public function, but in his heart he found it trying to have to maintain the charade. Since he didn't bother to arrange for any musical performances, the event was a not an especially lively celebration.

The Third Princess had always been frail, and since this was the first time she had gone through the pains of childbirth, the unfamiliar physical experience had unnerved her. She would not drink the infusions that she was provided, and she sank into a deep depression as she brooded over the cruel fate that had overtaken her. *If only I had died during childbirth*, she lamented.

Genji, meanwhile, was putting on a fine show for everyone, but because he found the newborn still rather repulsive-looking and difficult to love, he couldn't bring himself to pay all that much attention to the boy. Some of the older women

were sharply critical. “Really, now ... how can he be so coldly indifferent? He has so few children of his own, and the boy is really quite handsome ... worryingly so, in fact!” The Third Princess overheard them and was filled with remorse, since it seemed likely that the estrangement between Genji and her son would only grow. Bemoaning her misfortune, she was seized with a genuine desire to become a nun.

Genji would peek in on the quarters of the Third Princess every day, but he would not spend his nights there. One day he peeked around her standing curtain. “Having witnessed the evanescence of the world and experienced the loneliness of knowing that the future before me is short, I have grown more attentive to my religious devotions. As a result, I felt that the recent fuss over the birth of the child was a distraction, and I really wasn’t able to visit you. By the way ... how are you? Are you more yourself these days? I do feel bad for you ...”

She raised her head. “I still have the feeling that I will not survive, though it would be a grave sin to die as a result of childbirth and leave my child alone. I shall take vows and become a nun so that I may live a little longer ... or if I am to die, to see if I can at least cleanse myself of sin.” Her manner of speaking was more mature than usual.

“What an unpleasant notion ... absolutely out of the question! Why would you ever consider such a thing? Giving birth is a frightful experience, to be sure, but there’s no reason to think that you’re going to die any time soon.”

So he said, but his heart held different thoughts on the matter. *Helping her become a nun might very well be the most sensitive thing to do. That’s what she says she wants, and it would be cruel to go on together as we are, since my worries and suspicions about everything would keep me feeling constrained and distant toward her ... and I doubt if I could ever change my attitude now. Even if I don’t mean to cause her sorrow, I may not be able to help myself and that would be unfortunate, for others will surely observe my behavior. When Suzaku hears about us, he will likely put the blame on me. Since she is suffering so, now might be a good time for her to take this step.*

This was all very reasonable, and yet the idea of her becoming a nun was simply too wretched and sad to contemplate. It was painful to think of her taking the tonsure, cutting the long flowing hair that was a sign of her youth, and then spending the many years remaining to her dressed in religious garb. “You must remain strong,” he told her. “You really have nothing to worry about. There are examples close at hand of those who looked to be on the verge of death, but then recovered. The world is not entirely capricious and random.”

She drank the medicinal infusion. Painfully thin and pale, heartbreakingly vulnerable as she lay there, she exuded an air of intimate beauty. As Genji gazed

at her, his feelings softened, and he thought he ought to forgive her in spite of the grave offense she had committed.

The news that his daughter had safely delivered her baby reached Suzaku in his mountain retreat; he was deeply moved and very much wanted to see her. There were reports, however, that she was not well following the birth, and his worries about how she was faring distracted him from his religious devotions.

The Third Princess, who was already weakened by her labor, went several days without eating anything, and so her condition was truly precarious. Her yearning to see her father was stronger now than at any time during the many years that they had been apart. "I may never meet him again," she said, weeping loudly, whereupon Genji sent a trustworthy messenger to apprise her father of the situation and convey to him what the Third Princess had said. Suzaku found it unbearably sad, and, though he knew he should not have done it, he set off for the Rokujo estate under the cover of night.

Because Suzaku showed up so suddenly, with no advance letter announcing his visit, Genji was startled and humbled by the honor of this imperial visit.

"I know that I should no longer be preoccupied with worldly matters, but it's difficult to free oneself of delusions when lost on the dark path of a father's attachment to his child," Suzaku said. "I have been distracted from my devotions of late. It disturbed me to imagine that my daughter might die before I had the chance to see her again. Such a rupture of the natural order between a parent and child would have left us with lingering regrets. And so, I have made my way here, disregarding any public censure that I might incur."

Dressed discreetly in his strange priestly garb, his appearance had a soft elegance; though he was not wearing the formal robes of a priest, his gray clothing suited him perfectly. Genji looked on him with envy. As one might expect, tears fell before they spoke.

"I don't think that she's suffering from any particular malady," Genji explained. "It's just that months of pregnancy have weakened her, and she's in her current state because she's gone so long without eating very much. I'm ashamed to have to receive you in such an inappropriate space as this." Genji apologized as he had Suzaku seated on a cushion just outside the curtains of the Third Princess's bedchamber. Her ladies-in-waiting got her ready and helped her down from the dais where her bedding was laid out.

Suzaku pulled the curtain a little to the side.

"I feel like a priest performing evening prayers, though I'm ashamed to say that I've not yet accrued enough merit through my austerities to be a very efficacious healer. Still, I felt that I should present myself to you, since you evidently longed to see me." He brushed tears from his eyes.

The Third Princess, looking terribly frail, was crying as well.

"I don't think I have long to live. Now that you've come to me, please administer vows and make me a nun!"

"If that is your true desire, it is a noble aspiration," her father replied, "but the term of your life is not fixed definitively, and a woman with a long life ahead of her may find later on that the decision to become a nun brings her grief and that people at court will ultimately condemn her for taking such a step. You really should wait." Here he turned to Genji and continued. "She's making this request because she wants to take vows, and if she were really near the end of her life I would certainly do it for her, since even a short time spent as a nun would help her achieve salvation."

"She's been talking like this for some days, now," Genji said, "but I have refused to listen because I suspect that a spirit is confusing her and putting these thoughts in her head."

"If you think that a spirit is leading her on and that it would be wrong to give in to her request," Suzaku answered, "then perhaps it's best not to do anything. But suppose she really *is* close to the end ... she's terribly weak, after all. Were I to ignore what turned out to be her last request, I'd be left with nothing but pain and remorse afterwards."

I gave my daughter to Genji absolutely confident that he would look after her, but over the years I've received disturbing reports that convinced me he has never been all that affectionate nor behaved as I expected. Since I couldn't very well express my displeasure, all that was left for me was to lament the gossip that might arise from her misfortune. So what would be the harm now in using her illness as a pretext for taking her away from Genji and allowing her to become a nun? That way, she would avoid the ridicule of malicious gossips who might otherwise assume that she was driven to turn her back on the world by dissatisfaction with her marriage. Genji could still be relied on to look after her everyday needs, and from that standpoint, I believe I made the right decision in giving her to him. So as long as they part with no lingering, bitter recriminations, I could have the large, pleasant villa on Sanjō Avenue that father bequeathed to me refurbished for her use. I don't want to have to worry about her while I'm still alive, even if she's living as a nun. Genji may not feel any deep attachment to her, but no matter what happens, he's unlikely to abandon her altogether. I must make my feelings clear to him. With those considerations in mind, he spoke to Genji again.

"Under these circumstances, I really should take advantage of this opportunity to initiate her bond with the Holy Buddha by letting her take vows to uphold the Precepts."

Genji's resentment of the Third Princess softened, and he was filled with sadness and regret. Confused over what, exactly, was about to take place, he could no longer restrain himself and moved inside the curtains to speak directly to his wife. "What is driving you to abandon me when I have so few years left? You need to calm down for a while, drink your medicine, and eat something. It may be a noble thing to take vows, but how do you expect to carry out your devotions when you are so weak? In any case, you really can't make a decision such as this until you take care of yourself."

She was shaking her head. She couldn't stand listening to him. Her appearance moved Genji to sorrow and pity, for despite her cool, outward demeanor, he now realized the extent of the bitterness she nursed deep inside.

All through the night, Genji continued his halfhearted attempts to dissuade her. As dawn approached, Suzaku grew impatient, since it would prove awkward for him to have to make his way home in the light of day. At last, he summoned the most distinguished and virtuous priest from among the many healers who were chanting prayers there and had the man cut the Third Princess's hair. The ceremony, during which her thick, beautiful tresses fell away and the vows were administered, was poignant and heartbreakng. Genji could not bear to watch, and he broke down, weeping bitterly. Suzaku had always treated the Third Princess with special favor and had hoped to see her rise to greater fortune than his other daughters. Now, he felt unfulfilled and unhappy that his dreams for this world had all come to naught, and he too broke down in tears. "What's done is done," he told his daughter, "so you must be well and devote yourself to your meditation and prayers." Since the sun was already up, he hurriedly prepared to return to his temple in the mountains.

The Third Princess was still feeling weak, and she slipped in and out of consciousness. She had not had a clear look at her father and had not been able to talk with him.

"My heart is lost and confused, as if I'm in a dream," Genji told Suzaku. "I was honored by your gracious visit years ago,⁷ and it was discourteous of me not to make a proper show of my gratitude. I shall pay you a visit to make amends." He summoned several of his men to provide Suzaku with an escort.

"During that period, when I thought I might die any day," Suzaku explained, "I found it impossible to abandon this life, touched by the knowledge that if I did, my daughter would be left behind, adrift in the world with no one to look after her. You probably had no real desire to take her as your wife, but I pressed you to do so anyway, and for many years my heart was at peace. If she should survive and live on, it would be inappropriate now that she has changed her appearance to have her reside in a place with crowds of people coming and

going. By the same token, sending her off to live in some mountain villa would surely make her feel lonely and forlorn. Please do not abandon her but continue to support as you have up to now, in keeping with her new status."

"I am ashamed that you feel you must say these things to me. My thoughts are confused and in such turmoil that I cannot think straight." It appeared that Genji found all of this extremely hard to bear.

The malignant spirit that had possessed the Third Princess showed itself during the rites performed in the wee hours of the morning. "See what I've done! And you thought you succeeded in getting rid of me when you took your beloved back," the spirit shouted through the medium. "I hated you for giving your heart to her alone, and so I casually haunted this place for several days. I shall leave now." The spirit gave a harsh shriek of laughter. Genji was shocked to realize that the spirit of the lady at Rokujō had possessed the Third Princess as well. He felt sorry for his young wife and mortified at the same time. She seemed to have recovered a little, but was still vulnerable. The women attending her were subdued and depressed, but despite the change in their mistress's appearance, they hoped that now perhaps her condition would improve. Meanwhile, Genji made sure that no effort was spared and no detail overlooked in seeing to her needs, and he ordered the healing rites to continue uninterrupted.

After Kashiwagi heard about the birth, his condition worsened; he slipped in and out of consciousness more and more frequently, and there were almost no prospects for recovery. He felt sorry for his wife, the Second Princess, and considered having her come to him, but he gave up the idea. She was of imperial blood, after all, and making such a visit was beneath her dignity. Moreover, his mother and father were always near, and he felt it would be mortifying if by some chance they were to catch sight of her. "I really want to go see her one last time," he told his parents, but they wouldn't hear of it.

He then asked them to look after the Second Princess. Her mother, who had been one of Suzaku's lower-ranking wives, was not very enthusiastic about the marriage proposal at the beginning, but Tō no Chūjō encouraged the match, and eventually the sincerity with which he made his case carried the day. Suzaku then agreed to let the marriage go forward, since he had no idea how else to deal with his second daughter. Later, when Suzaku was fretting over the problems that the Third Princess was having in her marriage with Genji, he was heard to remark, "The Second Princess's future is secure, since she has someone serious to support her." Kashiwagi felt ashamed whenever he recalled those words. "The thought that I will soon be abandoning my wife," he said to his mother, "moves me to pity her in so many ways. But our lives do not always go as we might wish, and it hurts me to think that she'll be left to mourn resentfully the marriage

vows I was unable to keep. So, once I am gone, be considerate and look after her.”

“It’s bad luck to say such things,” his mother replied. “You talk about the future as if I will be there, but how much longer do you think I would live if you were to die first?” She broke down and was crying so hard that Kashiwagi could say no more to her. Instead, he gave final instructions concerning his wife to his younger brother, the Major Controller of the Right.

Kashiwagi had always been so calm and competent that all his siblings, right down to the youngest, relied on him as if he were a father. It made them sad that he should now be so downhearted. All of the people who served in the household were grieving as well. Even His Majesty expressed sorrow and regret, and when he heard that Kashiwagi was nearing the end, he suddenly appointed him Acting Major Counselor⁸ in the hopes that the joy of the promotion might revive him enough to visit the palace one last time. Alas, Kashiwagi showed no improvement and was forced to express his appreciation for the Emperor’s gracious favor from his sickbed. On seeing this evidence of the high regard in which His Majesty held his son, Tō no Chūjō was increasingly overwhelmed by regret and despair.

Genji’s son was deeply upset and constantly sent messages expressing his concern. When he heard about his friend’s promotion, he went straightaway to congratulate him. He arrived to find a throng of horses and carriages and people bustling about outside the gate near the hall where Kashiwagi’s quarters were located. Kashiwagi, who had been bedridden almost constantly since the New Year, felt that he could not very well greet like an illustrious man like the Major Counselor while in such a weakened, unkempt state. On the other hand, he would have regretted it were he to have gone into complete decline without seeing his friend. “Please do come in,” he said. “I hope you will forgive the chaos here.” He temporarily dismissed the priests who had been praying near his pillow and had his friend shown in.

The two of them were the closest of companions. They had been inseparable since childhood, and the grief and longing the Major Counselor felt at the prospect of parting was every bit as strong as the feelings that tormented Kashiwagi’s parents and siblings. He had hoped that the joyful news of the promotion might have brightened his friend’s mood, but unfortunately it had had no effect. “What has caused you to be so weak and frail? I thought that maybe the news of your promotion today might cheer you up a bit.” Genji’s son lifted up the edge of one of the curtain panels as he spoke.

“I’m sorry to say that the old Kashiwagi, the man who would have rejoiced at such a promotion, is no more,” Kashiwagi replied. His hair was tucked up into

his court cap, and he tried to raise himself a little, but the strain seemed too much. Wearing several layers of well-worn, soft white robes, he pulled his bedding over him and lay back down. His quarters were elegant—neat and clean, the air redolent with incense. Even as he was languishing in his sickbed, it was apparent that he remained mindful of his appearance. A person who is seriously ill naturally lets his hair and beard become all wild and tangled and ends up looking a frightful mess. Kashiwagi, however, was thin and wasted and had an alabaster glow that made him look more refined than ever. He had trouble catching his breath as he adjusted his pillow to raise his head to speak, and he was so weak that his old friend was moved to compassion.

“You really don’t look as emaciated as I expected,” the Major Counselor said, “given how long you’ve been sick. In fact, you seem more handsome than usual.” He was trying to sound jovial, but he could not hide the tears he brushed away. “Did we not as friends make a vow never to abandon one another? How dreadful this is! I can’t understand what is causing you to be so ill. We’ve always been so close, I’m frantic with worry.”

“It’s not clear to me why I’m so sick. My symptoms were vague at first, and so I never imagined that I might become seriously ill like this. But over time I grew progressively weaker, until now I seem to have lost all sense of myself. It may be that the power of these prayers and rituals, which seek somehow to keep me from death, has extended my life. But I do not regret my passing, and since lingering in this world only brings me greater pain, I’m impatient to hurry on to the next one. Of course, there will be many things that I will find hard to leave behind when I die. I ought to serve my parents as a filial son, but if I precede them in death I will only cause them more grief than they are suffering now. I shall not be able to fulfill my duty to His Majesty either. As I look back over my life, my failure to achieve my ambitions fills me with a sense of deep regret ... but these are the kinds of disappointments in life that anyone might lament. There is something else that torments my heart, and though I wonder how I could ever confess such a thing, with the hour of my death approaching I find it impossible to keep it secret any longer and must unburden myself to someone ... and if not you, then who? I have many brothers, to be sure, but there are complicating circumstances and it would be awkward to even drop a hint about this matter to them.

“I did something—a minor matter—that gave offense to your father, and for months now I have been privately seeking his pardon. It was never my intention to dishonor him, and I came to regard my life as hopelessly miserable. As a result of my anxieties, I fell ill. Then I was summoned by your father to attend the rehearsal for the banquet in honor of Retired Emperor Suzaku, and when I

tried to gauge his mood, it was clear from his sidelong glances at me that I had not been forgiven, and there seemed fewer reasons than ever to live on in the world. I was utterly devastated, the agitation in my heart began, and in the end, as you can see, I have been undone by this nervous exhaustion. Your father probably never counted me as a person of any consequence, but from the time I was a child I trusted and relied upon him. Now, I will leave this world knowing that he may have heard disparaging things about me, and I fear my remorse will become an impediment to my salvation in worlds to come. If the opportunity presents itself and you have his ear, intercede on my behalf as best you can and explain how I felt about him. Should he then find it in his heart to forgive my offense after I'm gone, your good deed will surely bring you merit."

It was unbearably sad watching Kashiwagi, and his suffering seemed only to increase as he spoke. Genji's son had some idea of what might be troubling his friend, but he really couldn't say for sure.

"Why are you feeling so guilty? My father has shown no indication that he is displeased with you. Quite the contrary ... he was shocked and grief-stricken when he heard you were gravely ill, and apparently he has told others just how sorry he feels for you. Why have you left it till now to mention this? I could have interceded and cleared up what you both were thinking. At this point, it will do no good." In wistful sorrow he wished that somehow they could return to the past.

"Yes, you're quite right ... I ought to have spoken with you and sought your counsel at some point when I was feeling a little better, but I was careless, not knowing myself how long I might have to live, and I took a casual attitude, thinking it could end any time ... today or tomorrow. You must not let anyone else know what I've said here. I told you so that when the opportunity arises, you may speak to your father on my behalf. Please call on the Second Princess, if you have occasion to ... her residence is on Ichijō. Her father will hear about her dire circumstances, and so you must see to it that she is cared for."

He wanted to say much more, but he was now suffering terribly. He motioned with his hand that his friend should go home. The priests performing the healing rites moved closer to him, his parents and family gathered by his side, and attendants hustled in and out. The Major Counselor left, weeping uncontrollably.

Kashiwagi's younger sisters, including the Kokiden Consort who served Retired Emperor Reizei and the Major Counselor's principal wife, Kumoinokari, were deeply upset. Because he had always been kind to Tamakazura and treated her just as an older brother should, she felt very close to him and was so worried and grief-stricken that she commissioned special rites of healing. Unfortunately, these prayers did no good—indeed, there was no cure.⁹ He passed away,

disappearing like foam on water without ever seeing the Second Princess again.

Kashiwagi, it must be said, never felt any deep affection for the Second Princess during the years they were together, but outwardly he had been an ideal husband—he had looked after her with kindness and respect while avoiding any overly familiar behavior. He never caused her a trying moment. Whenever she reflected on their time together or the nature of her relationship with him, she concluded that her husband's karma, which foreordained an early death, was responsible for the mysterious indifference that he had exhibited toward the everyday aspects of marriage. This thought brought on unbearable anguish, and her misery was difficult to behold. The Second Princess's mother, who had objected to having her daughter marry someone beneath her station, now lamented that the young widow would be exposed to vicious ridicule; the sorrow she felt as she watched her child grieve knew no bounds.

Kashiwagi's parents were the ones most devastated by his passing. It felt as though they were being consumed by flames of desperate longing, and they wished that they could have preceded their son in death. They suffered cruelly for this breach in the natural order, but all their sorrow could not bring him back.

The Third Princess had despised Kashiwagi's reckless passion and was not especially eager to see him recover and live a long life. Nonetheless, she was moved at the news of his death. His dream of the cat had foretold the birth of their son, proving that they really had shared a karmic bond from a former life and that their appalling affair was preordained. Turning these various thoughts over in her head, she felt lonely and dejected and finally broke down in tears.

The third month arrived, and the skies were clear and balmy. The customary celebration was held on the fiftieth day following the birth, and the little boy, with his fair complexion, was exceptionally handsome. He also seemed precocious for his age, since he was already babbling and cooing. Genji called on the Third Princess. "You're feeling much better, are you not? Really, now, taking vows proved unnecessary, wouldn't you say? Knowing that you've recovered, how happy I would be if I could see you looking as you did before you became a nun. Your decision to abandon me was heartless." He spoke resentfully, tears welling up in his eyes. He called on her every day, and only now did he treat her with the utmost respect.

As part of the fiftieth-day celebration, the father and mother fed the baby bits of pounded rice cake with a chopstick, but because the Third Princess was a nun her women were not sure how the ceremony should be conducted. "You don't have to be concerned about your mistress's changed appearance," Genji reassured them when he arrived. "Her nun's robes would be inauspicious only if the baby were a girl." He had a small room on the south side of the main hall

prepared for the ceremony. The robes worn by the nurses were bright and lovely, and both inside and outside the blinds attendants went about in their innocent joy—for they did not know the truth about the baby's father—arranging the many gifts in front of the child. These gifts included woven baskets and *hinoki* cypress boxes filled with fruits, sweets, and delicacies of all imaginable colors. Genji, who found it hard to watch these festivities, wondered how difficult the ceremony must be for the Third Princess.

The Third Princess arose and brushed the thick, spreading ends of her recently cut hair away from her forehead as if they irritated her. She felt acutely embarrassed that Genji had pulled aside the curtains, and so she turned away from him. She was smaller and thinner than ever, but because she had been reluctant to have all of her tresses cut at the time she took her vows, the hair down her back was still quite long, and from behind she appeared much the same as she did before becoming a nun. She wore a light plum robe over several layers of gray, and her profile, which had not yet acquired the quiet composure of a religious devotee, had a vivacious charm that created the impression that she was a lovely child.

"Ahh, how depressing ... the color of your robes is truly dreary and unpleasant to my eyes," Genji complained. "Knowing that I'll be able to continue seeing you despite your changed appearance is some consolation, but it fills me with pain and regret to realize that I have myself to blame for all this, since the pathetic unmanliness of the tears I shed on account of constant, unbearable worries drove you to utterly abandon me this way. If only we could go back to the time before you took your vows. If you were to leave this place now," he sighed, "I would feel ashamed and despondent knowing that in your heart you really do despise me. You must show some compassion!"

"They say that once a woman becomes a nun she is no longer sensitive to the pathos of the world," she replied. "Since I never understood such emotions from the beginning, I have no idea how to respond to you."

"It's no use lying like that. Obviously there were moments when you *did* understand such emotions." Genji said nothing more and turned his attention to the boy.

A large number of nurses—pretty, distinguished women all—were in service at the ceremony. Genji called them together and told them what they were expected to do to care for the boy. "How sad that he was born at a time when I have so few years remaining," he said. The child was plump, fair and cute, and he smiled most endearingly when Genji took him up in his arms. Genji had vague memories of the Major Counselor at that age, but this baby bore no resemblance to his son. The children his daughter, the Consort, had given to the

Emperor all looked like His Majesty, and they possessed the noble refinement one would expect from imperial offspring—though none of them were exceptionally good-looking. This baby, in contrast, had a captivating charm to go with his noble looks; the area around his eyes had a fragrant glow, and it was very sweet to see how he was always smiling. *Since I know who the real father is, it may be nothing more than my imagination*, Genji mused, *but the boy does look so very much like Kashiwagi.*

Even now, Genji could see Kashiwagi in the way the child would calmly gaze at things, in the exceptionally dignified demeanor that made others feel small, and in the enchanting face with that fragrant glow. The Third Princess was oblivious to all of this, and the attendants had no idea of the truth of the boy's paternity. Genji was the only one who realized, deep in his heart, how tragic and fleeting Kashiwagi's destiny had been. Pondering the uncertainty of this world brought a stream of tears, but he furtively wiped them away, knowing that it was inauspicious to cry on a day of celebration. He murmured a line of verse that Bai Juyi had written on the birth of a son when he was fifty-eight: "Calmly contemplating the birth, I have reason to rejoice, reason to lament."¹⁰ Genji was only forty-eight, and yet it was terribly depressing to realize that the end of his life was near. He recalled another line from the same poem and wanted to admonish the little boy in his arms: "Do not be like your father!"

Genji felt uneasy. *There must be someone among her attendants who knows the truth. It's annoying not knowing who she is ... and since she has no idea how I feel, I probably look like a proper fool to her. Still, I can put up with the criticism that comes my way. Between the two of us, the Third Princess is the one more to be pitied.* He did not blush or show any expression that might give away his private thoughts. Genji observed the child's innocent babbling and laughter and was captivated by the expression around his little eyes and mouth. *I wonder what those women who are unaware of the truth think about his looks? He really does resemble Kashiwagi.* Genji's thoughts turned to the boy's true father. *He left behind this little keepsake that no one knows about, that he couldn't even show to his parents, who are probably weeping right this moment wondering why he did not at least leave a child behind as a memento for them. To think that such an ambitious and accomplished young man should have destroyed himself!* Overcome by pity and remorse, the outrage that had filled Genji's heart dissipated, and he wept.

After the celebration was over and the attendants had withdrawn, Genji approached the Third Princess. "How do you look upon this child? Do you feel nothing for him? Was it necessary to abandon your baby in order to turn your back on the world? How cruel you are!" Startled by his questions, she blushed.

Genji composed the following:

*How will the pine rooted in the crags
Respond should someone ask ... by whose hand
And in whose reign was its seed planted*

“I feel sorry for the boy,” Genji added quietly. She lay down without replying. He thought her reaction was understandable, and so he did not force her to listen to anything further. *What is going through her mind? I know she’s shallow, but even so, how can she be so indifferent?* It was heartbreaking to try to fathom the workings of her heart.

Genji’s son wondered about the offense Kashiwagi had hinted at—an offense that had so filled his heart he could not keep it completely secret. *What exactly happened? He had already begun to tell me some of the details ... if only his mind had been a little more lucid and he could have said more, I might have been able to understand the situation better. It did no good to tell me on his deathbed ... the timing couldn’t have been worse. How sad that he should have died without clearly explaining the matter.*

The Major Counselor found it difficult to forget the image of his dying friend pleading with him to intercede on his behalf and obtain Genji’s forgiveness. He was even more grief-stricken than Kashiwagi’s brothers. He tried to piece together what might have been behind the deathbed request: *The Third Princess was not all that alarmingly ill when she took her vows and became a nun, but she made her decision to do so with no hesitation whatsoever. In spite of her condition, would my father really have permitted her to take vows if there were nothing else behind her decision? After all, when Murasaki was near death at the Nijō villa, she cried and pleaded with him for permission to take vows, but he found the very idea outrageous and refused her in the end.*

He then turned his thoughts to his friend’s feelings: *There must have been times when Kashiwagi could not suppress his feelings for the Third Princess ... feelings that had been evident in his behavior for many years. On the surface, he always managed to seem calm and self-possessed, and he was always more reserved than other men. He was so quiet, in fact, that he made people who observed him feel uncomfortable, since they had a hard time figuring out what he was really thinking. Still, he was prone to let his emotions carry him away, perhaps because he was too refined and sensitive. No matter how deeply in love he may have been, was such passion really worth the terrible suffering he experienced as a result of the offense he committed? Their love affair must have been an ordeal for the Third Princess as well, but did he really have to throw*

away his life for it? People might say it was his destiny, but that hardly makes his actions any less frivolous or meaningless.

The Major Counselor kept these thoughts to himself and shared his suspicions with no one, not even Kumoinokari. He had been unable to bring up the matter with his father, since he had not yet found a suitable opportunity. Even so, he wanted to see the look on his father's face when he told him what Kashiwagi had said.

Unaware of how many days had passed, Tō no Chūjō and his principal wife were depressed, with no respite from their tears. They were so distraught that they left the busy arrangements for the funeral—the preparation of the priests' robes, the furnishings, and other details for the memorial service—to their sons and daughters. Kashiwagi's younger brother, the Major Controller of the Right, was in charge of the sutras and images of the Buddha. Whenever someone would remind Tō no Chūjō of the sutra readings performed every seven days after his son's death, he would respond vacantly, as if he himself were no longer alive. "Don't speak to me about that. I am lost in such overwhelming grief that it will surely hinder my son's salvation in the next world."

The Second Princess remained in her villa on Ichijō filled with regret that she had not been able to see her husband again before he died. Even though the retainers who had served her husband so loyally continued to call and pay their respects, as the days went by her large residence grew deserted and took on a desolate atmosphere. Watching the men who had taken care of Kashiwagi's favorite horses and falcons wander around the villa, dejected and lost without their master, brought home to her the sadly eternal evanescence of all things. The many implements and furnishings he had used, the *biwa* lute and six-string koto he had always played, now unstrung and silent, made her feel depressed and lonely.

Gazing into her garden at the hazy treetops coming into bud and the blossoming flowers that had not forgotten the season, the Second Princess was lost in melancholy reverie. With her attendants all dressed in robes of mourning gray, she was passing another lonesome, tedious day when an outrunner's lively voice could be heard announcing the imminent arrival of his lord. This was followed by the sound of someone stopping in front of the gate.

"It sounds so much like our late master arriving ... for a moment I forgot," one of the attendants said, weeping. It turned out that the guest was Genji's son. He sent in a message announcing his arrival. The Second Princess had assumed it was one of her late husband's brothers—the Controller or the Consultant—who called on her frequently, probably to fulfill a last request by Kashiwagi. Instead, it was the Major Counselor who entered, looking devastatingly handsome and

dignified.

A space in the aisle room just outside the main chambers was prepared and the Major Counselor was seated there. It would have been insulting to have the attendants greet him like any ordinary guest, and so the mother of the Second Princess came forth.

"I feel a greater sense of grief over your unfortunate loss," Genji's son began, "than even those members of his family who would be expected to mourn. However, I was constrained by my status as an outsider, and with no way to convey my condolences to you, I had to show my grief in the same way as everyone else."

"Kashiwagi made some requests of me at the time of his death that I must not neglect. Sadly, none of us in this world can know with any certainty the exact term of our lifetime, but for as long as I survive my friend, I want you to bear witness to how deeply devoted I am to fulfilling his last request: that I do all I can to look after your daughter. At the time he passed away, the palace was busy with numerous rites and offerings to the gods, and because there is no precedent for someone in my position withdrawing from duty to mourn a death, I had to stay on and participate. Thus, even had I tried to visit you during that period, I would have had to wait outside of your residence, since my duties required that I avoid any defilement. Since I would have found it very dissatisfying not to meet you directly, I have let the days go by until now. Though all parents wander lost in darkness when it comes to their children, having seen and heard how desperate the former Chancellor is over the death of his son, I can only imagine how deeply distressed your own daughter must be, given her relationship to Kashiwagi. The thought is overwhelming ..." As he spoke, he frequently wiped away his tears and blew his nose. For all the obvious nobility of his looks and character, his attitude was warm and kind.

The mother of the Second Princess responded in a voice choked with tears. "As you say, sorrow is indeed the way of this mutable world. As one who has lived for many years, I have learned to brace myself and accept the fact that sorrow comes in all forms ... but when I see how depressed my daughter is, her grief seems frighteningly ill-omened, and I fear that she will soon follow her husband in death. I have lived long enough to experience every imaginable heartache, but the thought that I might have to witness the passing of all my loved ones from this fleeting world fills me with dread. You were obviously very close to him, and so naturally he must have said something to you about me ... about how I did not approve of him marrying my daughter at the beginning. His father, however, was most keen on the match, and it was difficult for me to oppose his wishes. Even Retired Emperor Suzaku indicated that he considered

the young man an appropriate match, and so I forced myself to accept it, knowing that in any case my own preferences would not be heeded.

“When I reflect on how everything unfolded before my eyes in this way, it seems like a dream, and I am filled with intense regret at the thought that I should have trusted my intuition and opposed the marriage more forcefully. Of course, I never expected that anything as tragic as this would happen. I may be old-fashioned, but in my opinion an imperial princess, as a general principle, should never under any circumstances marry a commoner ... and it makes no difference if the marriage turns out good or bad. It is my daughter’s sad, unfortunate destiny to find herself in these unsettling circumstances, with no place to turn to. So why should I care about what people might say about her if she should follow him in death, the smoke from her pyre mingling with his? That being said, I haven’t resigned myself to her death just yet, and have been looking after her with sad affection. I am most humbly grateful for the many kind expressions of concern for her, which have made me genuinely happy. Kashiwagi never displayed the affection toward my daughter that I had hoped he would, but since your messages of condolence were sent to fulfill a promise you made to him, it makes me happy, if only for a moment, to know that he was thinking of my daughter even on his deathbed, when he was making his poignant last requests.”

Though there was a blind between them, Genji’s son could tell that the Second Princess’s mother was weeping inconsolably. He found it hard to control his own tears as he replied to her.

“He was a preternaturally gifted man, and maybe that’s why he was fated to die young. For the past two or three years, he looked so lonely and depressed. A man given to introspection, to thinking perhaps too deeply about the workings of the world, may come to understand things a little too well. His personality becomes unattractive, he loses his humility and his vivacity fades. Though I myself lack experience and wisdom, I was constantly admonishing him about the dangers, but he dismissed my warnings as unworthy of serious consideration. I suppose that’s beside the point now ... your daughter, who as you say is truly grieving more than anyone else, is the one to be pitied. Though perhaps I am being presumptuous in saying so ...” He spoke warmly and at length. Then, after staying a little longer than was normal for such a visit, he left.

Although Kashiwagi was five or six years older than the Major Counselor,¹¹ he had always looked youthful and refined, and he treated others in a charmingly friendly manner. Genji’s son, however, was superior to other men—solemnly dignified, manly in appearance, his face youthful and handsome. As they watched him depart, the younger women found in his beauty something to divert

them a little from their sorrows.

On his way out, he noticed a lovely cherry tree in the front garden that put him in mind of a line of verse: “for this year only.”¹² However, because that poem seemed inauspicious, he murmured a snatch from a different verse: “Seeing them again ...”¹³

*The spring season comes around and as always
The cherry blossoms put forth their lambent hues
Even on this tree with its one withered branch*

He recited his verse casually, as if to himself, just when he was about to leave. The mother of the Second Princess sent out a reply immediately:

*This spring my eyes fill with tears like dewdrops
Bejeweling the shoots of willow fronds
That know not the fate of scattered blossoms*

Though not possessed of a profound sensibility, her reputation during her service to Suzaku had been that of a talented, stylishly modern lady of the bedchamber. It was apparent to the Major Counselor that she was indeed exceptionally sensitive.

He went straight from the Ichijō villa to Tō no Chūjō’s residence, where many of the former Chancellor’s sons were gathered. He was invited in and shown to a sitting room used to entertain guests. Tō no Chūjō gathered himself and came out to meet the Major Counselor. His handsome face, which had always resisted the ravages of age, was thin and haggard, his beard and hair were unkempt—signs that his sense of filial piety was greater than that of a son grieving for his parents. Genji’s son couldn’t stand seeing his father-in-law in such a state, but he felt it would be disgraceful were he to lose control and start crying, and thus he did his best to hide his tears. On seeing how especially close the Major Counselor had been to Kashiwagi, Tō no Chūjō could not hold back his flood of tears. The two men spoke at length, sharing their grief.

The Major Counselor described what he had seen when he visited the Second Princess’s Ichijō villa. His words brought further tears to soak Tō no Chūjō’s sleeves—tears that looked every bit like rain dripping from eaves after a spring shower. He had copied on a piece of folding paper the poem about willow fronds that the mother of the Second Princess had composed. He handed the poem to Tō no Chūjō, who looked at it, squinting his eyes. “I can hardly make it out,” he said. His expression was pathetic and showed no trace of his usual strong-willed,

handsome, prideful countenance. The poem itself was nothing remarkable, but the words “tears like dewdrops” struck a chord with his own tormented emotions, and it took him some time to regain his composure.

“That autumn your mother died,” he said at last, “I thought that I would never experience grief as intense as that. Still, women as a rule are constrained ... because so few people actually see them and they rarely show themselves, my grief for her remained hidden away as well. Although my son was not all that accomplished, His Majesty did not disregard him. When he became an adult, the number of people who relied on him for appointment to office or for promotion in rank naturally increased, and now there must be many who are shocked and disappointed by his death. Of course, the deep sorrows I feel have nothing to do with his worldly reputation or with rank and office; they arise simply from my unbearable longing to be with him as he was, not as someone special or different. How will I ever be able to assuage my grief?” He stared vacantly up at the sky.

The evening sky was covered in gray, misty clouds, and today Tō no Chūjō noticed for the first time that the cherry blossoms were scattering from the upper branches of the trees. He wrote the following on a piece of folding paper:

*Spring wears its robes of mist reversed, robes dampened
By raindrops falling from the trees ... while I wear
Gray robes damp with tears of grief for my lost son*¹⁴

The Major Counselor replied:

*Surely he who passed away did not imagine
That he would die before you, leaving you to don
These gray robes of sorrow in the evening mist*

Tō no Chūjō’s son, Kōbai, added the following:

*How heartless it is, the cherry blossom
That scatters before its own spring has passed ...
Who did it think should wear these robes of mist*

The memorial services were extraordinarily dignified. The Major Counselor’s wife, Kumoinokari, and of course the Major Counselor himself added unusual flourishes that made the sutra readings and other elements of the service deeply moving.

The Major Counselor regularly visited the Ichijō villa. The skies during the fourth month made one feel better somehow, and the green that filled the tops of the trees in all directions had an appealing freshness. But in that residence, which was still in mourning, everything was subdued and lonely, and it was difficult for them to get through the day. That is why he showed up so often. Young grasses were gradually putting forth green shoots in the garden, and here and there in shady spots mugwort had taken root and was showing through where the layer of white sand was thin. The garden near the front entrance had once been carefully tended, but now it grew wild and rampant. A clump of pampas grass was spreading vigorously, and as Genji's son made his way through the garden, he was moved to tears by the thought that the grass would soon be filled with the melancholy cries of autumn insects.¹⁵ Somber, austere Iyo blinds had been hung up around the residence, and through the gaps he could see translucent gray curtain panels, which had been put up as part of the seasonal change of clothing and furnishings and gave off a pleasantly cool feel. He also caught glimpses of the sheer dark gray robes and the hairdos of the lovely page girls there. The scene was charming, but the colors displayed by a house in mourning were still jarring to his eyes.

He sat down on the veranda that day, and so a cushion was brought out to him. This arrangement seemed a little too humble to the attendants, who urged the mother of the Second Princess to receive him as she usually did. However, she had not been feeling well recently and was reclining on an armrest. While the attendants filled the time by chatting with him, he gazed out at the stand of trees in the garden. Seeing that the trees seemed utterly indifferent to human suffering and grief, he was struck by the poignancy of the scene. An oak tree—Kashiwagi's namesake—and a maple tree stood with their branches intertwined, their color fresher and more vivid than the trees around them.

“What bond from an earlier life do they share, that they should enjoy the good fortune of their branches growing together?” He quietly moved closer to the blinds and spoke to the Second Princess.

*If you are willing, then like those twining branches
Let us grow closer together, knowing we have
The consent of the deity who guards their leaves*

“I resent being kept outside your blinds.” He reclined against the sill. The attendants nudged one another and whispered, “What a lithe, exceptionally graceful figure!”

One of the ladies-in-waiting, a woman named Shōshō no kimi, provided

hospitality for the Major Counselor and acted as intermediary. She conveyed to him the poem that the Second Princess had composed in reply to his:

*The deity who once stood guard no longer dwells
In this oak tree ... yet do its sheltering branches
Truly grant you leave to become more intimate*¹⁶

“Your impulsive words suggest a certain shallowness of character.”

He smiled a little, since there was some truth in what she said.

The mother of the Second Princess had apparently come out of her room and was now sitting behind the blind. He quietly sat up and assumed a more formal posture.

“I have been constantly depressed, afflicted by the sorrows of the world for many months, which may explain why I have not been feeling my normal self and seem to pass the time in a haze. Still, I am deeply grateful to you for these frequent visits, and so I gathered myself and got up to receive you.” From what he could tell, she really did seem to be suffering.

“It’s natural for you to be grieving,” he replied, offering words of condolence. “But then again, you must not let your sorrow overwhelm you. It seems that everything in this world is governed by karmic destiny and will inevitably come to an end ... even your grief.”

From what he had heard, the Second Princess was indeed an elegant, modest woman; he was moved to compassion by the thought that, in addition to her grief, she seemed, as her mother once lamented, to have to suffer the anguish of knowing people were ridiculing her. Because his interest in her was in no way commonplace, he was quite intent on learning all about her. *She’s probably no great beauty, he thought, but provided that she’s not so hideous that I’d have to avert my eyes, why would I weary of a woman on the basis of her looks alone? Or, further, why should I let my heart be tormented for the sake of something improper? It would be disgraceful, would it not? In the end, the only thing of true value is a person’s character.*

“I hope that from now on you will think of me in the same way that you thought of him and that you will not regard me as a stranger and keep your distance.” Although there was nothing intentionally seductive in his words, the kindness with which he spoke was suggestive all the same. He looked quite dashing in his court robes, and his height gave him a commanding presence.

The attendants were whispering among themselves.

“Her late husband was kind and gentle in all ways ... no one could match his elegant charm.”

“But the Major Counselor is truly virile ... and dazzlingly handsome: really quite magnificent. You can see at a glance that he has a luster about him unlike anyone else.”

“If only he continues visiting us like this ... how wonderful that would be.”

The Major Counselor murmured a line of verse: “The early summer grasses on the Commander’s grave turn green ...”¹⁷ The poem lamented the early demise of Yasutada, who died in the not-too-distant past. In this world where all manner of torments afflict people near and far, there wasn’t anyone, from the highest nobleman to the lowest servant, who did not feel a special grief over the passing of Kashiwagi. Apart from the talents and virtues that you would expect to find in such a man, he possessed an extraordinarily kind heart and was so considerate toward everyone that even old officials or female attendants—the kind of people who would normally go unnoticed at the court—were moved to mourn him. The grief was even greater for His Majesty, who would longingly remember Kashiwagi whenever there was a musical performance at the palace. It became almost customary at such moments for someone to say, “How sad that Kashiwagi is not here!”

The grief was just as intense for Genji, and as time passed, he would recall Kashiwagi in sorrow more and more often. In his heart he looked on the child as a memento of his late father, but since no one else even suspected the truth, it brought him little comfort. By autumn, the little boy was crawling.

¹ *Kokinshū* 947 (Sosei): “Where shall it go, this heart that longs to abandon the world? It seems I must wander in fields and mountains.”

² *Kokin rokujō* 2096 (Anonymous): “In this world of woe can our heart’s desire ever come true ... for no one is like a pine that lives a thousand years.”

³ *Kokinshū* 544 (Anonymous): “Like fireflies that die in the summer giving off a single flame, so I die for the sake of my single-minded love for you.”

⁴ *Kokin rokujō* 3241 (Anonymous): “It seems as if even a stone pillow might float away on the tears that pool atop this bed, where I sleep alone.”

⁵ *Dharani* are spells or incantations used for meditation, healing, or protection (see the *Wakamurasaki* chapter).

⁶ In the *Aoi* chapter, the lady at Rokujō composes a poem alluding to the belief that you could bind the hem of a person’s robes to keep their spirit from wandering. This belief is mentioned in *Tales of Ise*, section 110, as well.

⁷ This visit, which took place nine years earlier, is depicted in the *Fuji no uraba* chapter.

⁸ This appointment puts Kashiwagi at the same official level as Genji’s son, who is also a major counselor at this time. Because the appointment was made ad hoc, the post had to be designated as “Acting.”

⁹ *Shūishū* 665 (Anonymous): “I’ve fallen ill longing for my beloved, who I cannot see ... except for leaves of wild ginger, there is no cure.” The poem plays on the words *aoi* (“wild ginger”)/*ao(h)i* (“the day we

meet”).

10 *Hakushi monjū* 2821.

11 Genji’s son is twenty-seven at this point in the story. This is the first definitive mention of Kashiwagi’s age.

12 *Kokinshū* 832 (Kamotsuke Mineo): “If the cherry trees on the plains of Fukakusa have any feelings at all, for this year only let them put forth blossoms of mourning gray” (cited above in the *Usugumo* chapter).

13 *Kokinshū* 97 (Anonymous): “Though the cherry trees come into full bloom every spring, it is said that seeing them again depends on the span of one’s life.”

14 Tō no Chūjō’s poem plays on the words *kasumi no koromo*, which mean “robes of mist.” The words also contain the element *sumi no koromo*, which literally means “robes of charcoal,” but which refers to the gray robes of mourning that he must now wear. The word *sakasama*, which in this case means “inside out” or “reversed,” is not only an image of longing but also a symbol for the inversion of the natural order caused by Kashiwagi dying before his father. The play on *kasumi* and the idea of a breach in the natural order are carried on in the two response poems that follow.

15 *Kokinshū* 853 (Miharu Arisuke): “The clump of pampas my lord once planted has grown wild, turning his garden into a moor filled with the cries of autumn insects.”

16 This poem is usually cited as the source for the name Kashiwagi. Because Tō no Chūjō has many sons, I chose to use this traditional name from the beginning as a way to avoid the confusion that might arise by referring to each of his sons by the names of their offices. However, it should be noted that the oak tree in this poem refers to the Second Princess, not to her late husband, who is the guardian deity.

17 An early commentary cites an elegy written in Chinese by Ki no Arimasa on the death of Fujiwara Yasutada as the source of this line. The original poem has been lost. Yasutada, who died in 936, was the son of Fujiwara Tokihira (871–909).

XXXVII

Yokobue

The Transverse Flute

MANY PEOPLE thought longingly of Kashiwagi and continued to regret the tragedy of his passing. Genji was by nature given to mourning the death of anyone who was gifted and beautiful, even those who had no special connection to him. This particular loss, however, hit him especially hard. Of course, he could neither forget nor forgive Kashiwagi's shocking betrayal, but he had once favored the younger man, who had so often been his guest, and regarded him as a close companion. Thus, despite what had happened, Genji was deeply touched and, with each passing event or celebration, increasingly missed the presence of his talented friend.

Genji made sure the memorial services marking the first anniversary of Kashiwagi's death were performed in an especially grand and dignified manner. Whenever he looked at the innocent figure of the Third Princess's little son, he was overwhelmed with pity. He privately commissioned services for Kashiwagi on the boy's behalf as well, making a separate offering of 100 *ryō*¹ of gold dust. Tō no Chūjō did not understand the reason behind Genji's generosity, but he was humbled and grateful all the same.

Genji's son, the Major Counselor, made many offerings as well and graciously went out of his way to sponsor some of the memorial services. At around this time, he also lavished attention on the Second Princess. Kashiwagi's bereaved parents rejoiced at his kindness, for they had never expected him to be even more considerate of them than their own children. As they became aware of just how greatly others had esteemed their late son, their grief flared anew.

Retired Emperor Suzaku, off in his mountain temple, was feeling anxious and discontented—the Second Princess was depressed, now that she had become an object of condescending pity, and the Third Princess had cut herself off

completely from the common preoccupations of the world. Still, Suzaku continued to show forbearance in the face of these hardships, thinking that he did not want to let vulgar worldly matters trouble him. Whenever he was practicing his devotions, he would think about the Third Princess, who was following the same religious path as he; after she took her vows he was always contacting her about trivial matters.

The bamboo shoots emerging in the nearby forest and the taro roots growing in the vicinity of his temple struck Suzaku as touching symbols of the rustic life of a mountain village. He sent some of each to the Third Princess, attaching a long, detailed letter that ended with the following: “The fields and mountains are obscured by the mists of spring, but I have had these dug up as a small token of my deep affection for you.”

*You entered this path after me
Hoping to leave the world behind ...
Strive to reach the same place I seek²*

“It’s not easy to achieve enlightenment.”

Genji arrived just as the Third Princess was tearfully reading her father’s letter. Seeing several tall, lacquered pedestal bowls filled with the gifts Suzaku had sent, he was puzzled and asked her why they were there. She showed him the letter, and as Genji read through it, he was moved by one line in particular: “I feel that my life could end any time, be it today or tomorrow, but having withdrawn from the world I cannot satisfy my heart’s fond desire to meet with you.” Suzaku’s admonition to his daughter to reach “the same place I seek” was the sort of thing one might expect of a holy man—and thus not especially pleasing as art. Still, the words aroused Genji’s sympathies all the same: *It’s apparent that he’s genuinely concerned about her. My cold behavior toward the Third Princess has merely added to his worries.*

She wrote her reply with a rather diffident air, and presented the messenger a set of bluish-gray robes in a woven pattern. Just then, Genji spotted a piece of paper peeking out from under her standing curtain. He picked it up and read the following poem, which had been written out in a very uncertain hand:

*Longing for some place not in this world of sorrow
My heart is drawn instead toward the mountain path
You travel along, turning your back on this life*

“It seems that he’s anxious about you,” Genji said. “It’s really unpleasant and

thoughtless of you to write things like this, saying you want to be somewhere else.”

The Third Princess now no longer met Genji face-to-face. The pretty manner in which her hair had been cut around her forehead was adorable, giving her a delightfully childlike appearance. Seeing how cute she looked, he couldn’t help feeling guilty, wondering how things could have ever turned out like this. With only a standing curtain separating them, he did his best to avoid treating her in an aloof, distant manner.

The little boy had been sleeping in his nurse’s chambers, but he was now awake and came crawling out. The way he tugged on Genji’s sleeves was adorable. The hems of his plum red robe of Chinese damask, which he wore over a thin white gown, were extremely long and loose and trailed out along his back behind him. The robes had been pulled open in front, leaving him mostly naked. This was not unusual for little children, and he looked very sweet indeed, his body long and white, as if he had been carved from a piece of willow stripped of its bark. His shaved head had a bluish sheen, as if it had been dyed the color of dewflowers.³ He had a lovely, lambent smile, and the calm expression of his wide eyes gave off a fragrant glow that almost made one feel small in his presence. He thought of the boy as his little Kaoru.⁴ The child’s features put Genji in mind of the father—though Kashiwagi had not been nearly as handsome. *So why is the boy so handsome? He doesn’t look at all like his mother. Indeed, as he grows older, he’ll come to look more dignified and refined, and his face will resemble the one I see in my own mirror.*

The boy had reached the stage where he was able to toddle about a little, and he came up to one of the lacquered pedestal bowls holding the bamboo shoots. Having never seen bamboo shoots before, he began scattering them around, gnawing on some before tossing them away.

“What terrible manners you have,” Genji said, laughing. “This won’t do at all! Someone take these away and hide them. The women here are all terrible gossips, and they’ll cause trouble for him if they start spreading tales about what a glutton he is!” He picked the child up. “How strangely expressive his eyes are! Usually, infants all have pretty much the same innocent appearance—though, to tell the truth, I haven’t seen that many children in my life, so perhaps I’m just imagining things in this case. Still, it troubles me that he should already have such a distinctive look about him. Murasaki is caring for the First Princess,⁵ and now that this little boy is being raised here as well, there’s sure to be problems for both of them. Ahh ... I wonder if I’ll live long enough to see the two grown up? As the poem goes: ‘Though the cherry trees come into full bloom every

spring ...”⁶ He was observing the little boy as he spoke.

“Really now, my lord,” the attendants scolded him, “what an inauspicious thing to say!”

Because the boy was teething, he grabbed a bamboo shoot and chewed on it, soaking himself with his own drool.

“You certainly have eccentric desires!” Genji said.

*While I cannot forget unpleasant times⁷
I find it hard to abandon this child
This precious, tender shoot of black bamboo*

He took the bamboo shoot from the boy and led him away from the pedestal bowl. The child merely smiled and, having no idea what was going on, crawled off again, as if in a great hurry.

As the months passed, Kaoru grew ever more handsome—so much so that his looks seemed worrisomely inauspicious. Consequently, Genji began to feel that perhaps he ought to overlook the circumstances that had brought the child into the world. *Since the boy was destined to be born, that outrageous affair had to happen. There's no escaping karma.*

Genji reconsidered the situation. There were many things about his own destiny that left him dissatisfied. Of all the women at the Rokujō estate, the Third Princess should have been his perfect match—a woman with nothing to make him feel she was lacking in any way. Even so, the fact that she was now wearing a nun’s attire continued to fill Genji with regret and made it hard for him to forgive her.

Genji’s son, the Major Counselor, kept those final words Kashiwagi spoke to him in his heart and would mull them over from time to time. He was very curious to see how his father might react when asked what Kashiwagi was referring to, but he hesitated to bring the matter up, because he had known of his friend’s infatuation for the Third Princess and had vague suspicions that something had happened. Nonetheless, Kashiwagi’s last words continued to preoccupy him. *If an opportunity presents itself, I will uncover the facts behind his confession, and then I'll tell my father what Kashiwagi told me.*

One evening in autumn, when one feels most keenly the sad evanescence of the world, the Major Counselor was moved by fond thoughts of the Second Princess and went to her Ichijō villa. Apparently, she had been passing the time in quiet relaxation playing various types of koto, for she did not have time to have the instruments put away before he was shown into the aisle room on the south side of the main hall.

He could clearly sense the women who had been out near the edge of their mistress's chambers sliding back, still in a seated position, into the interior of the room. At that moment, the rustling of silk robes and the pervasive scent of perfume were alluring. As always, the mother of the Second Princess received him, and they exchanged stories about the old days. Because his own residence constantly resounded with the bustle of servants and the cries of his boisterous children, the stillness at this villa seemed sad and lonely to him. The atmosphere was desolate, but the lifestyle of the women was refined and dignified. As he glanced around at the twilight glow of the garden, the flowers blooming profusely put him in mind of "a moor filled with the cries of autumn insects."⁸

Pulling a six-string Japanese koto over in front of him, he found it tuned to the *richi* mode. The instrument had evidently seen a lot of use, for it was suffused with the Second Princess's perfume—a fragrance he found warmly alluring.

A man of brazenly amorous nature might find it hard to control his desires in a setting such as this and end up committing a shameless act that will earn him a reputation as rash and irresponsible. With these thoughts running through his mind, he plucked the koto—the very instrument his late friend played so skillfully. He performed a short section of a charming air, then said to the Second Princess's mother, "Ah, what mysterious, lovely tones Kashiwagi was able to produce from an instrument like this. No doubt traces of those tones remain latent in this koto as well. I'd very much like to hear your daughter play and bring those tones back to life."

"After the strings of his koto broke,"⁹ my daughter gave no thought as to what remained of childish pastimes. When Suzaku's four princesses each rehearsed the koto in his presence, he apparently praised my daughter's performance, judging it to be clear and true. But she is so distracted by grief that she is not herself any more. She passes her days in a pensive mood and no longer plays this instrument because it brings back sad memories of her late husband."

"Her feelings are perfectly understandable," Genji's son replied in a subdued tone, gazing out at the garden. "If only there were an end to love's longing."¹⁰ He pushed the instrument away.

"If what you said is true," the mother replied, "then the spirit of the departed will be conveyed in the tones of this instrument. Play for me, so that I may listen for traces of his style. It would bring bright joy to the ears of one who has spent so many days sunk in dark depression."

"It is the middle string¹¹ in particular that conveys the tones he used to produce. That is why I would very much like to hear your daughter play." He pushed the instrument over toward the blind, but the Second Princess made no

move to take the instrument; he did not press her further.

The moon rose, and faithful pairs of wild geese flew wing-to-wing in formation through the cloudless skies. How envious the Second Princess must have felt as she listened to their cries, which, together with the autumn breeze, chilled the skin and stirred sad thoughts of the transient nature of the world. She very faintly began plucking a few notes on her thirteen-string koto. The deep complexity of the tones she produced made her all the more alluring to the Major Counselor, and he wanted to hear more. He picked up a *biwa* lute and began to play “The Lover I Yearn For”¹² in a gentle, casual manner.

“I would not presume to guess what you are feeling,” he said, “but perhaps this song might move you to say a word to me.” He eagerly addressed her through the blinds, trying to draw her out, but she grew increasingly reserved and continued to remain silent, lost in poignant sorrow. He composed the following:

*Your reticence to speak or play for me
Suggests a depth of feeling best expressed
Not by words or music, but by silence¹³*

The Second Princess played a little of the final section of “The Lover I Yearn For” and then replied:

*Though I appreciate the poignant feelings
Evoked when you play your music late at night
How can I reply except to play my own*

Her performance was delightful, and it left him wanting to hear more. She had produced quiet, gentle tones that resembled the sound of a Japanese koto, and she performed in the same mode that Kashiwagi had so diligently taught her. The effect was sadly sublime, but he felt frustrated that she had played only part of the song.

“Have I displayed romantic inclinations,” he asked, “by playing this koto? I should be on my way now. I hesitate to stay on, lest I invite the censure of your husband’s spirit for being with you so late on an autumn evening. I shall come back and be in your service again, so wait for me, and leave the tuning of these instruments just as it is. Otherwise, I shall worry—the world being a place where change is inevitable.” Though he said nothing explicitly, he nonetheless hinted at his feelings for her as he readied to leave.

“His spirit is not likely to reprove you for these elegant diversions this

evening,” the mother replied for the Second Princess. “We spent the evening doing little else but rambling on about the past, and I’m disappointed that I did not hear you play more, since I feel that your music, even more than your words, would have added years my life.”¹⁴ She presented him with a flute in addition to the normal gift of women’s robes. “The sound of this flute,” she added, “carries with it an ancient lineage, and it seems a shame to keep it hidden away in a villa buried beneath tangled gardens. Please play it, so that I may hear its notes above the shouts of your advance guard.”

The Major Counselor looked at the flute. “This is too worthy an escort for someone like me,” he replied. The instrument was, in fact, the transverse flute that Kashiwagi had always kept with him. He remembered his late friend often telling him that he lacked the skill to exploit the full range of the instrument and that, when he died, he wanted to make sure the flute was handed down to someone who would treasure it. The memory added one more sorrow to the many Genji’s son had already experienced. He tried playing a song used to tune other instruments by—a prelude for tuning in the somber *banshiki* mode—but stopped halfway through. “I may be forgiven the offense of playing alone on the six-string koto in longing memory of the past, but I feel ashamed and awkward trying to play this flute.”

He was just leaving when the mother of the Second Princess sent out this poem:

*In this abode overgrown with dew-drenched weeds
I hear in a cricket’s voice notes of the flute
He once played, unchanged from autumns long ago*

He replied:

*The timbre of this flute is still unchanged
And those fleeting notes he once played remain
Endless as the cries that mourn his passing*

He was reluctant to leave, but the night was getting late.

By the time he got back to his own residence, the shutters had all been lowered and everyone was asleep. Kumoinokari knew about his interest in the Second Princess—how familiarly and kindly he behaved toward the young widow—and she was not at all pleased that he should be out late like this. As she lay in her room, pretending to be asleep, she listened intently for his return.

“My love and I on Mount Irusa ...”¹⁵ He was singing to himself in an

absolutely delightful voice. “What’s going on here? Why is everything locked up?” he complained. “Ahh ... how depressing! Are there really places where people never gaze up at the moon?”

He had the shutters raised, rolled up the blinds, and lay down near the veranda. “Is it possible that people can be blithely dreaming when there is a moon like this one tonight?” he continued. “Come out here for a while. You’re being very tedious, you know.”

Kumoinokari was irritated with him and merely listened in petulant silence.

His children were mumbling in their childish way, lying half-asleep all around the bedchamber he shared with his principal wife. Ladies-in-waiting were lying down with them. With so many people about, the scene contrasted sharply with the place he had just visited. He played Kashiwagi’s beloved flute.

I wonder if, in the wake of my departure, she isn’t still sunk in a pensive mood. She’s probably playing her koto right now in the very mode I tuned it. Her mother is quite talented on the six-string koto as well. Many thoughts raced through his mind as he lay there. In public, Kashiwagi had always shown the Second Princess great consideration and treated her with the dignity and respect she was due ... so why was it he had no deep affection for her? The question made him feel a little suspicious, and he wanted to see her face. It would be a real disappointment if she were ugly. I’ve heard of examples of women who are rumored to be peerless, but who turn out to be less than stunning.

He reflected on his own marriage to Kumoinokari. He had never been fickle or given her cause to doubt him; when he counted up all the years they had been intimate, it made him sad to think that it was natural for her to become willful and overbearing.

Genji’s son dozed off. Presently, Kashiwagi’s ghost appeared, informally attired—soft white robes with no outer robe or cloak—just as he had been when they last met. The ghost sat down beside his old friend, picked up his beloved flute, and looked at it. Even in a dream, it was troubling that the spirit of the deceased should be drawn by the sound of this flute.

*If a breeze is to blow through this flute-bamboo
I would prefer its music be handed down
For many long ages to my descendants*

“I had someone else in mind for this,” Kashiwagi added.

Genji’s son was about to ask him who, when he was awakened by the crying of one of his children.

The little boy was bawling and spewing milk. A nurse was up and fussing

over him. Kumoinokari had an oil lamp brought over and, after pulling her hair back behind her ears, wiped up the mess, changed the baby's clothes, and cradled him in her arms. She bared her plump, lovely breasts and nursed the boy, who was very cute and fair-skinned. Although Kumoinokari was no longer giving milk, she was able to calm and comfort him this way.

Her husband came over. "What's wrong?" The noise of the nurses bustling about, scattering rice here and there to drive off any malignant spirits or wayward gods that might disturb the children, had completely dispelled the sadness of his dream.

"He seems to be feeling bad. Of course, with you going out on your nightly adventures, acting like some stylish young gallant by raising the shutters to admire the moon late at night, it's no wonder that evil spirits got inside."

Because the complaint came from a face as young and lovely as hers, he couldn't help smiling. "What a peculiar accusation, claiming that I guided spirits here. Do you suppose if I hadn't raised the shutters they would have lost their way and not entered? Well, what they say must be true ... the wisdom of a mother deepens the more children she has."

The expression in his eyes made her feel extremely shy and awkward, and she complained no more. "Stop it now ... I look a proper mess," she said, feeling self-conscious at being exposed in the light of the lamp. He found her shyness not at all unattractive. The little boy did not improve and ended up fussing and crying the whole night.

The Major Counselor reflected on his dream: *This flute is a problem. Kashiwagi was deeply attached to it, and I should not be the one to have it. Women don't play the instrument, so it wasn't meant for the Second Princess to decide who should receive it. What did his spirit think about her decision? Something that doesn't mean all that much while a person is alive can come to seem very important at the hour of death. I've heard that the spirit of a person who dies while still caught up in the throes of resentment or painful longing ends up lost, wandering in the darkness of a long night. If that's true, then I don't want to have any attachments to this world.*

With these thoughts in mind, he commissioned sutra readings at Otagi.¹⁶ In addition, he commissioned readings at temples Kashiwagi had favored.¹⁷ He then considered what to do about the flute: *The mother of the Second Princess expressly presented it to me as something that had a deep connection to him. I suppose it might be best to present it straightforwardly to the Buddha. But however noble a gesture that might be, it won't do much for the repose of his soul.* With that in mind, he headed for his father's Rokujō estate.

At that moment, Genji was in the quarters of his daughter, the Kiritsubo

Consort. Genji had chosen the Consort's third son to be raised at Rokujō under the watchful care of Murasaki. The little boy, who was just three years old, was more adorable than any of his siblings, and his glowing beauty made Genji think of him as his Prince Niou.¹⁸ When the boy's uncle, the Major Counselor, arrived, he first went over to Murasaki's quarters, assuming that his father would be with her. Not finding Genji there, he next started for the quarters of his sister, the Consort. Just then, Niou came running up to him and shouted, "Major Counselor, pick up Prince Niou and take him with you!"

The boy was so self-deferential and his manner of speaking so cheeky that his uncle laughed in spite of himself. "Very well then, come here young lord! Oh dear ... I couldn't possibly sneak you past those blinds ... you know Grandma Murasaki doesn't want you going over there. It would be very disrespectful." Taking the boy in his arms, he sat down.

"Nobody will see you ... here, let me hide your face," Niou said, covering his uncle's face with his sleeve. The Major Counselor found the boy irresistibly sweet, and so he set off with the little Prince. When they reached the Kirtsubo Consort's quarters, they found Genji looking on lovingly as Niou's older brother, the Second Prince, was playing with little Kaoru. Seeing his uncle put Niou down in a corner of the room, the Second Prince shouted, "I want the Major Counselor to hold me too!"

"No ... he's my Major Counselor!" Niou refused to let go.

When he saw the boys arguing, Genji intervened and scolded them. "What an ill-mannered lot you are! Fighting over the Emperor's guardsman, both trying to claim him for your own escort! And you, Prince Niou, are a proper scalawag ... always trying to outdo your older brother!"

The Major Counselor laughed. "The Second Prince is truly a fine older brother. He's always considerate, always making way for his little brother. Still, given how young he is, such admirable behavior seems a bit frightening."

Genji smiled. Despite the scolding he gave the boys, they were both dear to him.

"This is hardly the appropriate place for a senior official to be sitting," Genji said to his son. "Let's talk in the east hall." They tried to leave, but the little boys clung to the Major Counselor and would not let him go.

In his heart, Genji's son felt he should not treat little Kaoru as the equal of the Second Prince and Niou, and yet he was concerned that if he did not, then the Third Princess, who was already tormented by a guilty conscience, might consider his attitude proof that he knew of her illicit affair with Kashiwagi. The Major Counselor was, in any case, tenderhearted by nature, and so he decided he would look after the precious Kaoru with as much care as he might have shown

a real brother. He then realized that he had never actually had a good look at the boy. Picking up a withered branch of flowering cherry that had fallen to the ground, he held it out for Kaoru, who, at that moment, was peeking through a gap in the blinds. When he motioned for the boy to come over, Kaoru scampered out, wearing only a child's outer robe of dark blue tinged with red, which hung loosely open to reveal his fair, glowing skin. Plump and refined, the boy was even more delightful in appearance than the two little princes. Perhaps it was the working of the Major Counselor's imagination, since he was looking at the child with memories of his late friend in mind, but the graceful shape of the line formed by the boy's eyes, with their fragrant glow, seemed identical to Kashiwagi's—though the child's expression struck him as somehow stronger and more sagacious. Kaoru's mouth, which had a special way of lighting up when he laughed, was also just like Kashiwagi's. Genji's son wondered: was he the only one to notice the resemblance? Surely his father had seen it, had he not? He now wanted, more than ever, to observe the reaction he would get when he broached the subject. His nephews, the two princes, unquestionably possessed aristocratic refinement, but their beauty was the kind one ordinarily sees with pretty children. Kaoru also had that refined nobility, but there was something special about him.

Genji's son continued to compare the children. *It's dreadful, really. If my suspicions have any merit, then it would be a sin not to inform Tō no Chūjō. He's so terribly depressed over the loss of his son that he's almost out of his mind with grief ... constantly lamenting that no one had yet come forward claiming to be Kashiwagi's child and wondering why his son had left him no living memento.* Just then, he caught himself. *No, I mustn't say anything. How can I be sure that Kashiwagi is the real father?* He didn't know for sure, and there was no reliable way to find out. What he did know was that he found Kaoru adorable—he was touched by the boy's sweet, gentle temperament and by the way he played without reserve.

Genji and his son eventually made their way back to the east hall. While they were quietly conversing, the sun began to set. A smile rose to Genji's lips as he listened to the Middle Counselor recounting in detail his visit to the Ichijō villa the previous day and describing the situation of the Second Princess. They exchanged bittersweet memories of Kashiwagi's life and the many occasions Genji had enjoyed with him.

"When the Second Princess played the song 'The Lover I Yearn For,'" Genji remarked, "it was, as you noted, a moment that will be invoked in the future as an example of the elegance of olden days. Still, a woman quite often comes to realize, with some regret, that it's best not to display too refined a sensibility

since it only serves to stir a man's heart. If the Second Princess knows that you have not forgotten your friendship with Kashiwagi, and that you will always show your devotion by looking after her as he requested, then your feelings and relationship with her will remain pure. In any case, I believe the most admirable and gratifying thing for the two of you is to avoid the temptation of an affair that could prove complicated and messy."

If you say so, the Major Counselor thought as he studied his father. You seem perfectly upright and proper when you lecture other people, but how do you behave when it comes to your own affairs?

"And just how would it prove messy? After all, I've only just begun to show indications of my compassion for her tragic loss, and I believe that if I were to stop calling on her after such a short time, I would come under the usual, vulgar suspicions. As for "The Lover I Yearn For," had she been so brazen as to begin playing it on her own, then I might have been put off. But she played just a brief passage—and only after I encouraged her by performing the song myself. Her response was charmingly elegant and entirely appropriate to the moment. It seems to me that all such cases depend upon the circumstances and the people involved. She's no longer what one would consider a young woman, and I have never been the kind who's attracted to frivolous erotic passions. I suppose she played the song because she felt at ease with me. Whatever the reason, she strikes me as warm and engaging." By telling his father all this, he had created the perfect opportunity to bring up the matter he had been wanting to ask about for so long. He leaned in a little closer and recounted the dream he had the night before involving Kashiwagi and the flute.

Genji listened intently, but he did not respond right away. Of course, he understood what the dream was all about. "There's a good reason why the flute should be left with me," he replied. "It once belonged to Emperor Yōzei.¹⁹ It was passed down to the late Prince Shikibu,²⁰ who treasured it deeply. However, when Prince Shikibu learned that Kashiwagi had, as a child, demonstrated precocious talent for the instrument, he made a present of it at a banquet he sponsored to celebrate the bush clover. The mother of the Second Princess was most likely unaware of the venerable lineage of the flute when she gave it to you."

Genji pondered the meaning of the dream: *In his poem, Kashiwagi said, "I would prefer its music be handed down for many long ages to my descendants," so he clearly didn't want the flute to go elsewhere. He wants it to go to Kaoru. My son is a clever man, and, no doubt, he has figured all this out.*

Studying his father's reaction, the Major Counselor grew increasingly reluctant to suddenly broach the subject he had hoped to discuss. Nonetheless, he

felt that it was imperative to raise it with his father, and so he took advantage of the moment.

“I visited Kashiwagi just before he died,” he began haltingly, as if he had just remembered something, “and he asked me to do several things for him after he was gone. One of them, which he repeated to me over and over, was to extend his deepest apology to you for some offense or other ... even now I don’t really understand what he was talking about or why he wanted to apologize, but the matter has been weighing on my mind.” He faltered as he spoke.

Just as I imagined ... he’s figured it out, Genji thought, as he searched for a response. He decided that there was no need to reveal everything at this point, and so, for the time being, he pretended not to understand.

“I can’t remember a single occasion,” he said at last, “when I might have given him any reason to believe I was displeased. I have no idea what caused him to feel so upset, but in the meantime, I shall quietly reflect on your dream. Let’s discuss what it may mean some other time. After all, it’s common wisdom among women that one should never talk about a dream at night.”

It was hardly an answer at all, and Genji’s son felt awkward as he imagined what his father must have thought of him for broaching the subject.

¹ One hundred *ryō* is approximately 60 ounces. As a measure of weight in the Heian period for gold, silver, or medicines, 1 *ryō* was equivalent to about 4 *monme* 4 *bu*, or roughly 0.6 of an ounce.

² Suzaku’s poem plays on the word *tokoro* (written in *hiragana*), which means “place”—referring in this case to paradise. *Tokoro* is also a homophone of the word for “taro root,” which is written with the characters 野老.

³ Dewflower (*tsuyukusa*) is in fact a species of dayflower (*Commelina communis*). Its flowers were used to make a light blue dye. Shaved heads were thought to have a bluish tint.

⁴ Although the name Kaoru does not appear at this point in the original text, for the sake of convenience I have chosen to introduce it here. However, my decision is not arbitrary. In this passage Murasaki Shikibu uses (for the third time) the word *kaori/ka(w)ori* to describe the little boy. The word has two related senses—to glow (from inside) and to be fragrant—and because of this implied synesthesia, I have translated the word with the phrase “fragrant glow.” I mention this here because Murasaki Shikibu also uses *nioi/ni(h)o(f)i* in this passage, a word that carries a similar dual meaning—to be perfumed/scented and to be lambent. This choice of words is later reflected in the names given to this child, Kaoru, and to Genji’s grandson, Niou, who is the third son of the Akashi Princess, the current emperor’s favored Kirtsubo Consort. Niou will be introduced later in this chapter.

⁵ The First Princess is Genji’s granddaughter, the oldest daughter of the Akashi Princess (the Kirtsubo Consort).

⁶ *Kokinshū* 97 (Anonymous): “Though the cherry trees come into full bloom every spring, it is said that seeing them again depends on the span of one’s life” (this poem is alluded to in the preceding chapter as well).

⁷ The poem plays on the word *fushi*, which means “times” (or “occasion/event”), but which could also refer

to a joint in a stalk of bamboo.

8 *Kokinshū* 853 (Miharu Arisuke): “The clump of pampas my lord once planted has grown wild, turning his garden into a moor filled with the cries of autumn insects” (also alluded to in the previous chapter).

9 *Goshūishū* 894 [the poem appears originally in *Kagerō nikki*, written shortly after a memorial service commemorating the first anniversary of the death of the author’s mother] (Michitsuna no haha): “The anniversary of the day the strings of her koto broke returns again without the departed one coming back.”

10 *Kokin rokujō* 2571 (Sakanoue no Korenori): “If this were a world in which there was an end to love’s longing, we might well pass through the years untroubled.”

11 The middle string (*naka no (w)o*) is an image used poetically to call to mind faithfulness in a relationship (*naka*) between husband and wife or lovers. This same image figures prominently in the *Akashi* chapter in exchanges between Genji and the Akashi lady.

12 This song is mentioned by Genji when he is playing the six-string koto with Tamakazura in the *Tokonatsu* chapter. Although I have translated the title as “The Lover I Yearn For” (*Sōfuren*), the character *fu* (夫) could be taken to mean “husband,” which is probably the meaning Genji’s son intends here.

13 The poem plays on the word *koto*, which may refer to either “words” or “music” (i.e., the musical instrument). *Kokin rokujō* 2648 (Anonymous): “These indescribable longings that overflow my heart like water gushing from an underground spring are more poignantly expressed without words.”

14 The phrase she uses here, *tama no (w)o*, which literally means “the thread of life,” echoes the image of the koto string that Genji’s son used earlier. *Kokinshū* 483 (Anonymous): “Should you and I not come together like strands twisted into a single thread, what will become of the thread of my life?”

15 This is a line from the *saibara* “My Love and I.” Mount Irusa is where the moon sets. The song, about a couple who have spent the night together, could indicate the feelings of Genji’s son toward the Second Princess, or it could be a blatant attempt to mollify Kumoinokari so that he might sleep with her.

16 Otagi is the temple where the funeral (and cremation) of Genji’s mother was held.

17 This is probably the family temple, Gokurakuji, mentioned in the *Fuji no uraba* chapter.

18 The association of the Akashi Princess’s (the Kirtsubo Consort’s) third son, a boy identified in the original here as the Third Prince, with the fragrance (*nioi*) of perfume is not made explicit until later, in the chapter titled *Niou miya*—literally, “The Fragrant Prince.” However, for the sake of convenience and clarity, I have chosen to introduce the name at this point in the text. Again, this decision is not arbitrary, since these two characters, Kaoru and Niou, are linked early in their lives and will come to dominate the last chapters of the story. As we saw earlier, the word *niou*, like the word *kaoru*, is synesthetic in that it signifies a lambent fragrance. Both fragrance and glow suggest an emanation that creates an aura around a person, an aura that has deep associations with the imperial line.

19 Yōzei lived from 868 to 949.

20 The text identifies this person only as “the late Minister of Ceremonials.” It is possible it could refer to Prince Shikibu (Princess Asagao’s father), to Prince Hyōbu (Murasaki’s father—though at this point in the narrative there is no mention of his death), or to a historical figure, Prince Sadayasu (870–924), the younger brother of Yōzei. For the sake of internal coherence I have chosen to identify the character as Prince Shikibu; but it is worth noting that this is yet another instance where the author makes use of a reference to real-life figures (or events) to mimic the effect of historical narrative.

XXXVIII

Suzumushi

Bell Crickets

DURING THE summer, when the lotus flowers were in full bloom, Genji planned to dedicate the sacred Buddhist images he had ordered for the Third Princess to use in her daily devotional practices. He would use the religious implements and accessories that he had prepared for her meditation hall as adornments for the ceremony. He selected lengths of rare, exceptionally elegant Chinese brocade and had Murasaki sew them together to make the banners that would decorate the altar and pillars. The covers for the tables on which baskets of flowers would be set before the image of the Buddha were made of a lovely cloth that had been tie-dyed in a striking pattern and unusual hues. Because the Third Princess did not yet have a proper meditation hall, she was using the dais in her bedchamber as a temporary chapel. The curtains hanging on all four sides of the dais had been rolled up and a Lotus Mandala¹ had been hung at the back. Silver vases filled with tall flowers that presented a spectacular array of colors were lined up as an offering. Chinese incense of the highest quality, which could be detected from a distance of a hundred paces, was burning on the altar. The beautiful statues of the Amida Buddha and his attendant bodhisattvas Kannon and Seishi² had been intricately carved from white sandalwood. The vessel used to hold ritual water was distinctively small, as was customary for that implement, and it was decorated with artificial lotuses in blue, white, and purple. The incense, which had been mixed according to the lotus-petal formula that called for very little honey as a binding agent, was the appropriate choice for the season, and its fragrance mingled very pleasantly with the scent of the lotus flowers.

Genji had six copies of the *Lotus Sutra* prepared—one for each realm of existence.³ He made the Third Princess's personal copy in his own hand and appended to it a dedication in which they both vowed to establish a shared bond

with the Buddha in this world and, subsequently, to travel together along the path to enlightenment and salvation in the next. He also made a copy of the *Amida Sutra*⁴ for her; but because he feared that Chinese paper might be too fragile for a text that she would be reading every day and night, he ordered artisans at the palace to provide him with paper that could withstand constant use. He had been diligently working on copying the *Amida Sutra* since the spring, and its beauty bedazzled those who caught even a glimpse of the edge of the scroll. Genji's radiant calligraphy, which stood out above the gilt rule of the paper, was a marvel to behold—there was nothing else like it. Of course, it goes without saying that the spindle, cover and box used for the scroll were magnificent. The scroll was placed on an aloeswood table with legs carved in a floral pattern, and the table was arranged on the same level as the carved images on the dais.

Once the chapel had been completely appointed, the lector arrived for the dedication ceremony. He stepped up from the left side and took his place on the dais in front of the images. While a procession of priests and noblemen circulated continually around the dais, chanting scriptures and keeping the images always to their right,⁵ Genji came out and peeked in on the aisle room to the west of the main chamber where the Third Princess was seated. This space had a rather cramped feel, since it had to serve as her temporary quarters while the chapel occupied the main chamber. Moreover, with some fifty or sixty of her attendants gathered for the service, it was oppressively hot and stuffy. Some of her page girls had wandered off as far as the veranda off the north aisle. There were a large number of censers, and smoke hung heavily in the air. Genji moved over to where the women were sitting and, as was his habit, instructed the younger, more flighty ones how to behave.

"When you burn incense, it's best that no one knows from which direction it's drifting. Unfortunately, there's more smoke rising in here than from the peak of Mount Fuji, and that's not proper for a service like this. When the lector begins to read scripture, you need to be quiet and listen attentively in a calm frame of mind ... and since it's best to create the feeling that no one is present, do not fidget or cause any rustling of your silk robes." The Third Princess, who felt intimidated to be in such a crowd, was reclining timidly, looking very petite and charming.

"Your little boy may make a fuss, so be prepared to have someone who can take him away and keep him out of sight," Genji advised her.

The sliding panel doors along the north side of the main chamber had been removed and blinds hung in their stead. The women gathered behind them in the north aisle room. After they had settled in, Genji explained to the Third Princess

the order of the service so that she would understand what was taking place. It was very touching to see how solicitous he was. Since her bedchambers had been converted to a shrine to the Buddha, many thoughts ran through his mind.

"I never imagined that you and I would arrange a service like this," he said. "If this is how it is to be, at least hope that we will be together, inseparable in the next life, reborn upon the same lotus flower." He began to weep. Dipping his brush into her inkstone, he wrote a poem on her fan, which had been clove-dyed a modest shade of brown:

*We vow to be reborn in paradise
Upon the same lotus ... and yet I grieve
That today we part like the fleeting dew*

She wrote out her reply:

*Though you vow we will be together, reborn
On the same lotus, your heart is not at ease
And does not want to stay with me forever*

"So, you disdain me so much that my promises mean nothing to you?" He was smiling as he said this, but it was clear from his expression that he felt very sorry indeed.

As was common at events like this, a large number of imperial princes gathered. The women at the Rokujō estate had competed with one another in making their offerings to the Buddha, and these were exquisite in appearance and so numerous that it seemed there might not be enough room to place them all before the altar. Murasaki had prepared not only the vestments for the seven priests who conducted the service, but the other accessories as well. The robes were made from silk twill, and for those of true discernment, everything about the vestments, right down to the stitching on the surplices, was extraordinary. However, it is much too bothersome to note all of the details of the service here. The lector gave a splendidly dignified reading and explanation of the significance of this ceremony. The Princess, he noted, was demonstrating nobility and profound wisdom by abandoning her glorious position in this world and pledging to the *Lotus Sutra* a vow that would remain unbroken for all ages to come. The lector was one of the wisest priests of the age. His eloquent homily, delivered with increasing passion and skill as he went along, was so splendid that everyone in attendance broke down in tears.

Genji had wanted to keep this service—the first to be held in the Third

Princess's chapel—a private one, but His Majesty and Retired Emperor Suzaku both heard about it and dispatched representatives. The service was expanded, and the additional offerings for the readings were so numerous and lavish that there really was no place to put them all. Events sponsored by Genji were nothing if not extraordinary, even those he tried to keep simple. He had added many stylishly modern flourishes to this service, and by the time the priests were ready to make their way back to their temples that evening, they found themselves with so many gifts and rewards they didn't know what they would do with them all.

The compassion Genji felt for the Third Princess was deeper than ever, and he did all he could to support her. Suzaku wanted her moved to the Sanjō villa that he had made available, arguing that for the sake of appearances she would have to move out of the Rokujō estate sooner or later. Genji, however, balked at his suggestion.

"I would be very anxious were she to live elsewhere," he replied. "It would be unacceptable for me not to be able to see her mornings and evenings, to ask how she is doing, or to idly chat with her. While waiting for my life to run its course,⁶ I don't want to pass up the opportunity to do everything I can for her while I'm still alive."

Despite his hesitation, he went to great trouble and expense to have Suzaku's Sanjō villa refurbished. The residence was beautifully appointed and the storehouses filled with the finest goods, which had been provided by gifts, stipends and the produce of her manors and pasturelands in the provinces. Moreover, he transferred her many treasures and the huge number of items she inherited from her father to new, closely guarded storehouses that he had constructed there. He also took on sole responsibility for seeing to her daily needs and for looking after her many attendants—women of both high and low rank. In short, he did all he could to serve her.

The atmosphere of the main garden at the Rokujō estate, which had been designed with spring in mind, was inappropriate for a nun contemplating the next world. Thus, Genji made changes to the smaller garden in front of the passageway connecting the west hall to the main hall. A fence running north to south divided this garden in two and provided some privacy for the halls on either side. The section in front of the Third Princess's quarters was replanted to create the austere landscape of a heath. Shelves to hold water vessels and other implements for Buddhist devotions were set up in the garden, and the effect was one of courtly elegance. Those women who would become nuns and follow their mistress as disciples were selected not only from among her nurses and longtime attendants, as one would have expected, but also from among several younger

women in the prime of their youth who were not troubled by the prospect of spending the rest of their lives in religious retreat. However, Genji's choices caused considerable discontent among the other attendants, with each one insisting that she too be allowed to join her mistress as a disciple. When Genji heard about their complaints, he would have none of it. "Absolutely out of the question. If there were just one woman whose heart wasn't in it and who regretted her decision, it would have a bad influence on everyone else, disrupting devotions and harming the reputation of the Third Princess." In the end, only about ten or so of her ladies-in-waiting were permitted to change their appearance and serve their mistress as nuns.

Genji had various autumn insects—bell crickets, pine crickets and the like—released into the heath in the west garden. On evenings when the breeze was slightly chill, he would go over to the quarters of the Third Princess to listen to their chirruping. It distressed her that he would use these occasions to say that he still longed for her. She found his amorous proclivities, which remained unchanged, utterly improper now that she was a nun, and she told him his advances were unwelcome. In the eyes of others, his attitude toward her was the same as it had always been, but privately she could tell from his expressions that he knew all about her outrageous affair with Kashiwagi. She did not want to have to see Genji now that his feelings for her had changed so radically, and this aversion was her primary motivation to become a nun. Although she should have been at peace now that they were separated, she was tormented by his continual pleas, which made her dream about how nice it would be if she could move somewhere far away. Unfortunately, she was neither mature nor strong enough to insist on such a move.

At dusk on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, the Third Princess was seated before the image of the Buddha near the veranda, gazing out at the garden in pensive meditation on the Holy Name. Two or three of the younger nuns were making an offering of flowers, and as the Third Princess listened to the soft clanging of the water vessels and the sound of pouring water, she was moved to sadness by the busy, fussy performance of rituals that merely served to remind her how much her life had been transformed.

Genji paid his routine visit at just that moment.

"The crickets are certainly in full cry this evening," he said, joining the Third Princess and the other nuns murmuring a *dharani* to Amida. His voice was low, sonorous and noble. There were indeed many crickets chirruping, just as he said, but the cries of the bell crickets stood out bright and lovely.

"It is difficult to rank the song of one autumn insect above another, but the Umetsubo Empress favors the pine cricket, and so she had them gathered from

fields far and wide and released in her garden in the southwest residence. Unfortunately, they do not sing as much there as they do in the wild ... perhaps because they live for such a short time, unlike the pine trees they're named after. They seem to prefer singing uninhibited in mountain recesses or in pine groves in distant fields where there is no one around to hear them ... otherwise, they seem awfully reserved. Bell crickets, on the other hand, are much more sociable, and their bright, cheerful song is endearing."

The Third Princess replied with a poem:

*I have known most autumns as a season
Of wearisome sorrow ... what a toll, then
To abandon the song of bell crickets*

She spoke in hushed tones, her voice ever so gentle and refined.

"How can you say that? I'm surprised by your words!" Genji replied.

*Though it willingly left this world behind
Weary of its lodging of grass, the voice
Of the bell cricket still rings young and bright*

Genji called for a seven-string koto and played it for the first time in a very long while. The Third Princess stopped praying her rosary and listened attentively. The moon rose and Genji, moved by its radiant beauty, gazed up at the sky. Reflecting on all of the women in his life who had taken vows and all too soon changed their appearance—Oborozukiyo, Princess Asagao, the Third Princess—he produced tones on the instrument that were more poignant and passionate than usual.

Assuming that Genji would indulge in musical diversions as he always did on an evening like this, Prince Sochinomiya arrived. Genji's son, the Major Counselor, came by as well, accompanied by courtiers of suitable rank; as soon as he heard the sound of his father playing in the quarters of the Third Princess, he went over there immediately.

"I've so much idle time on my hands," Genji said, "and I very much wanted to hear the rare sound of an instrument that I've neglected for so long. That's why I was playing it by myself, though my performance is hardly what you would call a proper concert. It's good of you all to call on me." He had a seat prepared and his brother, Sochinomiya, was shown in. A banquet in His Majesty's presence to celebrate the Harvest Moon had been planned for the palace that evening, but to everyone's disappointment it was canceled. When word got around that people

were gathering at the Rokujō estate, officials and noblemen arrived from here and there and a discussion ensued concerning which of the autumn insects had the finest voice.

The sounds of various kotos mingled to produce a fascinating concert.

“There has never been an evening when viewing the moon has failed to arouse deep emotions in me,” Genji ventured, “but the clarity of the moon’s light tonight truly moves me to contemplate worlds other than this one. More and more often, I find myself on some occasion or other fondly recalling Kashiwagi, and I feel that events, whether public or private, have all lost their glow without him. He was a sensitive man who appreciated the colors of flowers, the songs of birds ... a man of superior taste whose opinions were always worthwhile.”

The music of the koto he was playing moved him to tears, and his sleeves were now damp. He was aware—not without a twinge of jealousy—that the Third Princess was just inside the blind, probably tilting her head to catch what he was saying about Kashiwagi. Yet, it was occasions like this, when people gathered to play music in concert, that he missed the young man most and longed for his presence. Kashiwagi was remembered fondly at the palace as well. “Let us pass the night in celebration of the bell crickets,” Genji announced.

Just as the winecups were making their second round a message arrived from Retired Emperor Reizei. Disappointed that the celebration at the palace had been canceled, the Senior Assistant Minister of Ceremonials and Kōbai, who was now the Major Controller of the Left, had gone to Reizei’s villa along with officials and scholars skilled in the appropriate arts of music and composition. Reizei learned from them that the Major Counselor and others were in attendance at the Rokujō estate, and he sent this verse:

*At least the autumn moon does not forget ...
It shines tonight even on this dwelling
Far removed from that place above the clouds*

“If only I could show the moon to one who understands it as I do ...”⁷ Reizei added.

“I don’t have many demands on my time, given my current responsibilities,” Genji said, “and now that Reizei too is living a quiet life, he must be frustrated that I hardly ever visit. I am honored and ashamed that he should be pressuring me like this.” Although it seemed very sudden, he prepared to leave.

*The moon appears with unchanging splendor
Shining above the clouds ... is it the fault
of my shade that the autumn seems changed*

Of my avode that the autumn seems changed

It was nothing distinctive—a conventional poem praising Reizei's lasting glory while denigrating the changes in his own circumstances. Apparently, it came to him while he was dwelling on memories of Reizei past and present. He served wine to the messenger and lavished him with rewards.

The carriages were drawn out in order of rank and a large number of outrunners jostled together. The party brought its quiet concert to a close and, their attention turning elsewhere, set off for Reizei's villa. Sochinomiya rode in Genji's carriage with Genji's son and two of Kashiwagi's brothers—the Commander of the Left Gate Guard and the Fujiwara Consultant—with all of the others who had been in attendance following. Since they were all wearing informal court dress, they added trains to their robes to make themselves more presentable. The moon gradually rose, and beneath the delightful late night sky, Genji asked some of the younger noblemen to play their flutes casually as the procession discreetly made its way to the residence of the Retired Emperor. Genji and Reizei had only ever seen each other on public occasions when everything was properly arranged, and the ceremonies were grand and stiflingly formal. Genji had spontaneously set off this evening in this informal, lighthearted manner, his mind wandering back to how much simpler things had been in the old days when he was still a commoner. Retired Emperor Reizei was surprised and utterly delighted by his arrival. Reizei was now thirty-two and, as he matured and grew in dignity, his resemblance to Genji was ever more striking. He had abdicated of his own volition at the very height of a glorious reign, and Genji was deeply touched to see how peaceful he was in retirement. Many poems, both in Chinese and Japanese, were composed that evening—all of them profound and fascinating. However, considering the nature of the occasion, I am reluctant to set down even the few poems I usually pass along—and, in any case, I lack the ability to record the works in Chinese. The poetry in Chinese was read until dawn, and then everyone withdrew while it was still early.

On his way back, Genji visited the Umetsubo Empress, and they conversed for a while.

"I ought to call on Reizei more frequently," he told her, "given the tranquil life he is leading now. Although I don't have any special reason to visit, I would like to share stories from the past that I will never forget, no matter how old I grow. Then again, I hesitate to call on him too often because my status is so ambiguous ... I'm a commoner, after all, and don't want to appear presumptuous. Yet, at the same time, I also have the rank of a retired sovereign, so it could prove awkward for him. I've been left behind for one reason or another by many

who are younger than I, and it's so hard to find relief from the lonely sorrows of this evanescent world that I want turn my back on it at last and live somewhere far removed from society. But then I think about the people I would leave behind and how they would have no one to look after them. That's why I've asked you so often in the past to support them with all your heart so that they're not cast adrift." His expression was quite serious as he spoke.

Umetsubo looked as young and serene as ever. "After so many years spent living in the recesses of the palace, I find my present circumstances unfair and intolerable, since it turns out that my anxiety at not being able to meet you more often has only increased. While I too despise this world, which everyone else is now abandoning, I have neither mentioned my desire to take vows nor asked your opinion on the matter because I live in your sheltering shade, dependent on you for everything. It would be depressing, then, if you opposed my wishes."

"It's true what you say, and I always awaited with great anticipation those few times when you were permitted to withdraw from the palace and visit your home here. However, what reason would you have to leave Reizei and go into retreat? The world is of course an uncertain place, but a woman can't simply turn her back on it without a compelling cause—something that makes her life intolerable. Even people who are in a carefree position are naturally fettered by attachments to others. So, why are you talking about this? If you are thinking of following the path of religion because all of the people around you are doing so, people will question your motives and consider you eccentric. You should stop thinking such nonsense."

It pained Umetsubo to realize that he apparently had no understanding of her motives, for there was indeed something that made this world intolerable. After hearing that the spirit of her dead mother had been the cause of those reviled incidents in which Murasaki nearly died and the Third Princess renounced the world, she wondered what torments her mother was suffering as she wandered lost amidst the fires and smoke of Hell, and was saddened and upset that gossip later circulated at court in spite of Genji's best efforts to keep those incidents secret. She very much wanted to hear what her mother had said during those brief periods when she spoke through the people her spirit had possessed, but she felt that she could only broach the subject indirectly by informing Genji of her desire to become a nun.

"I've heard vague rumors that my late mother is suffering because her sins were a heavy burden," Umetsubo said, "and I have to assume that they are true, even without clear proof. Still, I cannot forget the grief that I experienced at the time she passed away, and it is thoughtless of me not to do more to help her soul find salvation in the next world. I want to make every effort to seek out the

guidance of priests who can teach me the way of Buddha so that I can extinguish the flames that torment her. This is why my resolve to take vows has gradually deepened.”

Genji looked on with pity and recognized the reasonableness of her desire to take vows.

“We know that no one can ever escape those flames that you speak of, and yet during our lives, which are as fleeting as the morning dew, we find it hard to let go of the attachments that cause such suffering. True ... there is the example of Mokuren,⁸ one of the Buddha’s closest disciples, who saved his mother from the torments of Hell immediately after her death. But he had supernatural powers that you would never be able to emulate ... and even if you were to renounce your position as Empress and throw away the jeweled ornaments that crown your head, it’s very possible that you would still have lingering regrets and attachments that bind you to this world. You should strengthen your resolve to help your mother’s spirit and commission services that will gradually clear away the smoke and flame and release her from her suffering. I too would like to renounce this world, and yet I continue to pass my days, mornings and evenings, feeling unsettled, unable to live the life of peaceful meditation that is my heart’s true desire. I shall add prayers for the repose of your mother’s spirit to the devotions that I perform for my own afterlife ... after all, it is, as you say, irresponsible to put it off.” Even though they confessed to each other a dislike of the vanity of this world and a desire to leave it behind, they were still in positions that made it impossible for them to take that step.

The informal excursion that Genji had undertaken discreetly the night before was public knowledge by the following morning, since all of the high-ranking officials and noblemen who attended the celebration at the residence of Retired Emperor Reizei had accompanied Genji home. Genji felt a sense of satisfaction as he reflected on the successes of his children—the peerless glory of his daughter, the Kirtsubo Consort, which was due in no small part to his careful upbringing, and the superiority of his son. Yet his feelings of love and compassion were more poignant for Reizei than for either of his other children. Reizei was constantly fretting, wanting to see more of Genji, and, indeed, it was his frustration at the infrequency of their meetings that hastened his decision to abdicate in order to enjoy a relaxed lifestyle and be able to meet his father more often.

Umetsubo’s life was far more constrained than Reizei’s, since it was now extremely difficult for her to withdraw from his presence. She was always beside him—in that respect, they were like any commoner couple—and the diversions that they enjoyed were more stylish and lively than when he had reigned. Her

circumstances would have left nothing to be desired had it not been for the constant anguish that she suffered on account of her mother's tormented spirit. Because of that concern, however, her desire to follow the religious path grew more profound, even though she knew Reizei would never give her permission to take vows. To compensate for the limitations that she faced, she commissioned rites and performed good works and, in so doing, gained a deeper understanding of the true nature of this evanescent world.

¹ A mandala is a painting of complex geometric patterns that symbolize the universe. The basic central design is commonly a circle surrounded by four gates within a square frame, but this particular mandala would depict scenes of the Buddha preaching the *Lotus Sutra* within the geometric design. The purpose of a mandala is to aid meditation.

² Kannon (Avalokiteśvara), who represents compassion, and Seishi (Mahāsthāmaprāpta), who represents the strength of wisdom, are often depicted together with Amida in Shingon and Pure Land iconography.

³ The six realms are paradise, the human world, the *asura* (realm of warring demons), the world of beasts, the realm of hungry ghosts, and Hell.

⁴ The *Amida Sutra* is another name for the *Shorter Sukhavativyuha Sutra*, which became a major text in Pure Land sects. The sutra briefly describes the delights of paradise in Amida's Pure Land of the West and explains how a devotee may achieve rebirth there.

⁵ The word used to name this ritual procession is *gyōdō*, but many older texts amended this to read *gyōkō*, which refers to the ritual practice by the priests and noblemen in the procession of lighting incense. Either practice is appropriate in a ceremony involving a reading of the *Lotus Sutra*, but because the text is so brief on the matter I have chosen to emphasize the procession here.

⁶ *Kokinshū* 965 (Taira Sadafun): "Would that I not be beset by obsessive thoughts about the sorrows of this world ... at least while waiting for my life to run its course" (this poem is alluded to earlier, in the *Matsukaze* chapter).

⁷ *Gosenshū* 103 (Minamoto no Saneakira): "On an evening too precious to waste, if only I could show the moon and the blossoms to one who understands, as I do, true beauty."

⁸ Mokuren is the Japanese name for Maudgalyāyana, a disciple of the Buddha. Mokuren was an *arhat* who had developed supernatural powers through spiritual discipline and meditation.

XXXIX

Yūgiri

Evening Mist

GENJI'S SON, who had a reputation as a serious and learned gentleman, made up his mind that the Second Princess was ideal for him. He would visit and talk with her most courteously, all the while carefully maintaining the pretense that his visits were motivated by his remembrance of the past and his promises to Kashiwagi. In his heart, he believed that their relationship was destined to progress to something more serious, and as the days and months went by, his love for her grew. The mother of the Second Princess was deeply moved and grateful, and she considered the Major Counselor a most splendid gentleman. His faithful visits were often a source of comfort that relieved the growing loneliness and tedium of her present life.

From the beginning, he avoided giving any indication of his romantic interest. *She might find it awkward if I suddenly changed and started professing my love for her. I shall simply demonstrate the depths of my devotion, and eventually she will open up to me.* With those thoughts in mind, he made use of every appropriate opportunity to observe and note her manner and appearance. For her part, she said nothing and gave no sign to indicate how she felt about him, and so he thought that he would wait for the right moment to come along, then tell her directly how he felt and gauge her reaction. However, while he was mulling over his next move, the Second Princess's mother was assailed by a malignant spirit and fell ill. As a result of her afflictions, she moved with her daughter to a mountain villa in Ono to seek the help of an efficacious master priest,¹ a man whom she had relied on for many years to perform rites of purification and exorcism. This master priest had taken up the monastic life on Mount Hiei and had solemnly sworn that he would never leave his retreat. However, because Ono was near the foot of Mount Hiei, he agreed to come down and do all he

could to help. Kashiwagi's brothers, who had been close to the Second Princess and her mother in the past, were so preoccupied with their own concerns that they took no notice at all of their difficulties, and so it fell to Genji's son to provide the carriage and escort that took them to Ono. Kōbai, the oldest of the surviving brothers, had intimated his interest in the Second Princess. However, she had behaved as though the very suggestion was offensive, and he could no longer visit her at his own discretion.

Genji's son, in contrast, cleverly insinuated himself into the Second Princess's life without any hint of amorous intentions. When he heard that her mother had commissioned religious services, he arranged all the details and provided offerings and white robes for the clerics. Her mother was too ill to be able to thank him, and so the Second Princess's ladies-in-waiting admonished their mistress. "He would surely be offended if an ordinary intermediary wrote to express your deep gratitude. He's such an important figure you must do it yourself." And so the Second Princess sent a reply, a poem set down in a single line that exuded a most delightful air. She also added a letter written in a graceful hand expressing warm sentiments. After reading it, he wanted more than ever to see her, and so he corresponded more frequently. Kumoinokari guessed what was going on and assumed that the two of them must be having an affair. Her suspicion made it difficult for him to satisfy his desire to call on the Second Princess.

It was now the middle of the eighth month—the season of lovely autumn vistas—and he wanted to view the scenery around the villa at Ono. "A certain holy man whose name I cannot recall just now," he said to Kumoinokari, "has come down out of the mountains on a rare foray to Ono, and I have something I urgently need to discuss with him. This trip will also give me the opportunity to call on the mother of the Second Princess, who has been ill." Making it sound as if it were just some ordinary excursion, he left with an escort of five or six of his most trusted retainers, all of them dressed casually in hunting robes. They were not traveling deep into the mountains, and the hills at Matsugasaki were nothing like the towering peaks of the interior ranges. Still, they were tinged with autumn hues that struck Genji's son as more moving and beautiful than even the incomparable southwest garden at his father's estate.

The small fence of fine wattle that surrounded the Ono villa was elegantly constructed, and though the residence was only for temporary use, it had a polished feel to it. An altar made of earthworks, which was used for ritual fires, had been erected in an annex jutting out on the east side of what passed for the main hall. The Second Princess was in residence on the west side, while her mother occupied the aisle rooms to the north. The malignant spirit was persistent

and troublesome, and so the old woman had wanted her daughter to remain in the capital. The Second Princess, however, came to Ono anyway, believing that she should not leave her mother on her own. The mother, who was afraid that the spirit might possess someone else, put up a small partition to separate the quarters and would not admit her daughter even for a brief visit. This arrangement left no proper space to receive guests, and so Genji's son was given a seat just outside the Second Princess's blinds. His greetings to her mother were conveyed to the north aisle room by senior ladies-in-waiting.

"I'm truly humbled and shamed for all of the messages you have sent me ... and now you've gone to all this trouble to visit," the mother replied. "It distressed me to think that I might not have been able to thank you properly for your gracious kindness had my life vainly ended here, and so I wanted to hold on for a little while longer."

"I had thought to escort you personally when you moved here, but I was prevented from doing so by some business I had to deal with at my father's Rokujo estate. These days I seem to be constantly distracted by trivial matters, and I worry that you might consider me neglectful and inconsiderate because I'm not able to look after you as much as I would like."

The Second Princess was seated demurely in the interior of her room, but because the space was humbly furnished with nothing more than modest screens and curtains for her sojourn, he could sense her presence. The soft rustling of her silk robes whenever she made the slightest movement told him that she was there and roused his passions. While waiting for his messages to be delivered to the north aisle room, he conversed, as he always did, with Koshoshō and the other attendants.

"I've been calling on your mistress like this and undertaking tasks for her for several years now, and I resent that she always remains aloof and keeps me at a distance. Here I am, seated outside her blinds like this, still exchanging roundabout greetings through an intermediary. I'm not used to being treated this way. It makes me feel awkward to realize that you are all mocking my old-fashioned manners. Had I gained more experience in the techniques of seduction when I was still young and my status insignificant, then perhaps I wouldn't feel as shy and clumsy as I do. No ... there's not a man my age who is as earnestly foolish as I."

Her attendants were convinced that he was speaking truthfully—and that he was therefore not a man who could be dismissed lightly. As they nudged each other, one of them told the Second Princess, "It would be shameful to give him a halfhearted reply."

"Yes, that's right ... such a reply would look as though you are completely

ignoring his complaint,” insisted another.

“It is embarrassing that my mother is not well enough to thank you in person for all you’ve done, and I really should do so in her place ... but caring for her during this awful time when she has suffered such a frightening possession has exhausted me to the point that I no longer feel human myself. That is why I cannot speak directly with you.”

When he heard this, Genji’s son sat up straight. “Is this message from the Princess?” He spoke directly to her now. “Why am I suffering like this, as if I myself were sick, grieving over the illness that is causing your mother distress? It may be impertinent of me to say so, but I suffer because I’m convinced that it would be best not only for your mother’s sake but for yours as well if she could recover and pass her days in good health until you, who have known such sorrows, see brighter times. I would be disappointed if you didn’t recognize that the consideration I have shown over the years was not for the sake of your mother alone.”

“What he says is true,” her women told her.

The sun was beginning to set, and a lovely mist poignantly veiled the sky. It was the time of day when the shadows of the mountain seemed to recede into the twilight, the evening cicadas sang,² and the pinks growing around the hedge showed off their charming colors as they swayed in the breeze.³ The flowers in the front garden, each in their own way, bloomed in a wild profusion of various hues. The sound of flowing water was cool and refreshing. The wind blowing down the mountains made one feel a sublime loneliness. The soughing of the wind echoed deeply through the pine forests. A bell rang, signaling the moment when a monk would come in to take his turn in the continuous reading of a sutra, and the way the murmuring voice of the monk who was finishing his turn overlapped with the voice of the monk who was just beginning was profoundly solemn. Everything around the place had a melancholy cast to it, and Genji’s son was greatly moved. The master priest was performing healing rites, and his chanting of *dharani* was awe-inspiring.

Hearing that the mother was evidently in extreme pain, the attendants gathered in the north aisle room. As a rule, few people visited this country villa, and with almost no one about, the Second Princess was left to herself, gazing out and lost in her thoughts. Genji’s son decided that this would be the perfect moment for him to quietly declare his feelings for her. Since fog was now billowing in beneath the eaves of the house, he said, “It looks as though I will have a difficult time finding my way back tonight ... what should I do?”

Adding poignant sorrows to this mountain villa

*Evening mists obscure the skies so I know not
The way home and feel that I do not want to leave⁴*

She replied:

*The mists that rise and envelop the wattle fence
Of this humble, rustic home need not detain one
Whose empty heart is so easily distracted*

Comforted by the fact that she had given him this faint reply, all thoughts of returning now truly left his mind.

“I am distracted, not knowing which way to turn. I cannot see the path back home, yet you have brushed me aside, saying your fog-shrouded fence should not keep me from leaving. I guess I’m not really suited for these romantic games.” He hesitated to say more, but then he intimated to her that his yearning was too great to suppress any longer. She was certainly not unaware of his feelings over the years, but she had always pretended not to notice, and she resented him for telling her now. Because she was troubled and increasingly unresponsive, he gave a deep sigh. He debated what to do, wondering if this kind of opportunity would ever come his way again. *What difference would it make if she were to consider me a thoughtless, frivolous man? I want to let her know all the things I’ve been feeling.* He summoned one of his guards, a trusted confidant who had been promoted recently to the fifth rank, and had him approach discreetly.

“I have something I must discuss with the master priest,” said Genji’s son. “He does not take many breaks when he performs healing rites, but apparently he is resting at the moment. I plan to stay here tonight, and when the evening services are completed, I shall go to his rooms to speak with him. See to it that a few of my most trusted men stay here on guard. The rest of my escort should go to my manor at Kurusuno, which is the closest one from this villa, and make sure that the horses are fed. I don’t want a lot of men here making a racket ... people might gossip and disparage me for spending the night on the road.”

The guard understood that his lord might have his reasons for these commands, and so he accepted the task and left.

“Now that it’s dark, it will be too difficult to make my way home,” Genji’s son continued, speaking again to the Second Princess. “I shall have to find a place around here to spend the night. If it’s all the same to you, I would like permission to stay in front of your blinds ... at least until the master priest has finished his services.” He seemed rather nonchalant about the situation.

Usually he had never stayed this long, and he had never before been as playfully flirtatious. She found his behavior quite unpleasant; at the same time, she thought it wouldn't look right were she to leave too quickly or make too big a show of going over to her mother's rooms. She sat there in silence as he began to talk. Then, suddenly, after giving her intermediary his message, he followed the woman through the blinds and barged into the Second Princess's chambers.

It was still twilight, but with fog closing in around the villa the interior was dark. The attendant looked back at Genji's son in shock. The Second Princess was truly frightened. She remained in a sitting posture, but slid just outside the sliding panel doors on the north side of the room. He nimbly pursued and clutched at her robes to stop her from leaving. She had managed to slip out of the room, but the long, trailing hems of her clothing were sticking through the doorway when he caught her. There was no way that she could lock the door from her side, and so she sat there trembling, bathed in perspiration, with the door still partially opened. Her attendants were outraged, but they had no idea how to handle this situation. There was a lock on his side of the door, but that was utterly worthless to them; since he was a man of considerable status, they couldn't very well pull him away by force.

Her intermediary was on the verge of tears.

"This is truly shocking. I never expected my lord to behave so outrageously."

"Do you really find it so extraordinarily hateful and insolent that I should want to serve your mistress and be close to her like this? Though my status is lowly and insignificant, she's known me for three years and is well aware of what kind of man I am." Quietly and calmly he confessed the longings he had for her.

Naturally, the Second Princess could not bring herself to listen to him, and she could not shake her feeling of regret. *Is it because he doesn't respect me that he's gone this far?* Replying to him was completely unthinkable.

"How cruel and childish of you," he chided. "I may be faulted for the sin of a secret passion that is too great to keep concealed in my heart, but I would never do anything more than what I'm doing now without your consent. My hopes have been utterly shattered, and it's unbearable. I had expected that, at the very least, you would come to recognize how I feel about you, but instead it seemed you were pretending not to notice and remaining aloof ... and so with no other way to let you know, what else was I supposed to do? Even if you find me callous and hateful, all I want is for you to listen and understand my sorrows, which would wither and vanish if I continued to keep them inside my heart. You have been unspeakably cruel, but because I humbly respect you, I have not forced myself on you."

Struggling to control himself, he was being as kind and gentle as possible. Even though the sliding panel door was not fully closed or firmly locked, he did not try to pull it open. “How sweetly touching that you think you must always keep something between us ... even this flimsy door.” He smiled, but took no untoward liberties with her. Although he had not expected much, since she had never excited Kashiwagi’s passion, her gentle and noble character seemed special. She was very thin and frail, perhaps because she had experienced so much grief. The soft sleeves of her casual robes, which she had not had time to change before the sudden visit of Genji’s son, had been suffused with an alluring perfume; all these things together gave her an air of sweet vulnerability and tender refinement.

The rustling wind created a lonely, forlorn effect. As the night deepened, the atmosphere of the surroundings grew increasingly exquisite, with the sounds of insects chirring, deer crying, and a waterfall roaring all blending wildly together. Even a shallow, insensitive person would not have been able to sleep with such skies to view, for the shutters were raised and the setting moon near the rim of the mountains looked so lovely that it was impossible to hold back one’s tears.

“Your continued refusal to acknowledge my feelings does not demonstrate any depth of character ... instead, it shows just how shallow your sensibilities truly are. I doubt there are any other men who are as naive and foolishly dependable as I am. A man whose position allows him to do anything with ease would laugh at an idiot like me who feels so constrained. He would then heartlessly do what he wants with a woman. Since you look down on me, I feel that I’m no longer able to restrain myself at all. Surely you cannot be *that* ignorant of the ways between men and women.” Pressured by all these complaints, she felt miserable and struggled to come up with a response.

He intimated time and again that since she knew what marriage was all about, it should be easy to give in to him. She found this idea appalling. As she continued to brood over her miserable destiny, which her mother had once regarded as truly strange, she felt it best to die. Sobbing piteously, she answered him in the faintest of voices. “I’m well aware of my own faults, which I myself find disagreeable, but what am I to make of your shocking advances?”

*Must I alone, as an example of one who tasted
The sorrow of losing a spouse, also suffer the grief
Of having my name ruined by rumors of tear-drenched sleeves*

She spoke as if she had no intention of letting others know her feelings. She was thus mortified when Genji’s son, who had not been able to hear her clearly,

quietly murmured a version of her poem, which he had reconstructed in his mind. She now wished to take it all back.

He smiled again. “What you say is true ... it was wrong to speak as I did.”

*What does it matter that I make you wear damp robes
For your name by now is ruined like tear-drenched sleeves
That are frayed and tattered by rumors of the past*

“You must be prepared for what will happen.” When he invited her to come out with him into the moonlight, she was not at all amused. She tried resisting, but he was able to pull her along with ease. “Accept that my feelings for you are unique and put your mind at ease. I repeat, without your permission I will do nothing at all ...” He made his intentions clear. Dawn approached.

The moon shone bright and clear through breaks in the fog. The eaves off the aisle room did not extend out very far and let in a great deal of light. It seemed, much to the shame and vexation of the Second Princess, that she was looking directly at the face of the moon. The way in which she tried to hide her own face was inexpressibly captivating to Genji’s son. He brought up the subject of Kashiwagi, offering a few words about him in quiet, measured tones. Nonetheless, he complained resentfully that she should think more of her late husband than of him.

She reflected on her life with Kashiwagi: *Everyone approved of our marriage, even though he was still only Middle Counselor at the time and had yet to reach the highest rank at court. Over the normal course of married life, we grew accustomed to one another, and yet he was always so dreadfully cold and indifferent toward me. And now this—an even more scandalous indignity—an affair with Genji’s son could hardly be considered a matter of no concern to others. His wife, for one, is the sister of my late husband. And what will Kashiwagi’s father think? Of course, I would expect to face the usual denunciations of society, but how will my father react?* Imagining how those who were close to her might feel, she deeply regretted what had happened this evening. No matter how stoutly she might resist him, people were going to gossip: *I would be committing a grave sin if I kept this incident from my mother, but when she hears what happened, she’s going to think the worst and tell me how careless I am.* This thought was devastating, and so she told him, “Please leave before dawn.” She just wanted him to be gone.

“What a shocking request! What will the morning dew think if I were to make my way through the grasses looking as though something actually happened between us last night? If, in spite of appearances, you’re going to insist that I

leave, then know this: I've made an utter fool of myself by confessing my love and then doing nothing about it. Should you succeed by some clever ruse in getting me to leave and thereafter assume that you've rid yourself of my attentions, then I may not be able to suppress my emotions any longer and fear I'll end up committing who knows what outrages against you."

He was genuinely worried about what would happen between them, and was uncertain whether he should leave or not. He had never in his life acted so impulsively, and he not only felt sorry for her but also wondered if he wouldn't come to despise himself for satisfying base desires. In the end, he decided it would be best for both of them to leave while the fog was still heavy enough to hide him. He felt confused and distracted.

*Must I return through eightfold mists
Drenched in dew that drips from your eaves
That covers the reeds of the fields*

"You will not be able to dry your own damp robes ... but you can only blame yourself for that, since you are sending me away so thoughtlessly."

One way or another, she thought, unflattering rumors will circulate, but when my own heart asks,⁵ I want to be able to answer with a clear conscience. She gave him a most chilly response:

*Are you taking the dew on the grasses
You parted on your way as your excuse
For forcing me to wear damp robes as well*

"What astounding ideas you have," she added. Her reproachful look was at once charming and humbling. For years now he had been her ardent supporter, doing more for her than any ordinary person would have done, showing his kind regard in all sorts of ways—but all that meant nothing now. Reflecting seriously on his behavior, he felt sorry for her and ashamed of himself that in a moment of weakness he had behaved licentiously. Yet, if he were to submit to her demands and do as she said, he would end up looking like a fool. Troubled by these various considerations, he departed. The dew along the road was thick, and he felt constrained and uncomfortable.

Genji's son did not have much experience with this sort of nocturnal adventure, and he felt both exhilarated and depressed. He knew that if he went straight home, Kumoinokari would be suspicious of his damp robes and would scold him, and so he went instead to the northeast residence at his father's estate.

The early morning fog had not yet lifted, and it occurred to him that it must be even thicker at the Ono villa.

The attendants were whispering about him, saying, “It’s not like him at all to be going out like this.”

He rested for a while, then changed his robes. Hanachirusato always prepared the finest clothes for him, whatever the season, and she brought out fresh robes from a beautifully aromatic chest. After having his breakfast, he went to see his father.

He sent the customary letter to Ono, but the Second Princess did not even look at it. She found his sudden, heartless advances shocking and shameful and was utterly appalled. *It would be mortifying if Mother should hear what happened ... she's not the kind who could even imagine such incidents, but she would surely sense that things aren't normal. In any case, people never keep rumors to themselves in this world. She's bound to hear something and figure out what's going on. If I don't tell her about the incident, she might conclude that I was cutting her out, and that would be hard to bear. Maybe I should have my attendants go ahead and tell her exactly what happened. She might be upset, but that can't be helped.* Compared to most relationships between parents and children, the Second Princess and her mother were exceptionally close; though there are examples in old romances of daughters who kept their affairs secret from their mothers—affairs that even some outsiders knew about—such a thing was inconceivable to the Second Princess.

Her ladies-in-waiting discussed the matter amongst themselves.

“If her mother were to hear the slightest hint of a rumor, she would fret about all sorts of things, assuming that something must have happened even when it didn’t. It would be a pity to make her worry for nothing.”

They all wondered how things would turn out between their mistress and the Major Counselor and were dying to know what was in his morning-after letter. They were thus disappointed that she didn’t even bother to open it. “If you don’t answer him at all,” they pointed out, spreading the letter open in front of her, “he’ll worry about you and you’ll come off looking childish.”

“I know it’s my own fault ... I was strangely naive, and through my own carelessness I let him see me, which spurred him to act as he did. And yet his behavior was so inconsiderate and despicable that I find it impossible to console myself. Tell him that I could not look at his letter.”

She lay down and turned her back on them, making it clear that she considered writing to him out of the question. The letter itself, however, was inoffensive—indeed, the writing demonstrated deep consideration and sensitivity.

*No doubt the fault lies with my heart
I wander lost and distracted
My soul caught in your heartless sleeves*

“My heart does not do as I would wish. I am resigned to the fact that there have been many cases like mine in the past. Even so, I know not where my yearning heart may go.”⁶ It looked as though he had written many other things besides, but they could see only part of the letter. It did not look like the usual morning-after letter, yet they couldn’t help but assume that it was. They grieved to see their mistress looking so pitiful.

“Did something happen? He has shown extraordinary kindness and graciousness for such a long time, helping our mistress in every way, but perhaps she’s afraid to give herself to him, worried that he will look down on her eventually, just like her late husband did.” Her closest ladies-in-waiting were all apprehensive.

Meanwhile, the Second Princess’s mother knew nothing about what had happened. The malignant spirit continued to trouble her, and, though her condition seemed serious, there were also intervals when its hold on her relaxed and she was more herself. At noon, when the midday healing rites were finished, the master priest stayed behind with her to chant *dharani*. He was happy to see that her condition had improved. “Dainichi Nyorai⁷ never fails to keep his word. When a priest like me prays for you with a devout heart, how could these rites not be efficacious? This malign spirit seems stubbornly persistent, but it is no more than a pathetic soul wandering lost, impeded from salvation by sins it committed in previous lives.” He spoke sternly in a fierce-sounding voice, hoarse from shouting angrily at the spirit during the ritual of exorcism. He had the kind of simple, direct, sincere manner one expects from a well-known holy man.

“By the way,” he said suddenly, “when did the Major Counselor take your daughter as his wife?”

“The Major Counselor? He isn’t married to my daughter,” she replied. “He’s been visiting us for some years now in order to fulfill a last request my late son-in-law made of him … the two were close companions, you see. He has been remarkably kind and has helped us in so many ways, but he dropped by this time to see how I was getting along … his graciousness is humbling.”

“Come now, I find that hard to believe,” the master priest replied. “It won’t do to hide things from me. Early this morning, as I was heading off to perform the late services, I saw a magnificent-looking gentleman coming out of the hinged double doors of the west hall, but in the thick fog I could not make out clearly

who it was. I asked some of the priests there, and they told me it was indeed the Major Counselor. They also mentioned that he had sent his carriage back home and had stayed the night. The rich fragrance of his perfumed robes filled the air ... so much so that it gave me a headache. I gathered then that it had to be the Major Counselor, since his robes are always scented like that. Their marriage isn't the most propitious event. He's quite talented and learned, and from the time he was a child, his grandmother, the late Princess Ōmiya, had me perform services on his behalf. Even now, I'm more than willing to perform any suitable ceremony for him, but this new marriage will come to no good, I'm afraid. His principal wife is a strong-willed woman. She comes from a distinguished and powerful family. And she's given him seven or eight children. The Princess will find it impossible to compete with her. More important, women are born inherently sinful, and wandering in darkness in the life after death is the kind of fearful karmic retribution brought about by such sinful behavior as this. If his principal wife is angered by this marriage, it will become a fetter preventing her from achieving Buddhahood for many future lives to come. I simply cannot agree to their vows." He was shaking his head as he spoke in this blunt manner.

"That's very odd," the mother said. "He's never given the least indication of any interest of that sort in my daughter. My attendants here were telling me that he planned to stay on here for a short time. He evidently told them that because I've been so ill of late he planned to visit me after he rested up. That must be the reason he spent the night, don't you think? He's always been such a serious, upright man." She spoke as if she doubted what the master priest had said, but in her heart she harbored different thoughts.

Could this be true? There have been times when his behavior struck me as odd, but he's a man of exemplary character and breeding, always careful not to do anything improper that might incur the criticism of others, and so perhaps my daughter let down her guard, confident that he would do nothing of which she did not approve. Seeing that only a few people were attending her, he must have gone straight into her rooms.

After the master priest had left, the Second Princess's mother summoned Koshōshō. "Anyway, this is what I was told," she said, after repeating the story she had just heard. "So, did it really happen? And why wasn't I informed about it? I'm sure there's no way it can be true, and yet ..."

Koshōshō felt sorry for her mistress, but she went ahead and explained all that happened in great detail, including the impression created by the morning-after letter and the Second Princess's vague reply to it. She then added, "He must have confessed the feelings he kept hidden in his heart all these years ... don't you think so? Thankfully, he was discreet and left before dawn. Who could have

possibly told you about this?” She assumed that one of the attendants had done so in secret—it never occurred to her that the informant was the master priest.

The mother was speechless. The situation was deplorable, and tears began to stream down her face. Koshōshō took pity on her. *Why did I go and tell her everything? This is bound to make her illness worse.* Filled with remorse, she tried to put the best face on the situation. “Well … at least the sliding door was locked,” she offered in defense of her mistress.

“That’s neither here nor there,” the mother replied. “It was careless of her to keep only a sliding panel between them, and it’s an absolute disgrace that she allowed him to see her so easily. It doesn’t matter how pure of heart she is, do you really think that these priests and their vulgar servants, who have already talked so much about the affair, will simply let the matter drop? No matter what excuse she may give, don’t you imagine people will be falling over each other to gossip about it, saying things about her that aren’t true? She has only naive, incompetent fools serving her.”

She could say no more. She was already suffering a great deal as it was, and the shock of this news seemed to make her even more miserable. She had wanted to provide her daughter with the proud, noble life befitting an imperial princess, and it caused her extraordinary heartache to think that her daughter would instead acquire a reputation as a worldly, disreputable woman. “Tell her she must come to me now that my mind is a little clearer. I should go to see her myself, but I cannot move. It feels like I haven’t seen her in the longest time.” Tears welled up in her eyes again.

Koshōshō returned to her mistress’s quarters. She said nothing about what had just transpired, but simply relayed the mother’s request. The Second Princess knew she had to go see her mother. She touched up the tangled, tear-soaked hair that framed her face and changed out of the singlet that had been split at the seams when the Major Counselor tugged on it. Still, she couldn’t bring herself to set off immediately. *What will my women think? Even if my mother doesn’t yet know what happened, she’ll eventually hear bits of gossip. When she realizes I’ve been pretending that nothing occurred, the shame will be more than I can bear.*

She lay down again. “I’m not feeling well at all,” she said. “It might be best if I don’t recover. An ill humor seems to be rising from my legs.” She had one of her women give her a massage to work the humor back down her legs. It had risen because of the various worries that were causing her such stress.

“Someone seems to have given your mother some vague indication of what happened last night,” Koshōshō said. “When she asked me what was going on, I told her everything exactly as it happened … except I embellished the story a

little by saying that you had locked the sliding panel door. If that detail should come up, be sure you tell her the same thing.” She said nothing about the mother’s grief-stricken countenance.

So that’s why she wants to talk to me! The Second Princess was inconsolable and said not a word as teardrops began to fall from her pillow. *It isn’t just this incident. I’ve caused my mother nothing but pain and sorrow, starting with my unhappy marriage to Kashiwagi.* She was now thinking that life was no longer worth living. Many thoughts raced through her mind. *The Major Counselor will not stop pestering me with his complaints and proposals, and that will certainly be troublesome and unbearable to have to hear. How much more would my reputation have suffered had I just meekly given in to his blandishments?* She took some solace from that last thought, but even so, it was simply not proper for a noblewoman whose status was as high as hers to carelessly allow a man to see her. She fell into a deep depression over her unfortunate destiny. When a message arrived from her mother that evening asking her if she was still coming for a visit, she made her way furtively from the west hall to the aisle room on the north side by passing through the open doors of the inner sanctum in the main room.⁸

The Second Princess’s mother, despite her illness, treated her daughter with uncommon respect and courtesy. She sat up, observing the customary protocol for greeting someone of her daughter’s rank.

“It bothers me that as a result of my infirmity you must demean yourself by coming here. Though it has only been two or three days since I last saw you, it feels like years to me ... though of course I know I’m being silly. Still, there are no guarantees that I will see you again in this life, and though we may meet again in future lives, it will do us no good, since we won’t recognize each other.⁹ When I think about it, I regret that I allowed myself to become attached to this fleeting world, since we all must part after only a brief time.” She was crying as she spoke.

The Second Princess was overwhelmed by her accumulated sorrows and could only gaze on her mother in silence. Extremely shy and deferential by nature, she was incapable of clearly speaking up for herself and unburdening her heart. She felt ashamed, and her mother, seeing how miserable she looked, took pity and did not press her to explain what had happened the previous night. Instead, she hurried to have lamps lit and, having heard that her daughter had not been eating much recently, asked her staff to prepare appetizing delicacies. The Second Princess, however, refused to touch the food, despite the relief she felt after seeing that her mother’s condition had improved.

Another letter arrived from Genji’s son. An attendant who was completely

ignorant of the situation brought it in and announced, “I have a letter for Koshōshō from the Major Counselor.” It must have caused the Second Princess further anguish. Koshōshō took the letter. The mother remained sensitive to her daughter’s mood, but this time she went ahead and asked, “What sort of letter is it?” Privately, her opposition to the marriage had already weakened, and she was expecting the Major Counselor to visit for the second night. However, she realized that with the delivery of the letter he apparently was not coming, and that stirred new anxieties.

“No matter what, you are still expected to reply,” she told the Second Princess. “It simply won’t do to ignore him. It’s rare to find someone who will speak up on your behalf and correct any gossip to make it sound positive. Deep down you may know that your heart is pure and blameless, but few will actually believe that’s true. Answer him in a proper, unassuming manner. It would be best to continue dealing with him as you’ve been doing. If you don’t reply, he will certainly think of you as a tease who’s trying to take advantage of him.” She asked to see the letter, and Koshōshō reluctantly handed it to her.

“Having fully witnessed the shocking coldness of your heart, I no longer feel constrained and am now more determined than ever.”

*Just as a dam may expose a shallow riverbed
Your attempt to hold me back reveals your shallowness
You cannot stop gossip that flows like a mountain stream*

He had written many other things, but she didn’t bother reading to the end. The letter failed to make his feelings clear. She found his smug, impudent attitude and his casual lack of concern about this evening, when he should have called again, an absolute disgrace. *I felt terrible for my daughter when it became clear that Kashiwagi’s feelings for her were not what we had hoped they would be, but at least he treated her publicly in a way that made it clear she was important and had no rival. She took comfort from that, since her position as his principal wife gave her some security, but even then she felt dissatisfied with their relationship. And now this appalling turn of events! What must they be saying at Tō no Chūjō’s household?*

Thinking that she wanted to ascertain his true attitude toward her daughter, she composed a letter to him. While she was writing, she would close her eyes tight, as though she were blinded by her illness, and wipe away her tears. The result was oddly disconnected characters that looked like footprints of birds tracking down the page.

“My daughter has come to call on me, since my health is precarious, and I

have pressed her to write back to you. However, she is apparently too depressed to manage a reply, and it hurts me to see her in such a state.”

*Do you know where it is, the autumn field
Where the maidenflower withers ... the place
Where you lodged for only a single night¹⁰*

That was all she could write. She rolled the paper up and twisted the ends to seal the letter. When she lay down again, her condition grew worse, and she was in great discomfort. Her women were shouting in confusion that the malignant spirit had caused her to let her guard down and had seized on her inattentiveness. The most efficacious of the exorcists raised a tremendous clamor as they sought to drive the spirit out. The ladies-in-waiting tried to get the Second Princess to go back to her own quarters, but because she did not want to be left behind in this world in her present unfortunate circumstances, she stayed right where she was.

Genji’s son had returned to his Sanjō residence at noontime. If he were to go back to the Ono villa that same evening, it would create the impression that something had happened between the Second Princess and him, and so he checked his impulses, mindful that people might jump to conclusions and start gossiping. He complained of his unease and frustration, which were a thousand times worse than anything he had experienced in recent years. Kumoinokari, having heard vague rumblings about his nocturnal adventure, was not at all pleased, but she pretended not to notice and went off to lie down and play with her children in the sitting room she used during the daytime.

It was already evening when the letter from the Second Princess’s mother arrived. Because it was so unusual—written in a scrawl that looked like bird tracks—Genji’s son was unable to decipher it right away and pulled a lamp closer to him to get a clearer look. He assumed that Kumoinokari was on the other side of her standing curtain, but just as he was about to read the letter she noticed it and, creeping up from behind, snatched it away.

“This is really too much ... why did you do that? It’s inexcusable. If you must know, it’s a letter from Hanachirusato. It seems that she came down with a cold this morning. However, because I did not have time to go call on her after seeing my father, I felt sorry and sent a message asking how she was doing. Please—go ahead—read it. Does it look like a love letter? You behaved in a most vulgar manner just now. It’s irritating how you have increasingly taken me for granted over the years. You feel no shame at all about what I might think of you, do you?”

He gave a rather theatrical sigh. Still, because he did not seem genuinely upset and did not even try to take the letter back from her, Kumoinokari did not look at it right away—though she did keep it. “It’s *you* who have taken *me* for granted over the years,” she shot back—but she now felt awkward, seeing how seriously and properly he was acting, and the childish look on her face was so adorable that he couldn’t help smiling.

“It doesn’t matter which of us is to blame. Husbands and wives who argue about being taken for granted are common enough. What isn’t so common is a man of high status like myself who doesn’t pursue clandestine affairs, but stays faithful to a single woman ... just like a male hawk¹¹ with his fearsome mate. People must be having a good laugh at my expense. And I might add that it does not bring much honor to you, either, to be always looked after by a man as rigid and unimaginative as me. You would look far more distinguished in the eyes of the world if you were singled out as the one special woman granted superior status over many others ... such a reputation would keep you feeling young, and you would never exhaust the delights and touching moments of married life. I feel frustrated that I should be so foolishly irresolute, staying faithful to only one woman, like the old man in that story who was always looking after—you know —what’s-her-name.¹² Where’s the glory in that for either of us?”

Of course, the whole point of his argument was to distract her, for what he really wanted was to get back the letter he was pretending meant nothing at all to him. Despite his transparent motives, she was charmed and smiled congenially.

“And while you’re out gathering all that glory, your aged wife is suffering. I’m not accustomed to the change in your appearance, your clothes are so stylish and sophisticated now, and the adjustment is painful for me. You should have acquainted me with your new look much, much sooner.” Her complaint was not at all unpleasant to him.

“What have you seen to make you think that I’ve changed all of a sudden? What terribly unpleasant thoughts you keep hidden away in the recesses of your heart! Someone must be saying awful things about me! Probably that nurse of yours who thought I was suspect from the beginning. Her disdain for those blue-green sleeves of mine still lingers, and even now she looks for any excuse to disparage me and insinuate that I have all sorts of nasty faults, scheming to make you dislike me. I feel most sorry for a certain lady who has nothing to do with any of this.” For all his denials, he had already made up his mind to take the Second Princess as a wife, and so he did not put up much of an argument with Kumoinokari.

All the while, her nurse, Taifu, was listening in awkward silence. In the end, Kumoinokari hid the letter following their quarrel, and he made no effort to get

it back from her. Instead, he went to their bedchamber pretending as if he couldn't care less. In truth, he was agitated, his chest pounding, since he really wanted it back. *It looked like a letter from the Second Princess's mother ... what did she write to me?* He lay awake, eyes wide open. When Kumoinokari fell asleep, he casually searched under the cushion and around the area where she had been sitting the night before, but he couldn't find anything. She didn't have all that much time to hide the letter, and so he was extremely frustrated by his lack of success. He did not get up right away when dawn broke. Their children woke up his wife, and she moved outside the curtains surrounding the dais where they slept. As soon as she left, he got up and looked all around, but again he could not find it. Since her husband had shown no interest in retrieving it, Kumoinokari was no longer concerned about the matter, having concluded that it wasn't really a love letter after all. In fact, she was so busy doing various things with her children—dressing up dolls and playing with them, reading books and practicing writing—as well as looking after her baby, who was crawling around tugging at her robes, that she forgot all about the letter. He, on the other hand, could think of nothing else and considered replying right away. However, since he hadn't been able to look at the letter last night, he worried that they might assume from his response that he had not bothered to read it properly or that he had misplaced it altogether.

At around noon, when everyone had finished their midday meal and the household was quiet, Genji's son could no longer stand thinking about it.

"What was in that letter last night? It was inexcusable of you to not let me see it. I really ought to call on Hanachirusato today and see how she's doing, but I'm not feeling well enough to go over to the Rokujō estate. I'll have to send her a note instead. I wonder if something happened?"

He sounded so nonchalant about the whole thing that Kumoinokari began to think that she might have acted childishly by taking it. She did not, however, respond to his question directly. Instead, she told him, "Why not make up some elegant excuse ... tell her that you caught a chill after spending a night wandering in the mountain breezes."

"Come, now ... stop it. You're always talking nonsense. What's elegant about such an excuse? It makes me feel embarrassed that you should think that I'm just like any other man. Your women here would be smiling wryly to hear you talk this way about someone they've long considered peculiarly prim and proper." After bantering with her in this way, he added, "So tell me, where's the letter?" When she did not produce it right away, he continued talking with her, and then he lay down for a while. As he was napping, evening arrived.

He was awakened by the cries of evening cicadas. He felt sorry for the mother

of the Second Princess. *The fog must be very thick at that villa in the shadow of the mountains. This nonsense with the letter is appalling ... but I really should reply today.* Feigning innocence, he casually began preparing ink, all the while gazing off lost in thought, wondering how he should go about writing a reply to a letter he hadn't seen.

As he sat there, he noticed a slight bulge on the back edge of his cushion, and when he lifted the cushion up to see what it was, there was the letter! *Kumoinokari must have slipped it in here*, he thought, feeling at once happy and a little foolish. Smiling, he read the letter—only to see that its contents were most upsetting. He could feel his chest tightening, and his heart ached with pity for the old woman, thinking that she must have heard that something had actually happened between him and the Second Princess that night. *She must have spent the whole night fretting because I didn't show up. And I didn't even get to my reply until just now.* He couldn't put his feelings into words. The letter, which was apparently written while she was under great distress, was confused and almost illegible. *She must have been overwhelmed with anxiety when she wrote this. And she's probably spending tonight lamenting once more what a heartless man I am!* There was no excuse that he could possibly offer, and he was now unhappy with Kumoinokari. *Such impetuous mischief ... hiding the letter this way. Really now ... I haven't trained her properly at all.* He chastised himself for all sorts of things and wanted to cry.

He thought that he should prepare to set off at once, but then his tendency to do things the proper way took over. He reconsidered. *Given what her mother wrote, I won't be able to meet the Second Princess all that easily. How should I handle this? On top of everything else, the yin-yang masters have determined that today is inauspicious,*¹³ *and so anything I might try is bound to fail. Even if the Second Princess does yield and agrees to see me, it would likely end badly for us. There must be a better way.*

The first step was to compose his reply: “You so rarely write to me that reading your letter made me happy for all sorts of reasons. Still, I do not understand why you censure me ... have I done something wrong?”

*It's true that I made my way through the dense grasses
Of autumn fields ... but do you think I'd weave from them
A temporary pillow for one night's shelter*

“It would be unreasonable of me to offer you excuses, but I cannot let the offense I committed last night by remaining in my quarters just stand without some explanation to you.” He wrote a great deal more to the Second Princess,

then had a fast horse saddled up and gave the letter to the trusted guard who had been with him the other night. He whispered to the guard, telling him just what to say. "Inform the people at the Ono villa that I've been at the Rokujō estate since last night and have just now come home."

Back at the Ono villa, the mother of the Second Princess, who could not abide the coldness Genji's son had exhibited by not showing up for the second night, had sent her letter expressing resentment without regard for the gossip it might stir later. However, when the following evening came and there was still no reply from him, she was completely shocked and disgusted, wondering just what kind of feelings he had for her daughter. Her heart was broken, and the stress brought on a relapse; despite the recent improvement in her health, she began to suffer terribly once again.

Privately, the Second Princess was neither shocked nor especially upset that the Major Counselor had not come back. The only thing she regretted was having carelessly exposed herself to him in an intimate setting. She did not, however, feel sorry for anything else. Her mother's horrified reaction, on the other hand, caused her misery and shame, and she had no way to excuse her carelessness. She seemed even more shy and uncomfortable than usual. Her mother, who was distressed to see the Second Princess in such a state, was choked with grief, wondering why a young woman who had known so much heartache should have to suffer these additional sorrows.

"I do not want to say anything that will add to your misery, but even if it is your karmic destiny to have things turn out like this, your own astonishing immaturity and lack of judgment will surely leave you open to criticism. What's done is done, but you must behave more prudently from now on. I know I do not count for much in this world, but I did everything I could for you. I felt at ease, thinking that I had taught you what you need to know to understand relations between men and women. But now I'm dismayed to see you still so very childish, so lacking in strength of character, and I find myself hoping to live a little longer to look after you.

"It is considered deplorable and frivolous for any woman, whether a commoner or even a woman of slightly higher status, to take two husbands," she continued. "It's even more deplorable when a woman of your noble status carelessly allows a man to approach you as closely as the Major Counselor did. I suffered over the years watching as you married a man I objected to, only to learn that he had no affection for you ... but, given your destiny, that was meant to be. After all, your father approved the match, as did Kashiwagi's father, and in the end I weakened and gave in, worried about how it would look if I were the only one opposed. I continued helplessly observing your unfortunate

circumstances, which will be the subject of gossip for generations to come. And, since they were not due to any mistakes on your part, I have beseeched the heavens to hear my grievances. That seems to have done little good, however, for it seems painfully certain that people will spread all sorts of vile rumors hurtful to him and to you. I thought that I might take solace in the possibility that if you were to pretend to know nothing about the rumors and maintain a normal relationship with him as his wife, then naturally the gossip would fade with the passage of time. But those hopes are gone now that I've seen what a truly heartless man he is!" Her tears would not stop falling.

The Second Princess said nothing to contradict her mother, who had vented all of the things she had been forced to keep inside. Instead, she simply sat there crying, looking sweet and gentle. Gazing at her daughter's figure, the mother added, "How sad it is ... in looks you are in no way inferior to anyone. What could you have possibly done in a previous life that would bring you such anxiety and deep distress in this one?" She was continuing to talk in this vein when suddenly she suffered a terrible seizure. Because malignant spirits take advantage of people who are in a weakened state like this, the spirit of the Second Princess's mother suddenly disappeared, and her body began to turn colder and colder. The master priest frantically hurried to begin performing the rites of exorcism in a very loud voice. He prayed fervently, putting his whole heart into the rites. Having made a solemn vow to retreat from the world and spend the rest of his life shut away in the recesses of the mountains, the decision to come down for this exorcism had not been made lightly. If his efforts failed and he had to dismantle the altar that had been constructed for the rites, he would return to the mountain in disgrace, feeling aggrieved that Dainichi Nyorai had not answered his prayers. The Second Princess was quite understandably beside herself, weeping uncontrollably.

In the midst of all this commotion, the mother heard that a letter from Genji's son had arrived. It was clear that he would not be coming this evening either. *How cruel he is! It seems that my daughter must suffer the ridicule of being a Princess abandoned after only one night. Why did I leave behind that letter suggesting that I would not oppose him if he took her as a wife?* With such tormented thoughts running through her head, she died soon after the seizure began. Words such as "stunning" or "devastating" are not adequate to describe her passing. This particular spirit had tormented her from time to time over many years, and on some occasions it looked as though it had taken her for good. She had always revived, however, and the priests, assuming that this possession would be the same as all the others, once more carried out a noisy exorcism. But despite their efforts it was obvious the end had come.

Desperate not to be left behind, the Second Princess lay next to her mother's body. Her ladies-in-waiting entered.

"It's no use now," one of them said, trying to comfort her with bromides. "You may wish to go with her, but the final journey she is taking is one from which no one returns. Though you may want to accompany her, you simply cannot do so."

"You mustn't cling to her body like that! It's terribly bad luck. And your grief will be an impediment on your mother's path to salvation. You must move away from her at once!"

They attempted to pull their mistress away from her mother's corpse, but the Second Princess had apparently fainted, for she could not be moved. The priests conducting the rites dismantled the altar. They began departing a few at a time, leaving behind only those priests needed for the funeral and memorial services. The atmosphere of the Ono villa was now sad and forlorn.

Condolences from various houses began to arrive very soon after. Genji's son was absolutely stunned when he heard the news, and he sent off a note at once. Genji and Tō no Chūjō also wrote; all told, there were countless messages. When Retired Emperor Suzaku received the news in his mountain temple, he too wrote a poignant letter expressing his grief. His was the first letter the Second Princess bothered raising her head to look at. It read as follows:

For the past several days, I was kept informed about your mother's grave illness, but since she had suffered from this malady before, I did not take the news all that seriously. It goes without saying that I mourn her passing, but it is especially sad and painful to imagine how much you are grieving. Take comfort in the truth that all things must pass.

Although she was blinded by tears, she sent him a reply.

The mother was always leaving instructions for how to handle her funeral, and she had wanted it to take place immediately on the day she died. Her nephew, the Governor of Yamato Province, took care of all the details. The Second Princess longed to gaze on her mother for a while longer and was reluctant to let the body go, but such a show of devotion was pointless, and everyone hurried to finish the preparations. Then, at the most inauspicious moment,¹⁴ Genji's son arrived.

Just before he left his Sanjō residence, he had told the attendants there, "The next few days are all unlucky according to the calendar, and so I must go now." He imagined poignantly just how grief-stricken the Second Princess must be, and even though the women at Sanjō advised against making the trip, pointing

out that there was no need for such haste, he set off anyway.

The trip to the Ono villa seemed to take forever, and when he arrived he was deeply touched by the mood of desolation there. The funeral rites, which were being conducted behind curtains in order to protect the surroundings from defilement, were hidden from view. He was shown into the rooms on the west side of the villa. The Governor of Yamato tearfully received him and thanked him for coming. He sat down on the veranda in front of the double-hinged doors, leaned against the railing there, and called for the ladies-in-waiting. The attendants, however, were all so emotionally distraught that they were in a daze. In the end, only Koshōshō, who had taken some comfort in the arrival of Genji's son, came out to see him, but he could not speak. He was usually able to control his emotions, as he was not the kind of man who easily broke down and wept. However, the desolate atmosphere of the villa and the grief of its residents were overwhelming. Reminded once again of the inescapable impermanence of life in this world, he was profoundly affected.

After regaining his composure a little, Genji's son said, "I had heard that she was feeling better of late, and so I felt reassured ... but in that brief careless interval, a moment as fleeting as waking from a dream, this shocking event happened."

Koshōshō conveyed his words to the Second Princess, who was filled with bitterness. *It's his fault Mother was upset.* Though it may have been her mother's time to die, the karmic destiny that bound them to Genji's son was hard to bear, and so she would not reply.

"How should I answer him?" Koshōshō asked. "You really must say something."

The other attendants pressed her as well.

"He's not a man you can dismiss lightly. It would be deeply offensive if you were not to at least acknowledge the gracious kindness he has shown by hurrying to come here like this."

"Just use your imagination and come up with something," she replied as she lay back down. "I can't think of anything appropriate to say just now." Her behavior was understandable.

"My poor mistress seems to be hardly alive herself just now," Koshōshō reported to Genji's son. "I did let her know, however, that you have arrived."

Because all of the attendants were upset and weeping, he decided that there was little he could do. "I can say nothing to comfort her at this point. I shall come again when I myself am feeling calmer and when your mistress is not as distracted by her grief. But, before I go, I want to hear what happened."

Koshōshō couldn't very well tell him everything that took place, but she did

describe how the Second Princess's mother lamented the events of that night when Genji's son stayed with her daughter. As Koshōshō was describing this, she added, "It must sound as if I'm criticizing you, my lord. But please bear in mind that I'm feeling very confused and unsettled today and may not be completely accurate. In any case, my mistress will not always be as upset as she is now, and I hope that we may be permitted to speak again when she has calmed down."

Because Koshōshō truly did not seem to be herself, he refrained from defending his actions. "I myself feel as if I'm lost in darkness. Still, I would be grateful if you could comfort your mistress so that she might be able to give me a brief reply." With that, he took his leave. There were too many people around, and, given his high status and lack of a deep connection to the Second Princess's family, he might come across as ridiculous if he appeared to be having a hard time departing. And so he went home.

He was deeply dissatisfied with the hasty preparations for the funeral, which he never imagined would be held that evening. He summoned people from his nearby manors and gave them detailed instructions to ensure that they conducted a ceremony appropriate for a woman who was once a consort to an Emperor. He then went on his way. The funeral, which was quite simple due to the last-minute arrangements, was made more splendid and dignified by the increase in the number of people attending. The Governor of Yamato and others were overjoyed and humbled by the assistance, and they thanked him profusely.

The Second Princess, who was in a state of shock that no trace remained of her mother, continued to lie prostrate, grieving over her loss. It is not proper for one person to be so deeply attached to another—not even to a parent. When they observed how their mistress was dealing with the death, the attendants fretted, worried that such behavior was ominous. The Governor of Yamato had finished taking care of all remaining details when he finally spoke to the Second Princess, urging her to return to her Ichijō villa. "You must not stay in this lonely place where there is nothing to take your mind off your grief." But she had decided that she wanted to live in this mountain villa, where she could always keep the memory of her mother vivid by remaining close to the mists on the peak where the smoke from the pyre had risen. The priests who remained behind for the period of mourning set up flimsy partitions to make rooms for themselves in the passageways and servants' quarters on the east side of the villa. They lived there quietly, and so she was hardly aware of their presence. She had all of the decorations and accessories removed from the aisle room on the west side of the villa and resided there, paying no heed to the passage of time. Several months went by, and the ninth month arrived.

Powerful winds came blowing down Mount Hiei, and the trees were no longer covered with leaves. Because everything seemed overwhelmingly sad to the Second Princess, the appearance of the autumn skies elicited a constant stream of tears. She did not wish to live on after her mother, and she felt her continued existence was unpleasant and trying. Even the people serving her found life sad and gloomy. Genji's son paid frequent visits. He made all sorts of offerings to provide comfort to the priests meditating on the Holy Name in the lonely atmosphere there, and he would send touchingly kind messages to the Second Princess as well as complaints about her refusal to reply to him. In addition, he sent her letters of condolence. Though she accepted them, she refused to read them, for whenever she recalled how her mother, who was already in a weakened state, had gone to her death believing beyond a doubt that something improper and outrageous had taken place, she realized that her actions had surely given rise to regrets and resentments that would keep her mother from achieving salvation in the next world. Such memories made her heart ache and, for that reason, the very mention of Genji's son was enough to bring on tears of distress. Her attendants were at a loss, unsure what to say or do.

He received not a single line from her. For a while, he assumed that her silence was due to her confused state of mind, but when too much time passed with no reply at all, he came to resent her cold behavior.

There's a limit to how much one should grieve. Why does she seem to be going out of her way to refuse to recognize my feelings for her? It's disheartening and utterly immature. It would be one thing if I were sending her notes filled with extraneous references to flowers and butterflies, but I'm not. She should be more sensitive to someone who's sympathetic enough to ask how she's getting along in the midst of her grief and draw closer to me. When my grandmother, Princess Ōmiya, died, I felt devastated, but my father-in-law did not seem to feel as sad as I did ... he just talked stoically about how the parting that death brings is a natural part of life. I couldn't stand it when he arranged nothing more than a pro forma funeral for public display. My own father took care of arrangements for her memorial services, and it made me happy when he devoted himself to the task and went well beyond what was expected. It was during that period of my life that I grew close to Kashiwagi, who shared my grief. He was quiet by nature and contemplative, and I think warmly of him now as someone more sensitive than others. Such thoughts would fill his idle time.

Kumoinokari found it hard to understand the nature of the relationship between her husband and the Second Princess. *What's going on with them? He was apparently exchanging detailed letters with her late mother, but ... One day, while her husband was lying down lost in his thoughts, gazing out at the sky at*

dusk, she had one of their young sons take him a note. Along the edge of the slip of paper she had written the following:

*How do I interpret the source of your sorrows
That I may comfort you ... do you long for the one
Left behind or grieve for the one who passed away*

“I feel anxious not knowing which it is.”

He smiled at the note. *She imagines all sorts of things and then complains to me about them. She knows full well that I'm not grieving for the Second Princess's mother.* He casually wrote out his reply and sent it back at once:

*I do not sadly contemplate the distinction
Between them, for this world after all is fleeting
Our lives last no longer than dew on blades of grass*

“I grieve that everything is mutable,” he added.

She was convinced that he was hiding his true feelings. His words about the poignancy of the dew were beside the point, and she felt extremely hurt.

Still anxious and fretful about the Second Princess, Genji’s son went to call on her yet again. He had tried to control his emotions, thinking that he should take things slow and gentle once the period of mourning had passed, but he could hold himself back no longer. *Unfounded rumors about our affair are already circulating, so why should I go out of my way to be mindful of her reputation? I should act like any other man and do as I please with her.* Having made up his mind, he would no longer bother with excuses or argue with Kumoinokari over her suspicions. Even though the Second Princess might utterly reject him, he would justify himself by pointing to the letter her mother had sent him that fateful night. After all, the mother had not merely expressed her resentment but had also given tacit approval to his proposal, and he was resolved not to let the Second Princess claim that their relationship was somehow platonic.

The tenth day of the ninth month had passed, and the autumn scenery of the fields and mountains would have moved even those with no innate sense of beauty and wonder. The leaves from the treetops and the kudzu vines growing at the peak of the mountain were unable to resist the force of the winds and came scattering down in a mad dash, vying to be the first to reach the bottom. The faint voices of priests solemnly chanting a sutra or invoking the Holy Name mingled with the sound of the wind and the rustling leaves. Only a few people remained in residence, the bitingly chill autumn breezes having apparently

driven off the rest. Deer were standing stock-still just below the fence of bamboo wattle and would not scare despite the sharp reports of wooden clappers intended to drive them away from the fields. A stag was belling in a rice paddy amidst dark golden stalks of grain, calling out plaintively for a mate. The roar of a waterfall reverberated over the area, a noise startling enough to bring anyone distracted by sorrowful thoughts back to themselves. Crickets weakly chirruped among the clumps of grasses, sounding as if they had been deserted, and from beneath the withered grasses, gentians were stretching up, their long stems drenched in dew. They appeared to be the only things still surviving in this season. These were typical sights and sounds of autumn, but at this particular time and in this particular place, they created a melancholy mood that was overpowering.

Genji's son went up to the hinged double doors at the southwest corner of the Ono villa—the doors that he always used when entering and leaving—and he stood there for a moment gazing around. He wore a soft, perfectly tailored outer cloak over layered deep crimson robes. The patterns on his robes created by fulling had a translucent sheen that was nobly elegant, and as the waning rays of the setting sun—detached, indifferent—shone down on him, he opened his fan without the least hint of affectation and used it to cover his face from the dazzling light. The women inside watching him thought such gestures would be ideal form for a woman, and yet none of them could have pulled it off as he did. His smiling face, which would surely bring solace to their worries, was radiant. He called specifically for Koshōshō. The veranda was rather narrow, however, and he felt that he could not talk freely since he was concerned there might be other women with her just inside the blinds.

“Come a little closer,” he told her. “You mustn’t be so distant with me. Have I trudged all this way deep into the mountains just so that you can treat me as if I’m a complete stranger? The fog is so thick that I won’t be able to see you in any case ...” He made a show of not looking toward the blinds, gazing off at the mountains instead. “Over here, over here ... ,” he urged her insistently, and finally she pushed a standing curtain with gray panels through the bamboo blinds so that it protruded a little out onto the veranda. She took her position behind it, sitting sideways to him, and rearranged the hems of her robes. She was a sister of the Governor of Yamato and thus a cousin of the Second Princess and niece of her mistress’s late mother. Since she had been so close to the deceased, having been raised by her aunt since she was a child, she wore dark gray mourning robes under a short formal outer layer.

Genji's son poured out his resentment.

“In addition to the unending grief that I experience as a result of your aunt’s

death, I am tormented by your mistress's unspeakable cruelty. I feel as though my heart and my spirit have left my body, and because I'm censured by every person I meet, I can no longer endure this." He shed many tears when he talked about the letter that the mother of the Second Princess had sent to him just before her death.

Koshōshō wept even more bitterly than Genji's son.

"When no answer to her letter arrived that evening, my aunt turned inward, into her own thoughts, sensing perhaps that her final hour was at hand, and her heart wandered lost in the dark night skies. In that moment of vulnerability, the malignant spirit that had troubled her for so long apparently seized her soul and took it away. At the time our young lord died, there were many occasions on which my aunt would lose consciousness and seem to be on the verge of death. However, each time she managed to gradually revive through the sheer strength of her determination to comfort her daughter, who was equally despondent. Now, after this latest misfortune, my mistress seems not to be aware of herself and passes the time in a haze." Unable to control her tears and constant sighs, she could not speak clearly or smoothly.

"That's what I'm talking about," Genji's son responded. "She is far *too* distracted, *too* aloof. It may be presumptuous of me to say so, but who will support her now? Her father has retreated to a temple, cut off from the world and living amidst the clouds on a peak deep in the mountains, and it will be difficult for her to communicate with him. You must tell your mistress how unpleasant her attitude toward me is. Karmic destiny determines everything, and what is to be will be. Even though she may not want to go on living, things in this world don't always go the way we want. If they did, would we ever experience the kind of suffering brought on by the death of her mother?" He rambled on, talking about a great many things, and there was nothing Koshōshō could say in reply. She merely sat there and continued to sigh.

Just then, a stag bellowed. Genji's son recited a snatch of verse: "Is my longing any less."¹⁵ He composed the following:

*I have journeyed to this far-off villa
Through the fields of bamboo grass at Ono
Yet like the stag, I cry out in longing¹⁶*

Koshōshō replied:

*The denizens of this mountain pass wear rustic
Mourning robes in an autumn drenched in dewy tears*

*Joining doleful voices to the cry of the stag*¹⁷

The poem wasn't all that distinguished, but given the moment and her hushed tone of voice, he found it pleasing all the same.

Koshōshō conveyed his sentiments to the Second Princess, who replied, "If there ever comes a time when I awaken from this nightmarish world and feel I have a little more control of my emotions, then I shall certainly thank you for your constant visits." There was nothing more to her message. Lamenting how useless it was to complain to someone so stubborn, he went home.

All along the way, he was gazing up at the poignant skies, and, because the thirteenth-day moon was shining with such radiant splendor, he did not lose his way at Mount Gloom.¹⁸ The road ran by the Ichijō villa, which was becoming increasingly vacant and run-down. Through a gap in the southwest corner of the estate where the wall had collapsed, he could peek inside and see that all the shutters had been closed. There was no sign of anyone there—only the moon seemed to be in residence, shining clear and bright on the surface of the stream. He remembered all of the times when Kashiwagi had played music here. He whispered a poem to himself:

*Reflected in the limpid waters of the pond
Where faces that once were seen no longer appear
The moon stands guard alone this autumn evening*

He continued to gaze up at the moon, even after he returned home, and his heart seemed to rise up to the skies. The attendants all thought that his behavior was reprehensible, and one of them grumbled, "How pathetic-looking. He's never shown such inclinations before!"

Kumoinokari was genuinely upset. *He seems to have completely lost his head over her. Those ladies at Rokujō are his ideal for how a woman should act, and so he considers me willful and disagreeable ... it's so unreasonable of him! They accepted their status as one of many wives from the beginning, and if I had grown accustomed to such an arrangement years ago, then perhaps I would have accepted the fact that others see it as normal and been able to live with it ... it might even have made my life easier, since I would have had fewer children. Everyone, beginning with my parents and siblings, thought that he was the very model of a devoted husband and rejoiced that I should be so blessed with marital happiness ... but, in the end, it looks as though I'm destined to be humiliated, scorned for another woman.* She felt hurt and aggrieved.

Dawn neared, and the two of them lay there not saying a word, sighing and

keeping their backs turned toward each other. After first light, he did not even wait for the morning fog to clear, but hastened to write his usual letter to the Second Princess. Kumoinokari found this extremely irksome, but this time she made no effort to steal it from him as she had that other day. He wrote at some length, giving great care to each line; when he began his poem, he put the paper down and recited it to himself. He kept his voice at a whisper, but she could hear anyway.

*You spoke only those few words saying I must wait
For you to awaken from an endless night's dream
Leaving me to wonder when I ought to rouse you*

He added a line from a verse: “Cascading from the heights ...”¹⁹ From what she could tell, that was all he wrote. He wrapped the letter and continued to murmur snatches from the same verse: “What am I to do?” He summoned a messenger and sent it off.

Kumoinokari wanted to know the truth about their relationship. *How I'd love to see her reply! What's really going on with them?*

The sun was already high when the messenger returned. The response, written by Koshōshō on dark purple paper, was brief and to the point. Things were the same—she had shown her mistress his letter, but it had done no good since she still would not respond to him. “I felt sorry for you, and so, when my mistress used your letter for her own writing practice, I pilfered those sheets.” She had torn off the pertinent parts and included them with her note.

So, she at least looked at my letter! It was utterly pathetic that this thought alone could bring him such joy. He managed to piece together the disjointed strips of paper to read what she had written:

*In the hills at Ono I raise my voice
Cry out night and day ... are my endless tears
A cascade unheard, like the Silent Falls*

He seemed to have pieced it together correctly. Her random jottings of old poems, which had about them an air of melancholy introspection, were done in an accomplished hand. *I've always considered a man whose heart burns with this sort of passion an irritating fool for having lost his head over a woman, but now here I am, doing the same thing ... and it's true: these feelings really are hard to bear. How curious it is. Why should I be burning with obsessive passion like this?*

Genji learned of the affair. As a parent, he had always been pleased that his son was a man of prudence and mature judgment who lived his life calmly and above reproach. Indeed, his son's virtuous character was a source of pride and honor and also helped make up for Genji's past indiscretions, which had earned him a reputation for wanton behavior. *What a pity*, he thought. *This will surely be hard on the women. And what must Tō no Chūjō be thinking ... after all, he's close to both of them? My son must have taken at least that much into consideration. There is simply no escaping the workings of karmic destiny, and, in any case, it's not my place to interfere.* Still, he felt sorry for Kumoinokari and the Second Princess and lamented this unfortunate turn of events. The travails faced by a woman who has been widowed prompted him to think about Murasaki—her past and her future—and he worried what would become of her after he died.

When he mentioned his concerns to Murasaki, she blushed.

It's cruel of him, she thought. *How long will I be on my own once he leaves me? Is there any life as restricted and miserable as a woman's? If a woman is withdrawn, quiet and meek to the point that she never experiences the poignant beauty of things or the delights of elegant events, how can she know the glories of living or find consolation for the tedium of this unsettled world? And if a woman is ignorant of the workings of the heart and mind or is hopelessly lacking in character, then the parents who raised her cannot help but have bitter regrets. Even when a woman understands right from wrong, it does her no good to shut herself away and never speak—like that Prince in ancient times²⁰ whom monks take as the model for their own sorrowful vows of silence. One must somehow find the proper mean in one's own heart.* She turned these various ideas over in her mind only because she was now concerned with properly raising the First Princess.

Genji took advantage of one of his son's visits to Rokujō to ask him about his relationship with the Second Princess.

"The period of mourning for her mother must be over by now, is it not? Three years²¹ have come and gone, but it feels as if events that took place back then happened just yesterday. How cruel and dreary the world is. We grow attached to things that are as fleeting as the evening dew. I feel that I should soon take the tonsure and turn my back on it all, and yet I continue to live on, blithely unconcerned about the next life. It is a very bad attitude on my part."

"It's certainly true that even a person who appears to have no regrets may have a hard time withdrawing from the world," his son replied. "The Governor of Yamato—you know the man I'm talking about—was set to take care of the memorial services by himself, but it was very sad to see ... pathetic, really. A

woman like the Second Princess's mother who has no one to rely on may be able to get by in life, but it's heartbreaking when she reaches the end."

"Suzaku sent condolences, I assume. How grief-stricken the Second Princess must be. I'd heard about her mother long ago but didn't know much about her until more recent years, when I gathered that she was one of the more impressive and likable of my older brother's consorts. Her passing is a loss not just for her family but also for the court. It always seems as if it's the indispensable people who die first. I understand that Suzaku was quite shaken by her passing. The Second Princess was his favorite after the Third Princess, and so she must be an attractive woman."

"I wonder about her temperament, though," the son replied. "From what I could tell, her mother was a woman whose demeanor and disposition were flawless. I was never all that close or familiar with her, but there were a few passing occasions when her true character revealed itself." He did not touch on the Second Princess, pretending instead to be totally indifferent. Genji was resigned to the situation. *Since he's smitten with her, it wouldn't be appropriate for me to offer advice. He's not likely to listen anyway, and so it would be useless to try to reason with him.*

Genji's son took charge of the memorial services. Naturally, he could not keep his involvement in the rites hidden from public view, and when Tō no Chūjō heard about this he was irritated, wondering how such a thing could be considered proper—after all, as the father-in-law he should have been the one to take care of things—and he inevitably criticized the Second Princess for being frivolous and lacking in judgment. His sons attended the ceremonies, since they had a past connection with her through Kashiwagi, and Tō no Chūjō himself made lavish offerings for the scripture readings and other services. Because everyone wanted to ensure that the services were magnificent, they were carried out as though for a person of the highest status.

The Second Princess wanted very much to live out her life in the villa at Ono, but when her father learned of her plans, he sent her one message after another: "This won't do at all. It's natural for you to think that you ought to remain there and that it isn't right to remarry, but a woman who has no one to support her and goes on living like a nun without actually taking vows will inevitably become the target of outrageous gossip. And if there should be a scandalous affair, she will be subject to severe criticism and will find herself in the worst possible position, with no prospects for happiness in this world or hopes for salvation in the next. I have withdrawn to my temple here, and the Third Princess has taken vows as well. People are saying that my line will end with me. Having no posterity means little to one who has turned his back on the world, and yet it

would be unseemly if you were to vie with your sister by also taking vows and assuming the guise of a nun. At the same time, it would create a rather bad impression for you to turn away from the world simply because of the sorrows that you've experienced. You may think that you know what you want, but give the matter a little more consideration after you have regained your composure and your mind and heart are clear."

He had no doubt heard the gossip about the affair between his daughter and Genji's son, and he was concerned about reports that she was weary and dissatisfied with the relationship, which, because they were not formally married, was not what she had hoped for. On the other hand, Suzaku also worried that it would be frivolous and unbecoming of her to openly admit the relationship. Of course, he would have felt bad if he embarrassed her by raising the subject—it was not his place to interfere—and so he decided not to ask about it.

After thinking about the situation, Genji's son finally decided on a date to move the Second Princess back to her Ichijō villa.

It no longer makes any difference what I might say to her, he concluded, for it seems that she'll never yield her heart to me. Perhaps I should just go ahead and inform everyone that I had her mother's consent. What else can I do at this point? I could lie a little and hint that our affair began at some earlier point ... though if I do, people may criticize her late mother for being a little careless. I suppose that I could go back and plead with her—shed endless tears of love and all that. But then I'd look ridiculous, like some callow youth.

He summoned the Governor of Yamato and gave him instructions for preparing the ceremonies that would accompany the move. He had the villa cleaned and refurnished. Although the attendants who were still living there had been ordered to keep the grounds immaculate, they had allowed the grasses and weeds to grow wild. Genji's son had those cleared away so that the residence glowed as if it had been polished. He showed great care in having everything readied—the preparations for the move were splendid, and he saw to it that new curtains, folding screens, standing curtains, and cushions for seating were installed. The Governor of Yamato had the craftsmen at his own residence hasten to complete the work.

The day of the move arrived, and Genji's son went personally to offer the Second Princess a carriage and escort. She did not want to go back to Ichijō, and her women did everything they could to persuade her. At last, the Governor of Yamato spoke with her.

"I really cannot deal with your attitude any more. I grieve when I see how forlorn and despondent you are, and from the moment of your mother's death, I

have done everything in my power to be of service to you. Now, however, I must take my leave and go back to my province to deal with official business there. Once I go, there will be no one to protect and look after your Ichijō villa, and I would feel uncomfortable if matters were left as they are. The Major Counselor, however, has gone to all this trouble to look after you. When I think about the situation from your point of view, it's true that you don't necessarily have to go, but there have been many examples in the past of women of your rank who had to marry against their wishes, and so there is no reason to imagine that you alone will be subject to the censure of society. You are being extremely childish. No matter how proud and brave you are, can any woman really manage to look after her affairs solely on her own? No ... you will still depend on the assistance of someone who will honor and respect you. You will certainly need a man like that if you are to ever realize your deepest wish to live the admirable life of religious devotion."

At this moment, he turned to her ladies-in-waiting, Sakon and Koshōshō, and added, "You two have failed to properly advise your mistress. To the contrary, you have behaved improperly, taking it on yourself to help him."²²

Her attendants gathered, coaxing and comforting their mistress. Though she felt completely put upon, she remained distracted and indifferent as she let them change her mourning robes to brighter, more cheerful clothing. When she brushed aside her hair, which she had wanted to cut completely away to become a nun, her attendants could see how stunningly beautiful it was—thinned out a little as a result of her grief, but still a full six feet long. In her own mind, however, she imagined how terrible she must have looked—not fit to be seen by anyone—and how she had been fated to suffer these many indignities. She lay prostrate again. Her women were flustered. "It's almost time to leave," they told her. "The night is getting late." A cold evening rain fell, blown about restlessly by gusts of wind. Everything looked sad and gloomy to her.

*How I long to rise up and mingle with the smoke
From her pyre on the mountain peak ... yet I drift off
On a course that I have no desire to follow*

She strongly held to her fervent desire to renounce the world, and so recently her attendants had been taking precautions, hiding scissors and other items by which she might cut her hair. Their actions prompted her to reflect on her situation. *There's no need for all this fuss ... having no reason to cling to this life, it doesn't matter whether I actually take vows or not. Would I really do something as foolish and irresponsible as cutting my own hair? Would I really do*

something that would make those who hear about it think badly of me?
Preoccupied with such thoughts, she did not act on her true desire.

Her attendants had all hurriedly packed up their combs, boxes, chests and other items, placing them in humble-looking bags and sending them on ahead to the Ichijō villa. The Second Princess could hardly stay on by herself, and so, still weeping, she boarded her carriage and stared at the empty seat her mother had once occupied. Her eyes misted over at the memory. On the way to Ono, her mother, despite suffering from the assaults of that malignant spirit, had stroked her hair and fixed it up. The Second Princess carried with her a ceremonial dagger and a sutra box—objects that were now mementos of her late mother.

*Gazing through a veil of tears at this box
Lovely memento of my mother's soul
How hard it is to comfort my longings*

She had not had time to obtain a more appropriate black box to hold the sutra, and so she used one inlaid with mother-of-pearl that had belonged to her mother. Just gazing at it made her feel like that son of Urashima.²³

By the time she arrived, the villa was bustling with people and the air of desolation that had previously pervaded the residence began to dissipate. When the carriage was drawn inside, the surroundings made her feel strange, since they were so unlike the old home she had once shared with the deceased. She wanted nothing to do with it and at first refused to get out of the carriage. Her attendants were at their wits' end, and they considered her behavior absurdly childish.

Genji's son had arranged to have temporary quarters prepared for his own use on the south side of the east hall, and he occupied the space looking every bit like a groom who has just set himself up in his wife's household. Back at his Sanjō residence, people were shocked: "He's suddenly behaving in a most disreputable manner. Has this affair actually been going on for a long time?" This was a man who previously had shown no interest in anything voluptuous or overly elegant, and yet here he was, acting in a most unexpected way. He may have projected an image of seriousness, but they all concluded that he must have been conducting this affair for years and had managed to keep it secret. Not one person even entertained the possibility that the Second Princess had not yielded to him. Whether she had or hadn't, her situation was a wretched one either way.

Because the Second Princess was still in mourning, the colors of the robes, accessories, and decorations used for the welcoming banquet were all subdued, which made for a peculiar nuptial celebration. Such a beginning did not augur well for the future of the marriage, but when the meal was finished and everyone

had retired for the night, Genji's son went to the Second Princess's quarters and put tremendous pressure on Koshōshō to admit him to her mistress's bedchamber.

"My lord, if you truly intend to be kind and eternally devoted to my mistress," she pleaded, "then come back after a day or two. Returning home was hard for her and she is terribly depressed ... all she does is lie in bed as if she herself were no longer alive. I try to soothe her feelings, but she resents my efforts, which makes all of this very stressful on me as well ... it's almost impossible just getting her to speak to me."

"She's incomprehensible! Not at all what I had imagined ... she's like some spoiled, irrational little girl!" He continued to insist that his plans were best for both of them and would not incur the censure of society.

"Oh no, please ... I'm so afraid that my mistress may follow her mother to the grave that I'm practically frantic and can't tell what's what any more. I beg you, my lord, do not force your way in or be aggressive with her!" She was rubbing her hands together in supplication.

"Her attitude is unheard of! It's beyond cruel that she apparently finds me hateful and detestable and looks down on me as inferior to others.²⁴ I'd really like to ask someone about this ... someone impartial who could judge which of us is the unreasonable one here." Because he considered the Second Princess's attitude completely beyond the pale, Koshōshō couldn't help feeling sorry for him.

"You say her behavior is unheard of, but isn't it possible you feel that way because you are inexperienced in the ways of courtship? When it comes to judging who is being unreasonable, well ... I have to wonder which way an impartial observer really would choose." She smiled slightly.

Although she was being adamant, he was not to be denied now. With Koshōshō trailing behind him, he barged into the interior of the chamber where he guessed the Second Princess was lying down. Because she was taken aback by his effrontery, she angrily deplored his callous recklessness and had a mat set out in her inner sanctum. She locked herself in to sleep there, not caring one bit if he raised a fuss over her childish behavior. She wasn't sure how long this would keep him out, and she found it sad and regrettable that her own attendants were so unruly as to lead him to her.

Genji's son was shocked and hurt at this reception, but he calmly decided that he wasn't about to let this kind of behavior on her part discourage him, and so he spent the rest of the night mulling over all his options. He felt just like the mountain pheasant, which sleeps apart from its mate in a different nest. Dawn arrived after the long winter night. He prepared to leave, for it would soon be

light, and he would feel awkward if people were to see his face. “Just open the door a crack,” he pleaded desperately, but she refused to acknowledge his presence.

*On a long winter night I cannot open up
To unburden my heart of bitter resentments ...
Now this stone gate, yet one more barrier to you*

“Your cruelty is beyond description,” he said. In tears, he departed.

He went to the Rokujō estate to rest. “Is something going on?” Hanachirusato asked in her typical gentle manner. “I heard from Tō no Chūjō’s residence that you moved the Second Princess back to her Ichijō villa.” Although she was behind a standing curtain in addition to the blinds, he could catch glimpses of her as she peeked around the edge.

“Yes, I suppose that’s something people *would* gossip about. The Second Princess’s late mother was adamantly opposed to our relationship, but her position softened when she was nearing the end ... perhaps it made her sad to think that there was no one to protect her daughter, and so she indicated that after she passed away I should assume the role of guardian. That had been my intention all along, since I promised Kashiwagi that I would look after the Second Princess. People are no doubt spreading all sorts of gossip about this. There’s really nothing much to the story, but people do seem to get perverse pleasure out of maligning others.”

He laughed, and then continued. “The Second Princess has decided that she wants to spend no more time in this world ... she’s depressed and resigned to becoming a nun, and so what can I do about it? There are sure to be nasty rumors swirling about here and there, but even if she were to distance herself from such hateful talk by becoming a nun, I don’t want to betray her late mother’s last request to me. I’m simply trying to be of assistance to her, nothing more. If my father should call on you and you have an opportunity to speak with him, please convey what I’ve told you now. I’m mindful that my father seems to think that, after a lifetime spent staying on the strait and narrow, I’ve finally fallen as a result of some unseemly affair. The truth is that this sort of romantic entanglement always follows its own course, regardless of the advice of others or the reservations in one’s own heart.” He spoke in hushed tones.

“Here I was, convinced that people were telling lies about you,” Hanachirusato mused, “and it looks as if something really is going on after all. Such affairs are common enough, but I feel sorry for your lady at Sanjō ... what must she be thinking? She’s grown accustomed to a life without turmoil.”

“Yes, indeed, my dear adorable lady at Sanjō … more like my precious little demon, I’d say! Explain to me why I’m now all of a sudden treating her shabbily just because I have a relationship with the Second Princess! It may be presumptuous of me to say so, but just picture if you will the situation of the women who live here. You all value harmony above everything. With some trouble and effort, one can go for a long time being attentive to a woman who is always complaining and keeping things in an uproar. Still, a man cannot be expected to go on forever reacting to his wife’s jealousies. For if he does, the two of them are likely to end up despising one another when he actually has an affair. When I think about it, my father’s Lady Murasaki is a paragon of wifely virtue … and, for that matter, I look upon you as a woman of exceptionally fine character.”

She smiled at his words of praise.

“If you start pointing me out as a model of womanly behavior,” she said modestly, “you’ll soon learn that I have a less than sterling reputation. I must say, though, it’s odd how your father makes such a big fuss over the slightest transgression that you commit as a way to cover up his own deplorable tendencies. It seems like he’s always lecturing you when you’re here or criticizing you behind your back when you’re not. I feel that he’s the kind of man who thinks he’s clever when it comes to others but doesn’t have a clue about his own behavior.”

“That’s true, isn’t it? He’s always admonishing me about relationships. But I’ve managed to keep myself under control, even without the benefit of his sage advice.” He found her observation genuinely amusing.

When he went to call on his father, Genji studied his son’s face and said nothing, even though he had heard all about the move to the Ichijō villa.

Why should I let on that I know anything? So thinking, he reflected on his own child. *He’s remarkably handsome and seems to have reached the very prime of manhood. Perhaps he let his passions get the better of him in this case, but he’s so vibrant and radiantly appealing that no one will really fault him … even the gods and demons will surely forgive him this indiscretion. Indeed, he isn’t some feckless youth, but a man of mature judgment who has no major flaws, and so affairs such as this are to be expected. Why wouldn’t a woman be attracted to him? Can he himself not be pleased when he looks in his mirror?*

The sun was already well up when Genji’s son finally returned to his Sanjō residence. As soon as he entered, his little boys swarmed over him playfully one after another, looking absolutely adorable. Kumoinokari was lying down inside the curtains that hung around her bed, and so he went inside onto the dais. She refused to look at him. She was obviously upset and angry, but even though he

felt she was perfectly justified, he showed no awkwardness or hesitation and pulled the bedclothes away from her.

"Haven't you come to the wrong place? I'm already dead ... since you're always calling me a demon, I might as well act like one!"

"When it comes to your temper, you're much worse than any demon ... although for a demon you're not bad-looking. That's why I really can't dislike you."

She was irritated by the nonchalant manner with which he tried to cajole her.

"I'm not as lucky as some women who get to spend their whole life beside someone as splendidly young and handsome as you, and so I just want to disappear somewhere ... anywhere! You mustn't remember me the way I am now. I can't bear to think that all these years I've spent as your wife mean nothing!" She sat up, and he found her extremely attractive. Her blushing face, with its lovely glow, had a most charming air about it.

"I'm so used to seeing your childish fits of anger that as a demon, well ... you're not all that frightening any more. If only you could just add a little more divine wrath ..." he teased.

"What nonsense! Go die quietly! I shall die as well. I hate looking at you, I can't stand listening to you, and I'm worried what you'll do once I've abandoned you and go off to die!"

The more she raged, the more charming she looked, and he laughed in delight.

"You don't so much as glance at me when I'm near you, but when I'm away you seem perfectly capable of listening to all sorts of rumors. Even so, you do seem intent to let me know the depth of our relationship as husband and wife. You say that you're prepared to have us suddenly die in succession, but haven't I already promised that if you die, I will quickly follow to meet you in the afterlife?"

He sounded unconcerned, as if to dismiss her worries, and he coaxed and comforted her. She was young at heart and good-natured, and though she knew he was simply sweet-talking her, her demeanor grew gentle and demure, which he found at once endearing and pitiful.

Despite his feelings for Kumoinokari, his heart was preoccupied with the Second Princess. *She does not show signs of being all that willful or strongly dignified, and yet if she goes against my wishes and becomes a nun, then I'm going to look a perfect fool!* He was panicky, thinking that for the next few days at least he had to visit her every night. When evening came on, he was worried and despondent that she had failed to reply that day as well.

Kumoinokari finally ate a little of the food that she had refused to touch the past two days. Her husband spoke to her.

“From the beginning, my feelings for you have been extraordinary, but because your father treated me cruelly and made me wait for years, people at court thought I was a fool. I put up with that unbearable situation, ignoring offers of marriage from various noble houses, and consequently people spoke ill of me. They said that not even a woman would be that faithful. When I think about it now, I wonder how I could have been like that? It makes me realize just how serious and earnest I was in those days. Now you tell me that you find me hateful, but since we have such a throng here—children you would never consider abandoning—surely you would not selfishly leave me? You should reconsider our relationship ... life in this world is fleeting, but my feelings for you are not.”

He wept a little as he spoke to her. His lady thought back on all that they had been through over the years, and though there had been sorrows, to be sure, she was struck by the depth of the bonds that connected them. After changing from his soft, well-worn clothes into a set of exceptionally magnificent scented robes, carefully grooming and applying his makeup so that he looked splendid, he left.

Watching all this in the flickering lamplight, Kumoinokari could bear it no longer and began to cry. Fingering the sleeve of a singlet he had taken off, she composed the following:

*Why grieve for a body you now find tiresome
Perhaps I should clothe it instead in robes worn
By the fisherwomen at Matsushima²⁵*

“I cannot continue living as a normal woman,” she muttered to herself.

Her words stopped him in his tracks. “What a truly cold, unpleasant thought!”

*Will you start rumors that you'll change into nun's clothes
Claiming that you find me tiresome and want to shed
The fisherwomen's damp robes at Matsushima²⁶*

It was a very hurried poem, full of clichés.

Meanwhile, the Second Princess had remained secluded in her inner sanctum.

“And just how long do you think you can stay there?” her attendants pleaded, using everything they could think of to persuade her to come out. “People will say you’re being childish and discourteous. You really must come out to the sitting room where you normally receive visitors and speak with him on matters of appropriate concern to you.”

The Second Princess thought that they had good reason to call her childish,

but she remained convinced that Genji's son, whom she despised and resented, was responsible not only for all of the gossip about them, which now would only get worse, but also for the sorrows that she had suffered when he caused her mother's death. She refused to see him that night as well.

"You must be joking ... this is unconscionable," he muttered over and over.

Koshōshō felt sorry for him.

"There will come a time, my lord, when she is feeling a little more herself. So long as you do not abandon her, I will speak with her again about you. She has confided to me that her deepest desire is to pass the time in quiet, untroubled remembrance of her late mother for as long as she's dressed in mourning robes, and she told me how troubling it is that apparently everyone believes the outrageous rumors that the two of you got married during this period of mourning."

"But my feelings for her and my intentions are not at all what people say they are ... she has no reason for concern. Our relationship isn't going at all as I hoped." He sighed and then pleaded his case on and on with the Second Princess. "If you will only come out to your sitting room, you may keep blinds and curtains between us if you wish ... just let me tell you what is in my heart, and I shall do nothing to upset you. I shall wait for as many months and years as it takes."

"You have added still more to my sorrow and confusion, and your unreasonable obsession with me is extremely hard to bear. The misfortune of having people thinking and saying all sorts of sensational things about me is bad enough, but your attitude and behavior have been especially heartless." Once more she rejected him with words of bitter recrimination and maintained her distance.

That may be how she feels, but this can't go on forever. It's only natural that people are going to gossip about us. He was now feeling awkward and embarrassed in front of the women here. "For the time being," he said to Koshōshō, "I will privately do as your mistress wishes and not pressure her about consummating our marriage, but at the same time I want to publicly maintain the appearance that we're married. This absurd arrangement is very unpleasant for me. Just imagine how pathetic your mistress's reputation would be if I used her coldness as an excuse to break off our relationship and stop coming altogether! I feel sorry for her; she's so naive and childlike."

Under such pressure, Koshōshō had to admit that what he was saying was true. It made her feel bad now to see him like this, and because he was a man of honor and integrity, she let him into the inner sanctum through the door on the north side used by the attendants.

The Second Princess was outraged and distraught—if her own women were as vulgar-minded as everyone else, then she could only expect to suffer even worse at their hands in the future. It was depressing to realize that she had no one on whom she could rely.

His pleas were both moving and charming as he explained the natural order of relationships between men and women—something she might have been expected to have recognized by now.

“That you should look down on me as unutterably contemptible has profoundly shamed me, and my presumptuous desire to win you over showed a lack of discretion that I regret. Yet there is no turning back now, and no matter what you do, your reputation will not be unaffected. Accept the situation and yield to me, since it will do you no good to resist. I’ve been told of cases where people drowned themselves when their lives did not work out as they had hoped ... you should consider my love a deep abyss, and throw yourself into it.” She, however, found his entreaties repulsive and annoying.

She had no recourse but to pull a singlet over her head and sob loudly. She looked so delicate and pitiable.

This is really unpleasant, he thought. Why does she resist so stubbornly? No matter how strong-willed a woman is, once things have come this far, the natural thing to do is yield ... but she’s harder to move than a boulder or a tree. Perhaps we do not share a close karmic bond after all, and she is destined to dislike me. Is that why she feels this way?

It was all much too much, and he was despondent. He thought about Kumoinokari, about how they had innocently yearned for each other so long ago, how close and intimate, how trusting and secure she had been throughout the many years of their marriage—and as he reflected drearily on how awkwardly things had turned out because of his own desires, he gave up trying to make the Second Princess yield and instead spent the night sighing in lament.

It would have been perverse of him to just keep coming and going like this, looking like a complete fool, and so today he would stay over at Ichijō and take it easy. Appalled, she thought that he was going too far and resisted his advances even more forcefully. Although he was troubled that she should take such a ridiculous attitude, he also felt sorry for her.

The inner sanctum itself was very sparsely furnished—she had arranged for a few incense chests and a cabinet to be brought in and set up here and there along the walls, keeping everything neatly close at hand and convenient. The room was a little dark, but it let in enough light to indicate that the sun had risen. He pulled away the singlet covering her head, smoothed her tangled hair and brushed it up away from her face. He gazed at her for a moment, and then consummated their

affair.

She was quite lovely, with all the feminine refinements of an aristocratic woman. Genji's son, dressed intimately, was more strikingly handsome now than when he wore his splendid formal robes. She recalled those times when it was apparent that Kashiwagi, who was not an especially handsome man, but who was nonetheless filled with a sense of great pride, did not find her looks all that alluring. Now that she was past her prime, thin and wasted, the memory made her feel even more ashamed as she wondered how the Major Counselor could bear to glance at her for even a moment. Various thoughts raced through her mind as she struggled to calm herself. Even so, she felt unbearably awkward, for there would be no way to escape censure once people like her father or Tō no Chūjō heard about them—and because this happened while she was still in mourning, it was impossible for her to find any consolation.

Water for their morning ablutions and boiled rice for their repast had been set out in the aisle room on the west side that she normally used during the day. They took their meal there. Given the nature of the occasion, folding screens had been set up to block the view of the inauspicious gray colors of the furnishings in the main room. Standing curtains with subdued tan panels that could be used for any occasion had also been set up between the main room and the aisle room, which was elegantly appointed with, among other things, a two-tiered shelf of aloeswood. The Governor of Yamato had provided all these items. He had the ladies-in-waiting dress in an appropriately subdued fashion as well—robes in the mountain rose style of fallen-leaf brown with yellow lining, over layers of dark crimson, dark purple, or bluish-gray. The younger women wore trains of pale purple, while the older women wore trains of yellowish-green lined with green—hues chosen to break up the more somber colors of the robes. They brought in stands to serve the meal. The Governor noticed that after the death of Kashiwagi the villa had been inhabited solely by women and was not being managed well at all, and so he set about organizing the few remaining lower-ranking servants and took it upon himself to see that things were taken care of properly. Many of the former retainers and staff at the villa had neglected their responsibilities after Kashiwagi died. However, as soon as they heard that a distinguished gentleman had unexpectedly married the Second Princess, they hurried back and resumed their duties in the household offices.

Because her husband gave every indication that he had had his way and was settled at Ichijō, Kumoinokari concluded that this was the end of their marriage. *I never believed that he would do such a thing, but I guess it's true what they say ... once a sincere man loses his heart to another, it's lost for good.* She felt that she now had confirmation of the truth about relations between husbands and

wives, and because she definitely did not want to observe his patronizing attitude any more, she went to her father's villa, using a directional prohibition as her pretext. As it so happened, her older sister, the former Kokiden Consort, was also in residence, taking a brief leave from her service to Retired Emperor Reizei. Being able to talk with her sister helped to brighten Kumoinokari's spirits, and so she did not hurry back to the Sanjō residence as she normally would have in the past.

Genji's son was startled when he heard. *Sure enough, she's really left. She's so short-tempered! Just like her father ... they're never calm and collected, but hotheaded and always overreacting. They'll be annoyed and so they won't see me, they won't listen to me, and they're perfectly capable of creating all sorts of mischief!*

When he arrived back at his Sanjō residence, he found his young sons, but Kumoinokari had taken his daughters and the baby with her. The boys were overjoyed to see their father, but he felt sorry for them because they missed their mother and cried.

He sent message after message. He even sent a party to bring her back, but she did not reply. He was irritated by his wife's stubborn, thoughtless behavior. Still, he had to be mindful of what her father might be thinking. Thus, he waited until evening and then went to Tō no Chūjō's villa on Nijō. Thinking that she would be in the main hall, he went to the rooms that she usually occupied, but found only the attendants who had accompanied her. The children were with the nurse. He sent a message to her:

"Here you are, running around again seeing people like some young woman. How can you just blithely drop off your children here and there and go amuse yourself with your older sister? I have known for years now that there were things about your personality that did not suit me, but I could never get you out of my heart. I suppose that was the working of our karmic destiny. Think of all our children, poor little things ... I always thought that we could never abandon one another for their sake. Must you behave like this all on account of one little episode?" His words were full of bitter recrimination.

"Since you find everything about me tiresome, and since it's too much to expect that I would ever improve enough to please you, what other choice did I have? If you can't abandon our nasty little brood, then I'd be happy for you to look after them yourself!"

"Now, there's a calm, rational answer for you! Keep talking like that and we'll see whose reputation is ruined." He did not force her to come to him and slept alone that night. Reflecting over his predicament—one wife running out on him, another treating him with disdain—he put his children to bed beside him.

Is the Second Princess upset ... does she think I've abandoned her already? Just imagining her suffering made him uneasy. What kind of man takes delight in romantic entanglements like these? To his regret, he had more than learned his lesson.

When dawn broke, he sent Kumoinokari a threatening message: “People will say you’re acting childishly ... since you claim that our relationship is over, let’s give separation a try, then. The children at Sanjō do seem to miss you dearly, but you must have had your reasons for choosing to leave those ‘nasty’ children behind. As for me, I find it impossible to cast them aside and will do all I can for them.”

Knowing how decisive he was, Kumoinokari, who was straightforward in her own right, was alarmed, worried that he might take even the children she had brought with her to some place like that Ichijō villa where she would not be able to see them.

“Come along, then, you must come home with me,” he said to one of his daughters. “It will be very awkward for me to always have to come here to see you. Your dear brothers are there, and I want to be able to look after you all in the same place.” The girl was still quite small and adorable-looking, and he could feel himself choking up with pity as he looked at her. “You don’t have to do as your mother says,” he told her. “It’s very naughty of her to be so unpleasant and unwilling to understand me.”

When Tō no Chūjō heard about all this, it pained him to think that people would laughingly deride his daughter. “It was rash of you not to wait a little while to see how things would turn out,” he told her. “He would probably have come to his senses on his own. A woman who takes such a decisive step risks being seen as lacking substance. Still, what’s done is done ... now that you’ve begun talking about separation, you would look foolish if you just went back to him. I suppose that you’ll find out how he really feels soon enough.” After speaking with Kumoinokari, he sent one of his sons, a Lesser Captain in the Chamberlain’s office, with a message for the Second Princess:

*In my heart you have always been close to me
And in pity I detest rumors I hear ...
All this means that our bond is deep, does it not*

“You have not forgotten us already, have you?”

The Lesser Captain barged straight into the Ichijō villa with the letter. A round mat was brought out, and he was seated on the south-facing veranda. The attendants found it hard to speak to him. The Second Princess was also at a loss

for words and felt even more awkward than her women. The Lesser Captain, who was the handsomest of all Tō no Chūjō's sons, gazed calmly at the surroundings, evidently recalling the old days.

"How familiar this place seems ... yet, apparently, you consider me a complete stranger now." He said nothing more, but the insinuation was clear.

"I simply cannot write a reply," the Second Princess said.

"But you must respond!" Her ladies-in-waiting gathered around her and urged her to write. "If you don't, he won't understand how you really feel, and you'll come off looking hopelessly immature. And it wouldn't be proper at all for one of us to write the reply for you."

She began to cry. *If only Mother were still alive! She would have helped me cover up my flaws, even if she found the task unpleasant.* She felt as if her tears were flowing faster than the ink and was unable to finish her letter. The following is all she managed:

*What reason could you possibly have
To feel both pity and aversion
For one as unimportant as I*

The poem looked as though she wrote it down just as it occurred to her. She wrapped it up and sent it out.

The Lesser Captain was conversing with her attendants.

"I used to come here on occasion," he remarked, "though it feels strangely unsettling to be seated in front of the blinds like this. Now that your mistress is married again, I feel a real connection to the place, and will be calling on you frequently. Of course, you'll have to grant me access inside the blinds, will you not? After all, I should receive some recompense for my many years of devoted service." His parting remarks were at once suggestive and cutting.²⁷

Genji's son was dazed and perplexed by the Second Princess's increasingly foul mood. Meanwhile, as the days went by, Kumoinokari's complaints about his behavior only grew louder. Her earlier rival for his affection, Koremitsu's daughter, who now served as the Principal Handmaid, heard what had happened and reflected on the situation.

She used to say that my presence in the world was an affront to her, but now she has a highborn rival she can't look down on the way she despised me. Since the two of them had corresponded from time to time in the past, Koremitsu's daughter sent a note that contained the following:

*Were I someone who mattered, I might
have learned of the woman that is married*

I have learned of the woe that is marriage ...

Still, I wet my sleeves in sympathy

Kumoinokari thought that the letter might be intended as a gibe. However, in this tedious period of her life, when she was so melancholy, she found some room in her heart to sympathize with her rival, who must be feeling betrayed and angry as well. She replied with a poem and nothing more:

*I too have lamented the marriage woes
That others have suffered ... yet never thought
I would in turn receive such sympathy*

Koremitsu's daughter was moved to compassion when she saw that her rival had written exactly what was on her mind.

Genji's son had secretly taken Koremitsu's daughter as his lover during that period in his life long ago when Tō no Chūjō kept him apart from Kumoinokari. After he was married, he did not see her very often, and his passion for the lady waned. Nonetheless, she had given him many children. Kumoinokari had given birth to his first, third, fifth, and sixth sons and to his second, fourth, and fifth daughters. The Principal Handmaid bore his first, third, and sixth daughters and his second and fourth sons. Every single one of his twelve children grew up to be exceptional and quite charming—though it must be said that the children he had by the Principal Handmaid were in fact superior in looks and personality. Hanachirusato was raising the third daughter and the second son with extraordinary care in her northeast residence at the Rokujō estate. Genji himself also looked after these children and treated them as precious treasures.

I'm afraid that I'm unable to divulge any further details concerning the complicated relationships of Genji's son.

¹ The man is a monastic priest who holds the title of *Risshi* 律師.

² *Kokinshū* 204 (Anonymous): “What I took to be the coming twilight, the time when evening cicadas sing, was in fact the shadow of the mountain.” The poem plays on the word *higurashi*, which refers to a type of cicada and to the setting sun.

³ *Kokinshū* 695 (Anonymous): “Ah, if only I could meet the one I long for ... that Yamato pink blooming in a rustic hedge.”

⁴ The word *yūgiri* (“evening mists”) in this poem provides the traditional (i.e., extratextual) name for Genji's son. Although I have used traditional names for a number of the characters as a matter of convenience (mainly to avoid confusion), I chose not to in this case because the image of evening mists occurs so late in the narrative. Moreover, the obsession of Genji's son with rank and the contrast between

his personality and that of his father seem more pertinent elements of character not fully captured by the traditional name.

5 *Gosenshū* 725 (Anonymous—a man who has been secretly visiting a woman at her father’s house, and does not want people to know, repeatedly denies the affair): “Though I must deny baseless rumors when people ask me, when my heart asks, how shall I answer?”

6 There are a number of poetic allusions in the poem and letter. They are, in order: *Kokinshū* 992 (Michinoku): “Did it perhaps go into those sleeves of the one for whom my desire is not sated? I feel as if my soul is no longer with me.” *Kokinshū* 977 (*Ōshikōchi no Mitsune*): “It must have left my body and gone off, for my heart does not do as I would wish.” *Kokinshū* 448 (Anonymous): “It appears that my love has filled up the empty heavens, for though my yearnings continue to go out to you, there is no more space for them.” The poetic overkill here suggests that Genji’s son is putting on a pose, trying to make up for his lack of romantic prowess—in marked contrast to his father.

7 Dainichi Nyorai is the Japanese name for Vairocana, who was the celestial manifestation of the Buddha, often associated with the sun (hence the Japanese name 大日). Vairocana was a key figure in Shingon Buddhism (the great statue at Tōdaiji in Nara is an image of Vairocana), but veneration of this Buddha eventually gave way to worship of Amida at the Heian Court during Murasaki Shikibu’s lifetime. Apart from the important place Vairocana occupied in esoteric worship, he is also associated with the concept of emptiness (*sūnyatā*).

8 The small chamber I have translated as “inner sanctum” is called *nurigome*. A common feature of *shinden* architecture, it was a small private room, often used for sleeping, inside the main room (*moya*) of the main hall. It was partitioned off from the rest of the space by thick plaster walls. There was a *nurigome* in the emperor’s quarters, the Seiryōden, at the palace.

9 *Goshūishū* 566 (Fujiwara no Sanekata): “Even if it is our destiny to be born again in this world, will not our looks be changed, will we not fail to recognize each other?”

10 *Kokin rokujō* 1201 (Ki no Tsurayuki): “I have passed the day hunting in these autumn fields ... maidenflower, may I lodge with you this night only?” This poem is also attributed to Kiyohara no Motosuke, *Goshūishū* 314.

11 The text simply uses the word *tori* and does not specify a type of bird. However, most species of hawks (and falcons) exhibit some degree of reverse sexual dimorphism (i.e., the female is larger) and most pair up for life.

12 The word for old man, *okina*, suggests several possible references here, but the allusion is not clear.

13 Yin-yang masters would determine by the position of the stars which day of the month (*kannichi*) was inauspicious for undertaking an endeavor. There was one such day for each month.

14 The original does not specify what is happening at this moment. One possible interpretation is that he arrived just as the service began. Another is that he arrived just as they were putting the body into the coffin.

15 *Kokinshū* 582 (Anonymous): “The autumn has come, and the mountains reverberate with the cries of a stag ... on this night when I lie alone, is my longing any less than his?”

16 *Kokinshū* 505 (Anonymous): “With no one to tell her, how will she know of my secret yearnings ... she who lies hidden away across the fields of bamboo grass at Ono in an abode amidst the tangled reeds.” Genji’s son uses the word *shinohara*, which refers to fields of bamboo grass (*sasa*).

17 *Kokinshū* 214 (Mibu no Tadamine): “At this mountain village autumn is indeed the loneliest season ... night after night I lie awake listening to the cry of the stag.”

18 The place name mentioned here is *Ogura no Yama* (小倉の山 Mount Ogura), but this mountain is actually located on the western side of the capital, and so Genji’s son would not have passed it. The generally accepted explanation for this apparent mistake is that the place name plays on the word *ogura* (小暗), which means “slight darkness/twilight.” I have translated it as “gloom” because of the emotional associations of the scene.

19 Genji’s son is evidently alluding to the following poem: “Tell me, O Silent Falls, cascading from the

heights of the mountains at Ono, how should I act, what am I to do?" The source and author of this work, which is cited in an early commentary, is unknown. As a rule, I have been reluctant to note allusions of uncertain provenance, since there is no way to know for sure if Murasaki Shikibu had such works in mind. However, the Second Princess picks up on the allusion to Silent Falls (*Otonashi no Taki*) in her reply below, and so this possible source is worth noting here.

²⁰ This is a reference to the *Prince Bohaku* sutra (太子慕魄經), which recounts the parable of a young prince who did not speak for the first thirteen years of his life. His example inspired the rigorous austerity of silence.

²¹ Some versions of the text have thirty years, which would make the line similar to the platitude that appears in the *Asagao* chapter: "Thirty years in a lifetime can pass so quickly, it all seems to have happened yesterday and today." Since it has been three years since Kashiwagi's death, it may be that some early copyists changed the number from thirty to three, but that is speculative. In any case, three years seems to follow the thread of the narrative better.

²² Like many others, the Governor does not know what happened that night and assumes that the attendants helped Genji's son get to the Second Princess. The only thing they did, of course, was convey his letters.

²³ This is a reference to a famous folktale about Urashima Tarō—or, as he is named here, Urashimako. The earliest written versions date from the eighth century, and there are a number of variations of the story. In one version, Urashimako sails out to the Island of Immortals, where he spends three years and marries a beautiful young woman. After three years, he grows homesick and sails back with a box, a gift from the young woman who warns him never to open it. When he returns, he finds that three hundred years have passed, and when he breaks his promise not to open the box, he is turned into an old man. A different version starts with Urashima Tarō helping a sea turtle that has been tormented by some children. The turtle repays this act of kindness by carrying him on his back to the undersea palace of the Sea-Dragon. The rest of the story is, in general outline, the same as the tale of Urashimako.

²⁴ The text uses the general term *hito*, which I have translated as "others" (i.e., other men), but he is likely referring to Kashiwagi.

²⁵ Kumoinokari's poem uses the well-worn play on *ama*, which I have rendered "fisherwomen" but which could also mean "nun." She is thus making a melodramatic threat to become a nun, which strikes a nerve with her husband.

²⁶ The word I have rendered as "damp robes," *nureginu*, also means "reputation for fickleness." Kumoinokari uses the phrase *Matsushima no ama no koromo* ("the robes of the fisherwomen/nun at Matsushima") to threaten to walk out on him. Genji's son uses the phrase *Matsushima no ama no nureginu* to refer not only to the fisherwomen/nun at Matsushima but also to their marriage, which Kumoinokari is now weary of because she thinks he's cheating on her.

²⁷ The text makes it clear that the Lesser Captain is hinting at his sexual interest in the women. In addition, by suggesting that the Second Princess has shown herself to have rather loose morals (by having an affair with Genji's son), his remarks are cutting—a response one would expect from a brother of Kashiwagi and Kumoinokari.

XL

Minori

Rites of the Sacred Law

MURASAKI NEVER fully recovered from the ordeal of her possession by the malignant spirit, but continued to suffer from an illness whose symptoms were never clearly diagnosed. Although her condition was not especially alarming, as the years passed she showed no signs of improvement and gradually faded. Genji was endlessly grieving, horrified at the prospect of living on, even if only for a short time, after his beloved's passing. For her part, Murasaki believed that she had never lacked for anything, and because she was not fettered by the lingering worries that come with having children, she did not think of her life as something she would want to go to extreme lengths to preserve. The only thing she felt sad about—a sorrow she kept hidden in her heart—was the anguish she knew Genji would have to endure once their bond of many years was finally broken. She commissioned numerous services and good works to help ensure her salvation in the next world, and she also continued to plead with Genji for permission to fulfill her true desire and become a nun, so that during the brief time remaining she could concentrate on her religious devotions without distraction.

As always, he refused. In truth, he had long harbored the same desire to renounce the world, and he had considered using her single-minded wish to take vows as an opportunity to set out together on the same path. However, he was determined that once he set out on the path of religious asceticism, he would never look back on this world for even a moment. They had made a solemn vow to be reborn on the same lotus in the next world, and their relationship was one of mutual trust; however, so long as they were performing their religious austerities in this world, he knew that they would have to reside in separate abodes, even if they went into retreat on the same mountain. Since they would be

living on different sides of the peak, they wouldn't be able to see one another. With Murasaki so sick and frail that her recovery was uncertain, his anxiety about her health would make it hard for him to abandon her when the time came for them to go their separate ways, and any lingering attachment he had for her would defile the purity of his retreat amidst the mountains and waters. As he wavered, unable to come to a decision, it seemed to him that he was falling further behind those who had set out on the path of enlightenment for merely shallow, selfish reasons.

Murasaki was convinced that it would look improper and contradict her own true wishes to simply go ahead and become a nun without his permission, but his refusal was the one thing she resented about him. She also worried that his refusal might be retribution for her own sins, which were anything but trivial. So now, she hastened to dedicate a thousand copies of the *Lotus Sutra*, which she had commissioned over many years in fulfillment of a promise to the Buddha. The ceremony would be held at the Nijō villa, which she had always considered her family home. She provided vestments and other items appropriate to the particular status of each of the seven priests who would conduct the dedication ceremony. Everything about their robes, beginning with the dyeing and stitching, was peerless, and the service was to be conducted with dignity and grandeur. She gave no indication to Genji that it would be such a magnificent event, and he had not advised her on the details. However, she planned everything very carefully, and though she was a woman, Genji looked on in admiration at her deep knowledge of Buddhist ritual and doctrine. The only things for which he provided assistance were the decorations and furnishings. Genji's son took special care to arrange for the musicians and dancers.

His Majesty, the Crown Prince, the empresses,¹ and other ladies at the Rokujō estate all commissioned sutra readings and provided so many generous offerings that there was hardly enough space to hold them all. Moreover, the entire court was busily involved in the preparations to make it a truly opulent ceremony. People observed this and wondered aloud, "When could she have had the time to plan everything? She must have made this vow to the Buddha ages ago."²

The dedication took place on the tenth day of the third month. Hanachirusato and the Akashi lady both attended the service. Murasaki was seated in an inner sanctum on the west side of the main hall, with the south and east doors left open. Spaces had been partitioned off in the aisle room on the north side, with only sliding panel doors separating the ladies. The cherry trees were in full bloom, and the skies were so balmy and delightful that they put everyone there in mind of Amida's Pure Land paradise. Even those whose faith was not especially deep believed that they would be able to cleanse themselves of their

sins. The assembly chanted the verses of the *Lotus Sutra* that tell the story of the Buddha's cutting of firewood,³ and their voices reverberated with startling power. Murasaki was deeply affected by the silence that followed. Because she was so frail, almost anything these days could stir lonely, forlorn premonitions. She had little Niou, the Third Prince, take a poem to the Akashi lady.

*Though my life is not something I cling to
As my end approaches, how sad I feel
That the firewood burns out and disappears*

The Akashi lady's reply was safely ambiguous—perhaps she worried that people might gossip if she took the same melancholy tone as Murasaki.

*Desiring to gather firewood like the Buddha
You set out today seeking after the Dharma
On a path stretching into the distant future*

The hypnotic beating of drums accompanied the chanting of sutras, hymns, and the *nembutsu*. In the dim light of early dawn, flowers of many hues could be seen peeking through breaks in the mist, their fragrant beauty reminding Murasaki that spring was the season that enchanted her heart. Numerous birds were singing, their voices every bit as clear and sweet as any flute; and just when she thought the occasion could not be any more affecting or entralling, the dancers began "The Masked Warrior King."⁴ As the tempo quickened near the end of the dance, the performance became even more spectacular and lively, and the colors of the robes that the spectators removed and gave to the dancers as a reward were captivating, perfect for this occasion in this season. All of the princes, senior nobles, and high-ranking officials who were skilled musicians performed to the absolute best of their abilities. Murasaki experienced a gamut of emotions as she watched everyone there, high and low, enjoying the celebration and losing themselves in the spectacle, for in her heart she knew that she had little time left to live.

The following day she was in pain and unable to get up, perhaps because she had overexerted herself by staying up throughout the dedication ceremony. At every similar event that she had attended over the years, she would wonder if *this day* would be the last time she would see the faces and figures of those who had gathered, the last time she would see them display their various talents or hear them play the koto or the flute. On such occasions, she would be moved even by the sight of faces normally beneath her notice. Her feelings were, of

course, even stronger whenever she observed the other ladies at Rokujō. They were, after all, women with whom she shared both gentle rivalry and mutual affection, especially when they appeared together at some concert or diversion held in the summer or winter. Although no one can expect to remain for very long in this world, the thought that she would soon leave the other ladies behind, going forth all alone to an unknown destination, brought home to Murasaki the poignant sorrow of the evanescence of life.

When the dedication ceremony ended and each of the guests had begun to make his or her way home, she felt a twinge of regret that this would likely be the last time that she saw any of them. She sent a poem to Hanachirusato:

*While my life, like these rites, must soon come to an end
We may rely on the truth of the sacred law
That karma will bind us through all the worlds to come⁵*

Hanachirusato replied:

*Even had these rites not been this magnificent
They would still have forged a lasting bond between us
Undeserving though I am, with little time left*

Immediately after the dedication ceremony, other solemn rites, such as the continuous reading of the *Lotus Sutra* and the ritual of confession and penance, were attentively performed. The esoteric healing rites that had been carried out every day over a long period showed no signs of helping Murasaki recover. Genji commissioned additional services at various holy sites and temples known for the efficaciousness of their prayers.

When summer arrived, Murasaki's fainting spells increased even though the weather was no hotter than usual. There were no alarming symptoms that one could point to as the source of her malaise. She was simply growing weaker, without ever suffering the sort of pain that caused others distress. Worried about what was to become of their mistress if she continued to weaken, her attendants observed her condition with regret and sorrow and fell into dark despair.

Because Murasaki's health was slowly failing, the Akashi Empress⁶ withdrew from the palace and went to the Nijō villa. She was to take up residence in the east hall, and so Murasaki waited there to receive her. The ceremony greeting Her Majesty's arrival was nothing out of the ordinary, but Murasaki found everything about it moving, since she knew that she would never witness it again. She listened attentively as the name of each nobleman who had escorted

the Akashi Empress—a very large group of senior officials indeed—was read out.

Since the two women had not seen each other for a long time, they seized this moment as a rare opportunity to speak intimately and at length. Genji arrived and said, “I feel like a bird evicted from its own nest. It’s obvious that I’m of absolutely no use this evening. I’ll take my leave and retire for the night.” He went back to his quarters feeling quite happy to see Murasaki up and about—it was, however, only a brief moment of comfort for him.

“Since we will be staying in separate quarters,” Murasaki said, “I would be deeply honored to have Your Majesty come to see me in the west hall. I know it is presumptuous of me to make such a request, but it is a considerable strain on me to leave my residence to visit you here.” She stayed a while longer, and when the Akashi lady joined them, they continued their quiet, heartfelt conversation.

Murasaki had many things on her mind, but wisely she did not broach the subject of what would happen after her death. She calmly made a few passing references to the ephemeral nature of life, but the serious manner in which she talked made it clearer than any words she might have spoken just how sad and forlorn she felt. When she saw all of the children of the Akashi Empress, tears welled up and her face blushed with a most lovely glow. “I had so wanted to see each of them grow up ... it would seem my heart regrets having so little time left.”

Her Majesty wept as well and wondered why Murasaki had to be so fixated on death. The subject of their conversation shifted, providing Murasaki the chance to speak about the ladies-in-waiting who had served her closely over the years. She did her best to avoid saying anything inauspicious, as if she were making last requests, but she felt sorry for her attendants, who would have nowhere else to turn once she was gone. “When I am no longer around,” she remarked, “please remember to look after them.” A sutra reading⁷ was about to begin, and so Murasaki retired to her own quarters in the west hall.

As he walked around the villa, Niou, the Third Prince, had the most charming appearance of all Her Majesty’s many children. During those intervals when Murasaki was feeling a little better, she would have him sit next to her and, when no one was around, ask him, “Would you remember me if I were not here?”

“I would miss you very much, Grandmama. You are much more important to me than Father or Mother! If you weren’t here, I’d feel awful!” The way he rubbed his eyes to hide his tears was so adorable that she had to smile despite her sadness.

“When you are all grown up, you are to live here. And when the red plum and

the cherry tree that grow in front of the west hall are in bloom in their respective seasons, you must not forget to view and enjoy them. At the appropriate times, you must make offerings of their branches to the Buddha in my memory."

The little boy nodded solemnly, then stared into Murasaki's face. Just as he was about to cry, he stood up and scampered off. She had raised him and the Third Princess with special consideration, and it filled her with pity and regret to know that she would not be able to help raise them to adulthood.

The heat of summer was so oppressive, she couldn't wait for the cool of autumn to arrive; and when it did, her spirits revived a little. Still, this was but a temporary respite, for even though the chill autumn winds were not yet blowing—cutting winds that bring only sorrows⁸—she was already spending her days in dewy tears.

The Akashi Empress was preparing to return to the palace. Murasaki wanted to ask her to stay on a little longer, even though such a request would overstep the bounds of propriety. It would also have been awkward, since His Majesty was now sending one messenger after another urging her to return. In the end, she didn't ask, and because she was so weak, she was unable to go to the east hall to see Her Majesty off. That was when the Empress took the extraordinary step of calling on her in the west hall. Murasaki was humbled and shamed that the Empress would deign to visit her, but she thought that it would have been senseless not to meet. Thus, she had special seating and furnishings prepared to receive her exalted guest.

Despite the fact that she was terribly emaciated, Murasaki still looked remarkable; the loss of weight had, if anything, distilled her beauty, which now possessed a boundless nobility and grace. Once, in the glorious flowering of her prime, her looks exuded to an almost excessive degree a lambent glow that was like the bright fragrance of blossoms. Now her infinitely cherished appearance, which brought to mind the transient nature of the mortal world, possessed a deeper loveliness, one that evoked incomparable feelings of compassion and sweet sorrow.

At dusk, a terrible, chilling wind began to blow, and just as she propped herself up on an armrest, thinking that she would gaze out at her garden, she saw Genji arriving.

"How good that you're able to get up today! Her Majesty's visit has apparently cheered you, has it not?"

She felt bad for him—he looked so happy whenever she was briefly feeling better that it moved her to imagine how devastated he would be when the end came.

*How brief the moment when you see me sitting up
As brief as the time that dew clings to bush clover
Before being blown off and scattered by the wind⁹*

It was an apt comparison, for the dew clung precariously to the stems of bush clover in her garden that bent and sprang back with each gust of wind. Genji gazed out at the scene, and the melancholy desolation that accompanied this season was unbearable.

*Our lives are like fragile dewdrops vying
To disappear ... would that no time elapse
Between the first one to go and the last*

He could not brush all the tears from his eyes.

The Akashi Empress replied:

*Who can look at this world, so like the droplets
That cannot resist the blasts of autumn winds
And think that only dew on the top leaves fades*

As they exchanged poems, Genji treasured the sight of these two women, ideal beauties both. Though he wished he could go on gazing at them like this for a thousand years, his heart ached, knowing that such a dream could never be fulfilled, for he had no way to keep his beloved from dying.

“You should leave now. I’m feeling very ill,” Murasaki said. “It’s terribly rude of me to say that I’m too ill to do anything for you.” She pulled a standing curtain over and lay down so that they would not have to see her suffering. This time, it did not appear she would recover.

“What’s wrong?” The Akashi Empress took Murasaki’s hand and watched her tearfully. She looked every bit like a dewdrop fading away, and so they hurriedly sent off countless messengers to commission more sutra readings. There had been episodes like this in the past from which she had always recovered, but Genji suspected that the malignant spirit of the Rokujō lady might still be at work; accordingly, he did everything he could to protect Murasaki, ordering prayers and services to be held throughout the night. His efforts were in vain, however, for just as dawn approached her spirit vanished and she passed away.

The Akashi Empress thought it a sign of the boundless karmic bond she shared with Murasaki that she had not returned to the palace and was with the woman who had raised her until the very end. Neither she nor Genji could accept

that her death was part of the natural order of things, that such partings were common to all. To them, her passing was singular and overwhelming, and so they felt as if they were wandering lost in the sort of dream one has in that twilight time between night and the dawn. No one there could make a rational judgment about anything. The attendants and other servants were completely stunned.

Genji suffered the most. Because he was upset and not thinking clearly, he summoned his son, who was in attendance nearby, and had him move over in front of Murasaki's curtain.

"It appears that this is the end," he said. "It would be a great shame to go against her wishes at this point and not carry out what she had desired for so many years. The holy men who performed the healing rites and the priests reading scripture have all gone silent and have probably left, but some of them may still be here; tell one of them to cut her hair like a nun's. It won't do any good for her in this life, but if she shows a mark of her devotion to the Buddha, then at least she may rely on his mercy to comfort her on the dark path she is to follow. Is there some priest suitable for the task?"

Judging by his expression as he spoke, Genji was trying to be strong, but the color had drained from his face, and unable to bear his loss, he could not stop his tears. His son looked on in sympathy, thinking that his father's grief was perfectly understandable.

"Sometimes a malignant spirit will do this kind of thing just to torment the bereaved ones," said Genji's son. "What I mean is, the spirit may be making it appear that she is not breathing ... that may be what's happening here. If that's the case, then it would be best to do what she wanted in any case, since according to the *Contemplation Sutra*,¹⁰ making vows to uphold the precepts for even one day and night will lead to rebirth in Amida's Pure Land. Of course, if she is dead, simply cutting her hair at this point would have little benefit ... it won't provide a light to guide her in the next world and would make the grief of those who look at her even worse. I wonder if it's for the best?"

He wanted to do all he could to make arrangements for the funeral and period of confinement, and so he summoned several priests from among those who had not yet withdrawn and were willing to serve during the weeks ahead. He also saw to all other necessary preparations.

Although he had longed for Murasaki for years after catching a glimpse of her on that morning after the autumn tempest, Genji's son had never harbored any improper or presumptuous fantasies about her. *In what world to come will I ever see her again as I did on that morning long ago? I never did hear her speak ... not even a faint whisper.* Not a day had gone by since then when she hadn't been

on his mind. *As it turns out, I will never hear her voice ... and if I'm ever to satisfy my hope of seeing her again, the only time to do so is right now, even if it means gazing at her lifeless form.* He had been trying to control himself, since it would look odd if he exhibited excessive grief, but these thoughts brought him to tears. The attendants were loudly weeping and wailing, and Genji's son scolded them. "Really now, be still for a while!" As he spoke, he lifted one of the panels of Murasaki's standing curtain and peered inside. Because it was difficult to make things out in the dim light of early dawn, Genji had placed a lamp near Murasaki's bed and was gazing at her. He so regretted that such a lovely face would soon be no more—a face infinitely dear to him, one possessing such noble grace—it seemed that he no longer had the will to even try to hide his beloved from the gaze of his son, who was peeking in on this scene.

"Here she is, her face looking the same as ever ... and yet it's obvious that she's no longer with us." Genji covered his face with his sleeves. His son, blinded by tears, could not see very well. To clear his vision, he closed his eyes tight and then opened them so that he could look at her; when he did, he was overcome by a feeling of sadness unlike anything he had ever known. He feared that he would lose his composure completely. Her hair was stretched out beside her, left just as it was when she died, incomparably lustrous and beautiful with not one strand of those thick, cascading tresses out of place. It no longer mattered to her that she was exposed to his gaze. In the bright glare of the lamplight, her complexion had an alabaster glow, and her face, needless to say, looked more pure and spotless than when she was alive, since she had always avoided being seen and concealed her real appearance under makeup. Gazing on her unique, extraordinary beauty, he wished that her soul, which had already departed, would soon return to her body—though he knew such a wish was unreasonable.

The women who had been her closest attendants were too overcome by grief to think clearly, and so Genji forced himself to calm down and set about making arrangements for the funeral. Although he had witnessed many sorrowful events in the past, he had no experience handling such matters directly himself. Undertaking this sad responsibility was like nothing else he had ever done in the past or would do in the future.

The funeral was to be held right away, on the day of her passing. Because he was constrained by custom in such matters, he would not be able to gaze on the empty shell of her body¹¹—such is the cruel indifference of this world. Throngs of people stretching into the distance crowded the broad field where the funeral was held. Even though the ceremony was sublimely dignified, it ended with a thin wisp of smoke rising all too quickly into the skies. It was a common enough

scene, and yet the sense of helpless grief was overwhelming. Everyone, even the lowliest person who was utterly insensitive to the poignancy of the world, wept as they watched a man as splendidly noble in rank and appearance as Genji suffer such grief that he had to be supported by his attendants. His unsteady legs made it look as though he were walking through the empty sky. The ladies-in-waiting who had come to see their mistress off had the feeling that they were lost in a terrible dream. They were more unsteady than Genji, and their servants had a difficult time dealing with them, since they might have tumbled out of their carriages at any moment.

Genji remembered that dawn long ago when his son's mother had died—he must still have had his wits about him on that sad occasion, for he recalled how bright the moon looked then. In contrast, this evening was total darkness. Murasaki had died just before dawn on the fourteenth day of the eighth month, and she was cremated just before dawn on the fifteenth. The sunrise was glorious and bright, and sparkling dew covered every corner of the field. As Genji mused about the transitory nature of life, intense feelings of weariness and distaste for the world overwhelmed him. How much longer must he go on living in it now that he had been left behind? This sorrow strengthened his resolution to carry out at last his long-held desire to take religious vows—though he quickly reconsidered. People would criticize him as weak-willed if he withdrew from the world soon after Murasaki's death. He decided to wait for a while, even though it would be unbearably trying.

Genji's son confined himself at the Nijō villa for the forty-nine days of mourning, staying by his father's side throughout and not once going home. Observing how devastated his father looked, he was naturally moved to compassion and did everything he could to offer comfort.

One evening, when a powerful autumn tempest was blowing, Genji's son reminisced about the past and thought longingly of that brief glimpse he had of Murasaki. Secretly, he kept obsessing over such moments, including that dreamlike scene at the time of Murasaki's death when he gazed at her body. The image he conjured made him unbearably sad, and so, fearful of giving away his true feelings, he chanted the *nembutsu*, "Amida Buddha ... Amida Buddha," furtively wiping away his tears drop by drop with each bead of the rosary he counted.

*Yearnings of an autumn evening long ago
For one briefly glimpsed ... seeing her figure again
After she had died, a dream in predawn darkness*

That dreamlike image lingered on, bringing heartrending sadness. He had distinguished priests brought in to perform the memorial services—not just the prescribed invocations to Buddha, which would be expected, but also readings of the *Lotus Sutra*. All of the ceremonies were deeply affecting.

Meanwhile, Genji's tears never dried, whether he was up and about or lying down trying to sleep. It seemed to him that he was constantly looking at everything as if through a mist. He reflected back on his life.

Beginning with the image I saw when I first looked in the mirror, I have always known that I was different from others ... and though the Buddha and others encouraged me from childhood on to recognize the tragic impermanence of this world, I lived my life willfully pretending I did not understand that truth ... and now at last I have experienced a tragedy I believe has had no equivalent in the past and will have none in the future. Now, I have no more concerns, no more attachments to keep me in this world, and there is nothing to hinder me from pursuing my religious devotions. Yet my heart and mind are in turmoil, and, with no way to calm my spirit, it will be difficult to do what I most desire: abandon this world and follow the path of the Buddha.

In his anguish, he fervently prayed to Amida: “Please ease my suffering a little by making my loss seem one of a more common sort ... please grant me this: that I may forget!”

Messages of condolence arrived from various exalted households, everywhere from the palace on down. And they were not mere formalities, but genuinely heartfelt. Having already made up his mind to renounce the world, Genji would neither read nor listen to any of these messages, since he did not want to stir emotions that might deter him from fulfilling his deepest aspiration. At the same time, however, he did not want his refusal to respond to come off looking as though he had gone senile. He wished to avoid giving rise to rumors that he had taken vows and withdrawn from society because his single-minded grief over Murasaki had rendered him weak-willed and confused in his old age. Such considerations added to his grief, since he could not do as he wanted, but had to put off taking vows for a time.

Tō no Chūjo, being the kind of man who could never let pass an opportunity to display his sensitivity, sent frequent messages expressing his sorrow and regret on learning that Murasaki, a woman with no equal in this world, had passed away. Gazing out in a pensive mood one quiet autumn evening, he was greatly moved by the memory that his sister, Genji's first wife, had also passed away during this season almost thirty years earlier. *So many people who once mourned my sister have themselves passed on! In this world, there's not much to separate those who die first from those who follow after.* The skies had a

peculiar, melancholy appearance, and so he sent one of his sons, the Lesser Captain in the Chamberlain's office, with a long, moving letter for Genji. He wrote the following at the end:

*That autumn in the distant past
Even now feels present to me
As fresh dew falls on these damp sleeves*

Genji replied:¹²

*I cannot tell the difference between the dew
That settled long ago and the dew that falls now
For every autumn evening brings sad thoughts*

Had Genji expressed his sorrow exactly as he felt it, Tō no Chūjō, a man of exquisitely fine sensibilities, would have concluded that his old friend had lost heart. So, to save face, Genji added a brief note to his poem expressing his appreciation: "It has been a great comfort to have received so many messages of condolence from you."

The mourning robes he wore were of a darker shade than that "light gray" he spoke about when his first wife died.¹³ Some admirable women, blessed with good fortune, might alas become the object of the world's spiteful envy, while some proud and overweening women, possessed of position and power, may cause great trouble for others. Murasaki was different. She was unique—a woman with an extraordinary personality who had the unusual ability to elicit goodwill and affection from even a common, insensitive person, who earned praise for everything she did no matter how trivial, who had an elegant charm and strove to ensure that every event or occasion was properly arranged. After she died, those who were not especially close to her, and who thus had no reason to mourn, were still moved to tears this particular autumn by the melancholy sounds of the season—the chirruping of the crickets or the soughing of the wind. People who had a slight acquaintance with her were more profoundly affected, while the women who had closely served their mistress for many years experienced the bitter fate of survivors and lamented having to be parted from her for even the briefest period. Some of her attendants decided that they would become nuns, withdrawing from the world to live far away in the mountains.

The Umetsubo Empress sent one message after another expressing her heartfelt sorrow.

Was it because your departed love

*...was it because your departure...
Deplored fields of withered, dying plants
That her heart could not abide autumn*

“Now, at last, I understand her feelings.”

Sensing that he had lost the ability to think clearly, Genji read the letter over and over, unable to put it down. *Her messages mean so much to me. Umetsubo alone provides the comfort of a refined sensibility.* Such thoughts distracted him a little from his grief, but, having to constantly wipe his teary eyes with his sleeves, he was unable to write a full reply, and managed only this poem.

*You who have risen far above the clouds
Gaze back on me in the autumn of life
Weary of a world of impermanence*

He wrapped the letter up, but then just sat there staring blankly ahead, lost for a time in his thoughts.

Although he found it hard to control his emotions or think straight, he was fully aware of how strangely forgetful and careless he was becoming. As a result, he decided to stay in the women’s quarters to conceal his weakness. He would carry out his devotions calmly before an altar to Buddha, keeping only a few attendants nearby. He had hoped to spend a thousand years together with Murasaki, and so their final parting was truly devastating to him. He now dedicated himself wholeheartedly to the tireless practice of his religious austerities, his mind focused on the next life when he hoped that he would be reborn in Amida’s Pure Land and rejoin Murasaki on the same dew-drenched lotus. Despite his good intentions, however, he continued to worry about what people might say about his behavior.

Genji did not clearly state his preferences for how the memorial rites should be conducted, and so his son took care of the arrangements. Time and again he thought: *Today will be the day I finally take vows.* And while he did have many opportunities to act on his intentions, before he knew it, the season had quickly passed, and he came to feel he was living in a dream.

The Akashi Empress and the others never forgot Murasaki, not for a moment. They missed her dearly.

¹ The empresses are Umetsubo and the Akashi Princess, Genji’s daughter who has been the consort of the Kirtsubo. This wording suggests that the inevitable promotion has been made and she is now the Akashi

Empress.

² The original phrasing here, if translated literally, is “ages and ages of Isonokami.” Isonokami is the name of an ancient shrine at a place called Furu, which was located south of the first permanent capital, Nara. Because *furu* is a homophone that may also mean “old” or “ancient,” Isonokami is a poetic place name, a pillow word that intensifies the sense of something that happened long ago.

³ Chapter 12 of the *Lotus Sutra*, the “Devadatta” chapter, tells how the Buddha humbled himself in the service of his spiritual teacher by drawing water, gathering firewood, picking fruit, and setting out meals.

⁴ Described in the *Wakana* chapter, Part 2.

⁵ This poetic exchange gives the chapter its title. It should be noted, however, that the word *minori*, which clearly means “rites” here, also refers to the Law (the Dharma), that is, the truth of the Buddha’s teachings. That double sense operates implicitly in both poems.

⁶ As noted above, Genji’s daughter, the Akashi Princess who becomes the Kirtsubo Consort, has been elevated to the title of empress. The narrative does not explain when this event took place. From this point on, I will identify Genji’s daughter as the Akashi Empress.

⁷ This reading may be the *Sutra of Great Wisdom* (*Daihannyakyō*), which an empress would normally have performed during the second and eighth months (though the reading could be held on special occasions as well). However, the timing does not seem right here, and it is likely that the sutra reading is part of the healing rites for Murasaki.

⁸ *Shikashū* 109 (Izumi Shikibu): “What sort of wind is it, this wind that blows in autumn ... how cutting it is, bringing only sorrow.”

⁹ Murasaki’s poem plays on two senses of the word *oku*—“to be up/sit up” and “to settle.”

¹⁰ The *Kanmuryōjukyō* is one of the three major scriptures of Pure Land Buddhism, along with the *Sutra of Infinite Life*, which is also known as the *Larger Pure Land Sutra*, and the *Amida Sutra*.

¹¹ *Kokinshū* 831 (Bishop Shōen, composed after the burial of the Horikawa chancellor, Fujiwara no Mototsune, at Mount Fukakusa): “One finds comfort in gazing on the body, an empty shell of a cicada ... send up at least a plume of smoke, Mount Fukakusa!”

¹² Some texts have the following sentences preceding Genji’s poem: “Given the nature of the season, Genji was in a nostalgic mood, thinking about all that happened in the past; as he recollected with sweet longing the events of that particular autumn, he composed his reply in a distracted state of mind, unable to wipe away all of the tears that poured from his eyes.” Most modern versions do not include these sentences. However, I am noting them here because they help to contextualize Genji’s verse, which is oddly detached even for someone grieving terribly.

¹³ Genji is recalling a poem that he composed at the time of his wife’s death: “By custom I must wear these light gray robes, and yet my grief is of a blacker shade, my sleeves darkened by a deep pool of tears.” (The poem appears in the *Aoi* chapter.)

XLI

Maboroshi

Spirit Summoner

OBSERVING THE bright cheer of the New Year season only served to make Genji's mood darker and more disordered. The sorrow that had completely overtaken his heart did not dissipate over time as might have been expected. Outside his quarters people were gathering for the customary seasonal visit, but he chose to remain inside his blinds, offering the excuse that he was not well. When Sochinomiya arrived, Genji sent out a message saying that he preferred to meet in a private room in the interior of the residence. He included a poem with his note:

*The one who always lavished praise
Upon these blossoms here is gone
Why should spring care to visit me*

Tears welled up in Sochinomiya's eyes, and he replied:

*Does the spring seek in vain the fragrance
Of the red plum ... are you suggesting
It comes for common blossoms only*

Genji experienced a sense of deep nostalgia as he watched his younger brother strolling beneath the red plum trees. *Does anyone appreciate such beauty as deeply as Sochinomiya?* The blossoms were just barely open, and their fragrant glow was delightful. There was no music or entertainment this year—indeed, the celebrations were very different in form.

The ladies-in-waiting who had been in Murasaki's service for many years made no effort to change their wardrobes with the advent of the new season.

Instead, they continued to wear dark robes of mourning. Their grief was hard to assuage, but since they remained devoted to Murasaki, they continued to serve Genji. It gave them a measure of comfort that he chose to stay with them in his quarters at the Nijō villa, where they could be near him, rather than going off to call on his other ladies at the Rokujō estate. After Murasaki died and Genji began sleeping by himself, he treated even those women whom he had previously regarded as lovers the same as any other attendant—though, to be sure, his relationship with them had never really been all that serious. He even had the women who served on duty at night withdraw to a spot some distance away from his sleeping chambers.

Whenever Genji was bored, he would reminisce about the old days. Though his devotion to following the path of Buddha had deepened and he had purged all traces of his former, fickle disposition, he would nevertheless recall things from the years he spent with Murasaki—especially the way she looked when her jealousy flared up over one of his passing affairs. *I suppose it made no difference whether my affairs were serious or mere dalliances ... either way, they hurt her. Why did I have to be so impulsive? She got used to my peccadilloes as time went on and adopted an attitude of tolerance that allowed her to deal with them and to understand the true depth of my devotion to her. Though she never grew resentful or bore a grudge, she must have suffered from the turmoil in her heart, wondering with each passing affair what would become of her.* He was overcome by feelings of remorse and pity, and his heart was filled to bursting with shame and regret. Some of the women who most closely served him knew how their departed lady felt about Genji's betrayals, but they were circumspect about the subject, and would only discuss it with him in the most delicate terms.

Murasaki's face had betrayed no hint of her emotions when he brought the Third Princess to Rokujō. Still, thinking back on it, he recalled how grief-stricken she looked during those moments when she sadly contemplated her wearisome existence. One time in particular—that snowy dawn following the Third Night with the Princess when Murasaki's spirit appeared at his pillow and he rushed back to her quarters—he remembered how he had tapped at her lattice shutter and was kept standing outside because no one could hear him; he had waited so long he thought he was going to freeze. Beneath those glowering skies, she had received him so sweetly and gently, hiding her tear-soaked sleeves from his view and doing everything she could to divert his attention from her own sorrow.

Every night until dawn, one thought ran through his mind over and over even in his dreams: *When will I be able to see her again ... in what future world will we meet?* In the faint light of dawn Genji overheard a woman who must have

been returning to his attendants' quarters saying, "My ... it snowed heavily last night, didn't it?" Those words transported him back to that dawn long ago, and the loneliness that swept over him when he realized his beloved was not lying there beside him was shattering.

*I long to melt like snow, to disappear
From this world of sadness ... but snow still falls
And I still live on against my wishes*

To distract himself from sorrowful thoughts, Genji called for water to cleanse his hands and, as was now his custom, performed his devotions. The attendants stirred up the charcoal embers in the brazier, and then moved it closer to him. Two of the women, Chūnagon and Chūjō, sat nearby and talked with him. "Sleeping by myself last night, I felt lonelier than ever," Genji told them. "I still seem to be caught up in my attachments to this world, which I ought to understand well enough to renounce." He gazed off, lost in reverie. Then, as he glanced around, it occurred to him how sad these women would be and how much more grief they would have to endure were he to turn his back on the world. He privately continued his devotions out of sight, and anyone who heard the sublime beauty of his voice reading the sutras would have been moved to weep. One can only imagine the overwhelming feelings of those who were with him all the time, day and night. Their compassion for him was so great that they would not have been able to hold back the flood of tears even if their sleeves had been weirs.

"I was born into such a high station in life that I have lacked for nothing in this world," Genji remarked. "Yet I've always had the feeling that I was destined to experience more misfortune and regret than the average person. The Buddha has determined that I must know the truth about this world ... that it is an ephemeral realm of woe. Throughout my long life, I pretended to ignore that truth. However, as I approach my final years and have had to experience the ultimate sorrow of witnessing my beloved's death, I now fully appreciate the nature of my karma and the limits of my desires. Since the fragile, dewlike bonds that tied me to this world have disappeared, I'm at peace. Still, I've grown closer to you now than when you were serving your late mistress, and so when it comes time to say my farewells I know that my heart will be in even greater agony than it is now. Our lives and loves are so fleeting ... my mind is not right, for it is wrong of me to have such attachments."

He wiped his eyes in an effort to hide his tears, but he could not hold them back and they fell in spite of him. The women who witnessed his grief could not

help but weep themselves. They each wanted to tell him how sorry they would be if he abandoned them, but their hearts were too full to say anything, and the conversation ended.

In moments of quiet solitude, Genji would have Murasaki's women sit nearby and converse with him either at dawn, following a sleepless night filled with regrets, or at dusk, following a day spent gazing off in pensive reverie. He did not look down on them as ordinary in any way; in fact, he had known one of the women, Chūjō, from the time she was a child. She had once been an object of his desire, and it must have been awkward for her when she first came to attend Murasaki, for soon after she began keeping her distance from Genji. For his part, he remembered how much Murasaki favored Chūjō over the other ladies-in-waiting, and it touched him to think of her now as a memento of his late beloved. Though he no longer considered her a sexual intimate, she had retained her attractive looks and personality. Indeed, because she resembled Murasaki a little, she was a living memorial, an evergreen planted beside a grave, and thus dearer to him than the other ladies-in-waiting.

Genji stopped meeting people with whom he felt no close affinity. Senior officials who were on good terms with him or his imperial brothers would often call on him at his estate, but he rarely met them directly. He even stayed behind his blinds when he spoke to his son.

If I agree to meet people, he had reasoned, I risk exposing just how feeble-minded I've become over the past few months. Even if I'm in command of my faculties and keep my emotions in check, I'm likely to say something foolish, embarrass myself, and leave a bad reputation to later generations. I suppose that if people gossip about me and claim that I refuse to see anyone because I've grown senile, the effect on my reputation will be much the same. Still, it's far worse to have people witness my infirmities with their own eyes than to have them merely speculate about them.

Genji was not yet ready to turn his back on the world. Biding his time and composing himself, he felt that he should wait to take vows, even during this period when people must be gossiping about how much he had changed. Whenever he made a rare, brief visit to one of his ladies—Akashi or Hanachirusato—he would be so overcome with emotion that tears would fall like rain. This was too shameful for him to bear and, consequently, he would let so much time elapse between visits or letters that the two ladies were always fretting about him.

The Akashi Empress returned to the palace, leaving the Third Prince, Niou, to comfort his lonely grandfather. "Grandmama Murasaki told me to give special attention to this tree," the boy announced, carefully tending the red plum in the

garden that fronted the west hall of the Nijō villa. Genji was very touched watching him. It was the second month and the tops of the plum trees were in full bloom. Spring mists provided a delightful cover to those trees not yet in blossom. Hearing the cheerful voice of a warbler singing in the red plum tree just outside the west hall—a tree that also served as a memento of Murasaki—Genji stepped out to have a look. Walking about, he murmured a poem:

*Feigning ignorance of her passing, the warbler
Still comes to the house of the lady who planted
This red plum tree and admired its fragrant blossoms*

It was now deep into the spring season, and the garden at the southeast residence at Rokujō looked just as spectacular as it did when Murasaki was still alive. However, Genji could no longer savor its beauty; just to look at it unsettled him and brought back all sorts of heartrending memories. His desire to go off to a remote spot deep in the mountains far removed from this world of woe—a place where he would not hear even the cry of a bird to remind him of spring¹—only intensified. The sight of mountain roses and other flowers blooming in wild profusion suddenly brought dewy tears to his eyes.

The single-petal cherry blossoms had scattered already, the double-petal blossoms were past their peak, and the mountain cherries were now in bloom. The wisteria apparently darkened in color later than the cherries ... Murasaki had had a good understanding of the plants in her garden, knowing which ones bloomed early, which ones late, and she had planted many varieties so that every season of the year would be filled with fragrant splendor. “My cherry is in bloom,” Niou declared, referring to the one Murasaki had planted. “I’d hate it if the petals fell! There has to be some way to protect them ... I know! I’ll put a curtain around the tree, and so long as the cloth stays up, the wind won’t be able to touch it!” The little boy’s face showed just how clever he considered his plan to be. He was so precious-looking that Genji couldn’t help but smile. “That’s quite a good idea,” he told his grandson. “You’re much cleverer than the man who wanted to cover the sky with his sleeves!”² Genji considered this Prince his sole pleasure in life.

“We won’t have much time to get to know one another. Life being what it is, regardless of how much time we may have together, the day will come when I’m no longer with you.” Seeing his sentimental grandfather tear up as he was so wont to do recently, the boy was put off. “Grandmama Murasaki was always talking that way ... I don’t like it.” Niou turned his face away, fingering his sleeves as he tried to hide his own tears.

Genji would often lean on the railing of the veranda just outside the corner of Murasaki's old quarters, lost in reverie as he gazed longingly around her garden or into the interior spaces beyond her blinds. Some of her women were still wearing mourning robes as a remembrance of their mistress; others wore robes of more everyday colors, though the pattern of their silks was plain and subdued. His own cloak was dyed an everyday hue, but its pattern was drab and inconspicuous. The furnishings and decorations were extremely austere—not much craftsmanship had gone into them, and they had such a forlorn air that he composed the following:

*After I have renounced this world of woe
Will it fall to ruin, this springtime hedge
My departed love tenderly nurtured*

No one was forcing him to take vows, but, even so, his decision made him terribly sad.

Bored and with time on his hands, Genji went to pay a call on the Third Princess. Niou, carried by an attendant, accompanied him, and when they arrived, he ran around playing with the Third Princess's little boy, Kaoru. Still very much a child, it seemed that Niou had forgotten all about the scattering cherry blossoms that had so worried him earlier.

The Third Princess was reading a sutra before the altar. She did not strike Genji as being especially devoted to the religious life, nor did she appear troubled at heart or regretful at having taken vows. She practiced her devotions quietly, without distraction, and Genji envied her ability to single-mindedly distance herself from the world. He deplored the fact that his own resolve to follow the religious life should be inferior to this shallow woman's. The flowers decorating the altar possessed a beguiling beauty in the dim twilight of dusk, prompting Genji to remark, "Now that the woman who was so attracted to the spring is gone, the colors of the blossoms have lost their charms for me. But seeing those flowers adorning the Buddha, I can't help finding them lovely. I've never seen the mountain roses in her garden bloom like they have this year ... their petals are enormous! It's not a flower that one usually associates with refined elegance, but their vibrant colors are so exquisite and charming! How sad that they should be so much more lush and fragrant this spring, as if they were heedless of the fact that the one who planted them is gone."

The Third Princess offhandedly replied, "No spring comes to this dark valley ..." ³

"*Couldn't she have put it another way?* Genji found her allusion tasteless and

insensitive. It occurred to him that even at casual moments like this, Murasaki never once said or did anything that would cause him to think, I wish she hadn't done that. He tried conjuring up her appearance at different stages of her life, beginning from the time she was a child. A succession of images of her on various occasions in the past came to him one after another, reminding him of the wit and charm that had characterized her attitude, her behavior, and her manner of speech. Genji, who was now susceptible to teary sentimentality, was embarrassed that his memories should cause him to weep in the presence of the Third Princess.

The dusk, made indistinct by shimmering mists, was lovely to behold, and he decided to call on the Akashi lady. Since he had not looked in on her for some time, she was not expecting this visit and was caught by surprise. Still, she managed to receive him with grace and charm, which, to his eyes, made her look every bit the superior lady she was; and yet, try as he might, he could not control the natural inclination to compare her with Murasaki and note the differences in their personalities and talents. Recalling images of Murasaki ought to have brought some relief to him, but instead it merely increased his longing and sorrow, making it all the more difficult for him to find consolation.

The atmosphere of the quarters of his Akashi lady was very different from that of the apartments of the Third Princess, and Genji felt that here he could speak at ease about the old days. "I learned long ago that obsessing sorrowfully over a woman was certainly not proper, and in all my relationships I have tried to avoid attachments to this world. During the period of my life leading up to my exile—a time when people at the court were convinced that my fortunes were in decline—I thought things over carefully and concluded that there was nothing in particular to stop me from wandering off deep into the fields and mountains where I could take it on myself to abandon this world. But now in my twilight years, as I near the end of my life, I find myself entangled in bonds that will prove a hindrance to salvation. How frustrating to be weak-willed!"

Though he was speaking of his sorrows in general, the Akashi lady understood with pained sympathy the real reason why he was in such a mood. At that moment he seemed especially miserable to her.

"Even a person," she began, "who in the eyes of ordinary people appears to have nothing at all to regret, may in fact keep many bonds hidden away in their hearts. How could such a person possibly abandon those relationships with an easy conscience? Such ill-advised action would invite criticism for being frivolous and rash. When it comes to making a decision about a matter as serious as renouncing the world, it is best, in my opinion, to take your time, so that in the end you will make a deeply considered choice and bring peace and calm to

your heart and mind. From what I know of past examples, they say it is never proper to renounce the world when your heart and mind are unsettled, when things have gone against your wishes and you find the world detestable. In your case, you should resist the impulse to take vows and hold off making such a life-changing decision until the children of the Akashi Empress are grown up and their positions truly secure. I would feel more at ease and happier if you would wait.” The Akashi lady looked magnificent as she offered him her mature, sensible advice.

“You may be right,” Genji replied, “but the deep wisdom that recommends taking time to think it over before renouncing the world may in fact prove the shallower choice.” He went on to share with her things that had been on his mind for a long time. “The spring Fujitsubo passed away I felt just like the poet who wrote about those cherry trees blooming on the plains of Fukakusa.⁴ I felt that way because I had seen her when I was young and was deeply moved by her beauty, which was apparent even to the court at large. Being more familiar with her than others, my grief was of course greater at the time of her death, but the special loss I felt was not due simply to our relationship as a man and woman ... it grew out of feelings that were more complex than that. Now Murasaki has preceded me in death, and it is so hard to forget her that I find no way to console my heart. In this case, too, my grief is not simply the kind that comes when death severs a relationship between husband and wife. No, when I think back over the circumstances that led me to want to raise her from childhood, the way we grew old together, and how, in the end, I was left behind, the grief I feel arises out of all that happened between us and possesses a special quality that makes it too hard to bear. With all of the things that we experienced together—the sad and the sublime, the exquisite and the elegant, the amusing and the delightful—with such memories filling my thoughts, how could my grief be shallow?”

Genji shared his memories and talked about current happenings at the court until late that night. It occurred to him that he should stay with the Akashi lady until dawn, but instead he returned to his own quarters in the southeast residence. She could not help but be moved to sorrow and pity. For his part, he startled himself when he realized what a peculiar change had come over him.

He set about his regular devotions, and in the middle of the night moved to his daytime quarters and lay down temporarily. When morning came, he sent a letter to the Akashi lady:

*Crying on and on, wild geese head north, longing to return ...
I weep as well, longing to return, but in this sad world*

Nothing remains as it was and there is no place to rest

She had resented his leaving her early the previous night, but seeing how much pain he was in, she realized that he was no longer himself. She put her own feelings aside, tears welling up in her eyes.

*The water in the seedling paddy
Where wild geese once gathered disappears
And with it the flower's reflection*

Her calligraphy was lovely as ever.

For some reason, Genji recalled, Murasaki had never taken to her, though in her final years the two of them recognized their mutual interests and grew friendlier. Still, even after they realized that they were not a threat to each other and were able to establish a trusting relationship, Murasaki remained uncomfortable around her ... and I was the only one who ever noticed how stiff and formal she was.

Whenever his loneliness became too much for him, Genji would suddenly drop in on the Akashi lady just to talk about everyday matters. Now, however, nothing remained of his former passion, and he showed no inclination to spend the night with her.

From her quarters in the northeast residence Hanachirusato sent new summer robes for the change of season. A poem was attached:

*This day brings the start of the season ...
Will your heart be filled with memories
As your old robes are exchanged for new*

Genji replied:

*From this day forward, each time I put on these robes
Diaphanous as cicada wings, the sorrows
Of this fragile, fleeting world will only deepen*

During the fourth month, on the day of the Kamo Festival, the atmosphere at the Rokujō estate was so tedious that Genji told his female attendants, “It would make all of you feel better if you were to go off to see the sights today.” Recalling how the Kamo Shrine looked during the festival, he added, “You will likely feel left out if you don’t go. Perhaps it would be best if you returned discreetly to your family homes and then went to the festival from there.”

Chūjō was taking a nap on the eastern side of Genji's quarters. When he stepped out and saw her lying there she got up, looking very dainty and adorable. The expression on her face was fresh and bright, and her hair, mussed from sleep, cascaded down and hid her face in a most charming fashion. Her trousers were dyed a scarlet hue tinged with yellow; her singlet was burnt orange and over it was an outer robe of dark gray and black. Her robes were not properly layered, since she had just got up from her nap, and her train and jacket had slipped down. While she casually pulled them back up, Genji picked up some of the sprigs of wild ginger that she had set aside in preparation for the festival. "What are these called?" he asked. "I've completely forgotten their name." Chūjō responded with a poem:

*Gods do not reveal themselves in a vessel choked with weeds
Nor do you show yourself ... so I adorned my hair with leaves
That promise a tryst, only to find you forgot their name⁵*

She seemed embarrassed as she spoke. Genji realized that what she said was true and felt sorry for her.

*Having now forsaken the things of this world
Including the ways of love, is it sinful
Of me to pluck off these leaves of wild ginger*

Apparently Chūjō alone remained an object of Genji's affection.

With nothing else to do during the fifth month but gaze out at the endless rains of the season, Genji, sinking ever deeper into his brooding thoughts, was overcome with a sense of desolation. It was the tenth day of the month, and Genji's son was in attendance that evening. There was a rare break in the clouds, and the instant the bright moonlight broke through, the mandarin orange tree, which was then in full bloom, stood out vividly before their eyes. The fragrance of the tree wafted toward them on the breeze, stirring nostalgic memories. As they waited in anticipation for the sound of "the cuckoo's voice, which calls out for a thousand years,"⁶ the clouds gathered again and suddenly took on an ominous appearance. They were startled when a driving rain began to fall and the wind accompanying the rain caused the lamps to flicker and nearly extinguished them. The sky seemed to have turned black. "The sound of the rain at the window."⁷ Genji murmured these and other rather trite, common lines of old verse. Perhaps it was due to the atmosphere of the moment, but his son fervently wished that Murasaki had been there to hear his father's voice—truly a

voice to be heard, as the old poem had it, “from my beloved’s hedge.”⁸

“Things aren’t all that different now that I’m living by myself,” Genji remarked, “but still, I feel strangely alone. Having grown accustomed to this solitary life, I wonder ... even if I were to live in a hut deep in the mountains, would my heart really grow pure and tranquil?” He then called out to his attendants: “Bring food and refreshments here! I suppose it’s much too late to summon some men to join us.”

Genji’s son could tell from the expression on his father’s face as he gazed up distractedly toward the skies that the old man was in no mood for entertainment.⁹ It was painful to see him in such a state, and he worried that his father’s inability to take his mind off Murasaki was a lingering attachment that would make it difficult for him to purify and calm his heart. It occurred to him that if he himself found it so hard to forget Murasaki after only the briefest glimpse of her, how much more difficult must it be for his father?

“It seems like she left us only yesterday,” he said, “but the first anniversary is already upon us. What sort of memorial service have you planned?”

Genji replied, “I don’t plan to do anything out of the ordinary. This would be the right time to dedicate the mandala of Amida’s paradise that she commissioned. She also had a large number of sutras prepared, and before she died she explained what she wanted done for the dedication to that bishop ... I’ve forgotten his name ... anyway, he knows what to do. If there are other details that need to be seen to, I’ll just have to go along with whatever bishop what’s-his-name recommends.”

“She put a lot of thought into arranging these things ahead of time, and they’ll certainly be a comfort to her in the afterlife. When I think back on it now, she was destined not to live long in this world, which makes it all the more regrettable that she left behind no children to remember her by.”

“That may be,” Genji said, “but of all my women, even those who are destined to live a long life, only a few gave me children. In that regard, I consider myself unlucky. It is you, my son, with all of your daughters, who will ensure that our family line flourishes.”

Cognizant of his own tendency to break down over every little thing—a weakness he found difficult to conceal—Genji tried to avoid bringing up the past very often. Just then, the cuckoo that they had been waiting for gave a faint cry. Upon hearing it, Genji was unusually moved and whispered a line of verse: “How could it have known?”¹⁰

*Is it yearning for the one who is gone
That leads you back here, O mountain cuckoo*

Soaked by a sudden evening shower

Genji looked up ever more intently into the sky.

His son replied:

*Take this message with you, mountain cuckoo
To one who is beloved of me ... tell her
The orange tree at home is in full bloom*

Many of the women in attendance also composed poems, but I shall refrain from setting them down here. Genji's son stayed on in service—a task that he assumed from time to time because he felt sorry that his lonely father was now sleeping by himself. He had many memories associated with these bedchambers —a place familiar to him now, but one that had been off limits while Murasaki was alive.

The following month, during the hottest season of the year, Genji stayed in a room cooled by the nearby pond. Looking at the lotus blooming profusely, the dew covering the many flowers brought back a line from a poem by Lady Ise: "How can there be so many tears?"¹¹ He remained distracted, lost in his thoughts until the sun went down. Amidst the shrill cries of the cicadas, he sat by himself observing the pinks in the garden, which were aglow in the slanting light at sunset.¹² But they were no comfort to him.

*Do these cicadas take this summer day
A day I pass in idleness and tears
As a pretext for incessant crying*

Swarms of fireflies reminded Genji of a line spoken by the Emperor in Bai Juyi's *Song of Everlasting Sorrow*: "Here in the evening pavilion fireflies flit about, and I long for Yang Guifei." Reciting lines like this from old Chinese verse had now become habitual for him.

*They at least know it is night, these flickering fireflies ...
But because my grief and sorrow are with me always
I can no longer distinguish between night and day*

The seventh day of the seventh month arrived, and with it the festival of Tanabata. Genji did not have the heart to celebrate with the customary composition of verses in Chinese and Japanese. He did not call for music, but instead whiled away the time by gazing outside in idle reverie. There were no

attendants to observe the meeting of the two celestial lovers, the weaver maiden and the oxherd. Late at night, Genji arose by himself in the dark and pushed open the hinged door at the corner of the hall. Dew had drenched the garden just below the veranda. He passed through the door into the walkway and, after looking around, went outside.

*I look up to observe the heavenly lovers
But their tryst belongs to a world beyond the clouds
In this garden of parting, only dew remains*

The eighth month arrived, the beginning of autumn. Though the sound of the wind possessed an unusually lonely quality, Genji had to prepare for the memorial service—a task that seemed to divert him from his grief for the first few days of the month. When he considered the months and days that had brought him from her death to this moment, he was astounded that he had lived through them all. On the day of the memorial service, everyone in his household, irrespective of rank, fasted after the morning meal. Genji had the mandala of Amida’s paradise dedicated.

That evening, while Genji was performing his customary devotions, Chūjō entered his chambers, bringing water for ritual purification. Noticing that she had written a poem on her fan, he picked it up and read:

*These tears of longing for one I loved
Flow endlessly ... how, then, can this day
Be said to mark the end of mourning*

Genji replied:

*Yearning for my lost beloved
I have reached the end of life
Yet so many tears remain*

On the ninth day of the ninth month, the day of the Chrysanthemum Festival, Genji observed the flowers wrapped in cotton cloth to catch the dew.¹³

*Together we would rise on this festive morning
To place cotton cloth over the chrysanthemums ...
Today the autumn dew clings to my sleeves alone*

The tenth month brought in the season of chill rains, and Genji felt

increasingly melancholy; looking out at the scenery at dusk, he felt indescribably despondent. He whispered to himself, “Though the rains fall as they always have ...”¹⁴ He stared enviously at a flock of wild geese, each bird with its mate winging its way across the sky.

*Taoist summoner¹⁵ who wanders heavenly realms
I beseech you, seek the spirit of my lost love
Who does not show herself to me even in dreams*

No matter what he did, no matter how many months and days passed, he could find no solace.

The eleventh month was the season of the Gosechi Festival, a time when the world took on a gay, fashionable atmosphere. Genji’s son brought two of his boys, who were in service as pages at the court, to see their grandfather. They were about the same age and were exceptionally handsome. They were accompanied by several of their maternal uncles, including the Middle Captain in the Chamberlain’s Office and the Lesser Captain, who also served in the Chamberlain’s Office. The boys’ uncles were all attending the festival in an official capacity, and they looked smartly attractive in their robes of blue printed with designs of flowers and butterflies. They had come to assist in training the boys and didn’t appear to have a care in the world. When Genji caught sight of them, he couldn’t help but recall that outrageous incident long ago when he arranged a tryst with a certain Gosechi dancer who wore the traditional headband of bluish-green corded silk.¹⁶ Genji composed a poem:

*While princes rush to celebrate with wine-flushed faces
The Feast of the Glowing Harvest, must I pass this day
Observing neither the sun nor those headbands of silk*

Having passed through the year bearing up under such grief, Genji was increasingly aware that the time was approaching when he must renounce the world. Even so, he had yet to exhaust his sorrow, and privately he continued to mull over the various things he needed to do before he took vows, including arranging appropriate gifts for each of his attendants according to their respective rank. He did not want to make a big fuss about things and startle them into thinking that this might be the last time they saw him. However, those who were closest to him could tell by his demeanor how serious he was about going through with his long-stated desire. The loneliness and sorrow they experienced as the end of the year arrived knew no bounds.

Genji still had in his possession letters from various women that might prove embarrassing if others ever saw them. He thought of a poem by Prince Motoyoshi: "If I destroy your letters I'll regret it; if I don't, then others may see them ... with countless tears I return them to you."¹⁷ With this thought in mind, he put aside a few letters from each of his women. As he was setting about to destroy the rest, some of them caught his eye. Among the notes he had received from various ladies during his exile in Suma was a bundle of letters from Murasaki. Though Genji himself had tied that bundle with special care, it seemed like an object from the distant past. The ink was still vivid, as though the letters had just been written, and that made him realize that they could last as mementos for a thousand years even if he were not around to read them. It was pointless to keep such things, however, and so he ordered two or three of his closest female attendants to burn them in his presence.

It is quite moving to look upon the writings of someone who has died ... even the writings of someone who may not be all that closely connected to the reader. Thus, it is hardly surprising that Genji had such a powerful reaction to Murasaki's letters. Everything went dark before his eyes, and in his heart he worried that the flow of his tears would merge with the stream of her words and cause the ink to run, smearing the letters so that they would no longer be legible. Ashamed to be displaying such unmanliness in front of these women, he pushed the letters away.

*Though I tried to keep my eyes on her tracks
Thinking to follow the one who has crossed
The Mountain of Death, I have lost my way*

Though the women helping him could not very well open the letters to read them, they did catch glimpses of Murasaki's calligraphy and were extremely upset to have to destroy her writings. When Genji read the words she had written to express the misery of their separation exactly as she experienced it—even though the distance between his world at Suma and hers in the capital was really not that great—he realized now, even more than when she wrote those letters, that there was no way to assuage the grief that he felt when she was not with him. It was all too much to bear. Because the turmoil in his heart would surely have exposed him to the shame of appearing womanish and weak, he stopped reading the letters and instead wrote a poem in small characters along the margins of one of them:

*Why collect these letters, gathering words
Till so much sorrow—confining them to flames*

*Like so much seaweed ... consign them to flames
Let their smoke rise with hers to the heavens*

And so they burned all of Murasaki's letters.

It was now the twelfth month. On the nineteenth day, the palace began the three-day observance of the Invocation of the Holy Name, which was held in the Shōkyōden. The voices of the priests chanting the names of the Buddhas of past, present, and future together with the clinking of the metal rings on top of the priests' staffs seemed more deeply moving to Genji than usual. Was it because of what he had been through this year? He was overcome with doubts, wondering how his prayers for a long life would sound to the Buddha—especially now that he had decided to take vows. A snow was falling heavily, piling up on the ground. As the head priest of the ceremony was about to withdraw from the palace, Genji called him over and honored him with wine and other delicacies, treating the man with more than customary deference and bestowing exceptional gifts. This priest had been coming to the Rokujō estate for many years and had also served the imperial court. Thus, Genji knew him by sight and they were on familiar terms. The priest's hair had gradually gone white over the years, a change that touched Genji. The usual assortment of princes and high-ranking officials had gathered, and the plum trees, which were just beginning to put forth little buds, were a delight to behold. The moment called for musical diversions, but Genji thought that such entertainment would not be appropriate this year, that it might make him tearful; and so, in keeping with the occasion, he simply had poetry recited.

Lest I forget, I should mention that when Genji offered the winecup to the priest, he composed a poem:

*We know not if we'll survive till the spring
So for today let's decorate our caps
With twigs of plum budding amidst the snow*

The priest replied:

*I pray that you live to view these blossoms
For a thousand springs ... my years have piled up
Like this drifting snow, turning my hair white*

Many people composed poems that day, but I have decided to omit them.

That day marked the first time all year that Genji had appeared in public. He looked splendidly handsome—if anything, he was even more radiant than he had

ever been in the old days. As the aging, white-haired priest observed his lord, he found himself unable to stifle his tears—a reaction quite out of character for such an enlightened man.

It was a lonely feeling knowing that the year was drawing to a close. At that moment, Prince Niou came scampering in, saying, “I have to make loud noises to drive out the demons for the New Year ... but what’s the best way?”

The thought that a time would come when Genji would no longer be able to look upon the adorable figure of his grandson was too much for him:

*Having passed the time in mournful longing
I have lost track of all the months and days ...
Have the year and my life both run their course*

Genji sent out an order that the festivities to mark the beginning of the New Year were to be arranged with special care so that they would be extraordinary. I’ve been told that the various gifts and stipends that he presented to the princes and high-ranking officials, each one appropriate to the rank of the recipient, were lavish and without precedent.

¹ *Kokinshū* 535 (Anonymous): “Does she not know my feelings are as deep as those mountain recesses, where not even the cries of birds can be heard?”

² *Gosenshū* 64 (Anonymous): “If only I had sleeves wide enough to cover the heavens, I would not leave spring blossoms to the mercy of the wind” (also alluded to in the *Miotsukushi* chapter).

³ *Kokinshū* 967 (Kiyowara no Fukayabu): “Because spring comes not to this valley where no light shines, there are no lamentations for the scattering of blossoms.”

⁴ *Kokinshū* 832 (Kamitsuke no Mineo): “If the cherry trees on the plains of Fukakusa have any feelings at all, for this year only let them put forth blossoms of mourning gray” (alluded to earlier in the *Usugumo* and *Kashiwagi* chapters).

⁵ In addition to the oft-used play on the word *aoi*, the poem refers to a *yorube*, a sacred vessel containing water used in Shinto rituals to draw a god to its reflection. The comparison of Genji to a deity in this context is sexually suggestive; though the original text is coy, it leaves no doubt that he accepts the invitation, for in his reply poem he plays on the word *tsumi*, which means both “sin” and “to pluck.”

⁶ *Gosenshū* 186 (Anonymous): “I hear the cuckoo’s voice, which calls out for a thousand years amidst the orange blossoms, whose colors remain forever the same.”

⁷ *Hakushi monjū* 131.

⁸ The source of the poem is uncertain. It is cited in later commentaries.

⁹ *Kokinshū* 743 (Sakai no Hitozane): “The vaulting heavens are no memento for the lady I loved ... why then, should I gaze distractedly up at the sky each time I long for you?”

¹⁰ *Kokin rokujō* 2804: “As we talked of things that happened long ago, a cuckoo cried out in that same voice of old ... how did it know we were here?” (alluded to in the *Hanachirusato* chapter as well).

¹¹ *Tales of Ise*, section 176 [also *Kokin rokujō* 2479]: “My sorrow grows ever more intense ... how can there be so many tears for one person?”

¹² *Kokinshū* 244 (Sosei): “Am I the only one who finds them moving ... these Japanese pinks aglow in the light of sunset when crickets cry?”

¹³ Chrysanthemums were thought to possess properties that ensured a long life. The damp cloth was subsequently rubbed over the body as an anti-aging treatment.

¹⁴ This is certainly a line from a poem, but the source is unknown (an early commentary cites a possible source poem, but the provenance of that work is not clear, and so there is no way to know for certain if Murasaki Shikibu was alluding to it).

¹⁵ The word I have translated as “Taoist summoner” is *maboroshi*, which I rendered as “spirit summoner” for the title of the chapter. The word also appears in the *Kiritsubo* chapter in a poem by Genji’s father, who expresses his grief over the loss of Genji’s mother. The poetic evocation of grief thus comes full circle in the narrative. *Maboroshi* refers to a Taoist priest who has gained special powers to travel to the heavens and to summon spirits of the dead and commune with them.

¹⁶ *Hikage* refers to a garland worn on the head of the maidens of the dance, but it is also a homophone for “sunlight.” The *hikage* garland takes its name from a plant called *hikagegusa*—coral evergreen—originally used to adorn the dancers’ headdresses at the Gosechi Festival. By the Heian period the garland was more commonly made up of strips of silk or mulberry paper. The Feast of the Glowing Harvest, or *Toyo no Akari*, which is part of the Gosechi Festival mentioned in the poem by Genji that follows, is described in the *Otome* chapter.

¹⁷ *Gosenshū* 1143.

Translator's Note

BY THE end of the twelfth century, certain copies of the text of *Genji monogatari* contained a chapter that was entirely blank except for its title, *Kumogakure*, which means “Hidden by the Clouds.” The evocative image of radiance obscured suggests the death of Genji, but there is no depiction or description of the event itself. *Niou miya*, the chapter that follows, picks up the story eight years after Genji has passed away and focuses on his descendants, primarily Niou and Kaoru. Several explanations may be offered for the lack of a chapter devoted to a narrative resolution of Genji’s life. The first is that the text of *Kumogakure* (or of some chapter depicting Genji’s last years) was lost. The second is that *Kumogakure* is spurious, that Murasaki Shikibu never wrote such a chapter either because she found it impossible to do so without undercutting the literary conception of her protagonist or because such a chapter was unnecessary, since later chapters eventually fill in some of the details about Genji’s last years. A third possibility is that Murasaki Shikibu, in a highly abstract and self-conscious literary move, intended for the *Kumogakure* chapter to be blank.

While the first explanation may seem the simplest, there is in fact no real evidence to support it. Barring the discovery of a very early copy of either a complete chapter (an event that is highly unlikely but not out of the realm of possibility) or some other chapter depicting Genji’s death that has credible provenance, we have to acknowledge that *Kumogakure* is most likely the product of a frustrated reader or copyist who was dissatisfied by the lack of a “proper” ending. That is, *Kumogakure* is a kind of medieval Japanese fan fiction written to fill in the blanks. Such an impulse toward completion is not only understandable (Marguerite Yourcenar’s story “The Last Love of Prince Genji” is a modern instance of the impulse) but also clearly supported by the historical

evidence. Many spurious chapters (*Yatsuhashi*, *Sakurahito*, *Sagano*: Parts 1 and 2, *Sumori*, and *Hibariko*, to name a few) were written not only to complete the story of Genji's life, but also to fill in that apparently troublesome eight-year gap.

In my opinion, the general structure of the narrative as we now have it is probably close to what Murasaki Shikibu designed. There are, after all, other temporal jumps and gaps in the narrative and, in any case, the later chapters provide information that fills in the storyline. Thus, based on structural and stylistic elements of the text as a whole, I tend to believe that *Kumogakure* is spurious on the grounds that a chapter detailing Genji's death was not necessary to the conception of the narrative as a whole. Still, I certainly recognize that any resolution of this matter remains open-ended, and I must admit that I find the third explanation intriguing. The notion that, because language is arbitrary and constructed, words cannot adequately capture certain emotions or realities may seem too modern for Murasaki Shikibu to have ever intentionally employed it as a narrative strategy (the effects achieved by the blank chapters 18 and 19 in Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* show just how overtly manipulative the technique can be). However, the awareness of the limits of language that was part of Buddhist teaching means that we cannot completely dismiss the possibility that the author felt a wordless chapter was the only way she could move the story along. Still, as appealing as this explanation seems, it is highly speculative and probably anachronistic.

One final issue raised by the eight-year gap and the lack of narrative closure for Genji is the problem of authorship. Just as some of Shakespeare's plays are attributed to other writers, there has been a long-standing debate over the authorship of the late chapters of *Genji monogatari*. The final thirteen chapters do exhibit some discernible stylistic differences from the earlier parts of the text. No doubt these differences reflect the input of many of the early copyists, who naturally edited the text and very likely added material as they went along, but they may also reflect the presence of a different hand altogether. One tradition claims that Murasaki Shikibu's daughter, Kenshi, wrote the final part of the book. As with questions related to the design and provenance of the text, the issue of authorship will likely never be fully resolved. My opinion is that the simplest though still speculative explanation for the temporal gap and the shifts in style and storyline is the development of Murasaki Shikibu as a literary artist of considerable range and sophistication.

XLII

Niou miya

The Fragrant Prince

WITH GENJI'S radiance extinguished, not one among all of his descendants shone with the same glorious light. Of course, it would be disrespectful of me to mention Retired Emperor Reizei in this regard, but for the others, well ... Prince Niou, the grandson of Genji, and Kaoru, the son of the cloistered Third Princess, both of whom were raised at the Rokujō estate, simply did not possess the same captivating light. Certainly they were remarkable young men, each widely admired for his uniquely handsome looks and graceful comportment, but, to tell the truth, they were average in many respects. The source of their appeal was less their looks and character and more the rare qualities of elegance and dashing nobility they exhibited. Their close connection to Genji perhaps explains why they were so honored and praised by the court, which held them in slightly higher esteem than it had held even Genji himself when he was their age. Whatever the reason, they were said to be markedly more distinguished than other young men.

Murasaki had lavished great attention and shown special favor to Niou, who lived at the old Nijō villa. His older brother, the Crown Prince, was naturally given special consideration by His Majesty and the Akashi Empress because of his august status, but Niou was very much their favorite as well, and they pampered him in every way they could. They wanted him to live at the palace with them, but he preferred spending most of his time at Nijō, which he thought of as his family home, the place where he felt most comfortable. After donning his first trousers at his coming-of-age ceremony, he was named Minister of War.¹

The Akashi Empress's oldest daughter, the First Princess, lived in Murasaki's old quarters in the southeast residence of the Rokujō estate. She did not change

the furnishings there at all, but left them just as they were as loving mementos to keep Murasaki always in her heart. The Second Prince, who was also a child of the Akashi Empress, maintained apartments for himself in the main hall of the southeast residence and would use it whenever he withdrew from the palace, where he normally resided in apartments in the Umetsubo. He had an impeccable reputation as a dignified man of keen judgment and was next in line to the throne. His principal wife was the second daughter of Genji's son, who by now had risen to the post of Minister of the Right.

Genji's son had six daughters in all—three by Kumoinokari and three by the daughter of Koremitsu, who had once served as the Fujiwara Principal Handmaid. The eldest had gone into service at the palace as a consort to the Crown Prince, and she had no rivals for his affection. Everyone at the court assumed that the remaining daughters would, each in her own turn, be given to an imperial prince. Even the Akashi Empress herself had declared that this would be the case, but Niou wanted no part of such an arrangement. Apparently, he frowned on the idea of taking as a wife any lady he himself had not chosen according to his own preferences.

When the Minister of the Right learned of Niou's attitude, he shrugged it off. *Why should it bother me if he wants to make the choice? It's really all the same ... people don't always have to follow prescribed forms.* Of course if Their Majesties made it clear that they wanted their third son to take one of his daughters, then he could hardly refuse them, and so he continued to give extraordinary attention to their upbringing. As it so happened, at around that time his youngest girl, born of the Fujiwara Principal Handmaid, was the object of much interest by those princes and senior noblemen who were confident enough to regard themselves as worthy suitors.

The women whom Genji had gathered around him during his lifetime tearfully left the Rokujō estate after his death and took up residence elsewhere. Hanachirusato, his lady of the villa of scattering orange blossoms, inherited the annex on the east side of the Nijō villa when Genji took vows, and so she moved there. The Third Princess, who had been a nun for several years by that time, moved to the Sanjō residence bequeathed to her by her father, Retired Emperor Suzaku. Because the Akashi Empress now resided exclusively at the palace, there were far fewer people at Rokujō, and the place took on a lonely atmosphere. The Minister of the Right expressed his view of the situation, saying, "There are many instances from the past of houses built with the greatest of care only to be abandoned later and left to deteriorate after the owners die. It is deeply moving to consider such examples, for they illustrate the great truth that everything in this world is evanescent. Still, so long as I'm alive, I'm

determined that my father's Rokujō estate will not fall into disrepair and that the other nobles living nearby will not desert the area and allow it to become desolate." With that vow in mind, he moved his other wife, the Second Princess, from her old Ichijō villa to the northeast residence formerly occupied by Hanachirusato and, in an ideal courtly arrangement, divided his nights equally between the quarters of the Second Princess and his main residence at Sanjō, where Kumoinokari lived.

Genji had rebuilt and splendidly burnished the Nijō villa, and he had turned the southeast residence of the Rokujō estate, with its gardens dedicated to spring, into a jeweled mansion—a center of court life that everyone praised extravagantly. As it turned out, it seemed as though these places had been built for the benefit of the descendants of one person and one person only—the Akashi lady, who took care of her many imperial grandchildren and helped manage their affairs at both residences. The Minister of the Right did nothing to change the circumstances of the women at Rokujō, but treated them in accordance with the wishes of his late father, showing them every consideration as if he were a son to them. If Murasaki were still living at the estate like the Akashi lady, he would have done everything in his power to be of service to her. He recalled with a mix of regret and disappointment that time had slipped away without his ever finding an occasion to let her know even a little of the special regard with which he had held her in his heart.

There wasn't one person under Heaven who did not miss Genji, and not a single event went by in which someone did not lament that everything had lost its savor since his passing. It was as if somehow a light had been extinguished. It goes without saying that the sense of loss was much worse for those who worked in the household offices, for his ladies, and for certain members of the imperial family—Umetsubo as well as the Akashi Empress and her children. Quite apart from their memories of the splendor of the Rokujō estate during Genji's lifetime, they all kept an image of Murasaki deep in their hearts, and she was always in their thoughts. It's true what they say—the glory of cherry blossoms at their peak is all the more intense because they pass so quickly.

In keeping with Genji's last wishes, Retired Emperor Reizei took responsibility for raising Kaoru, the young son of the cloistered Third Princess. The Umetsubo Empress had always been despondent over her failure to give Reizei a child, and so she was more than happy to devote herself to the boy. His ceremony of the first trousers was held at Reizei's palace, and in the second month of his fourteenth year he was named gentleman-in-waiting. The following autumn he was appointed Middle Captain in the Right Palace Guard. These promotions were made at the urging of Reizei, who seemed anxious about the

matter for some reason, and the swift advancement in rank rapidly made Kaoru a man of parts.

Reizei arranged to have Kaoru reside in a hall near his own quarters, and he even personally oversaw the provision of furnishings and accessories and the selection of superior people to serve Kaoru as his ladies-in-waiting, page girls and servants. Reizei provided for everything in a dazzling manner, showing more consideration to the young man than he would have even for a daughter. He and Umetsubo moved the most talented, refined and attractive women in their service over to Kaoru's apartments to ensure that he would enjoy living with them in comfort and style, and they thought of him as someone who had to be shown special consideration. Indeed, Reizei lavished as much attention on Kaoru as on his only child, the First Princess born of his Kokiden Consort, the daughter of the late Tō no Chūjō.² It was not clear to others why he was so solicitous to Kaoru—perhaps he was motivated by his high regard for Umetsubo, which deepened with each passing year.

Kaoru's mother was now entirely devoted to the quiet pursuit of her religious practices. Every month she participated in special rites for invoking the Holy Name; twice annually she commissioned the Rite of the Eight Lectures; and she had other solemn services performed on various occasions throughout the year. Otherwise, she was idle, and as her son was busy going back and forth between Reizei's palace and her Sanjō villa, she gradually grew dependent on him, thinking of him more as a father than a son—an attitude that bothered Kaoru, who found his mother a little pathetic. Both Reizei and His Majesty were constantly summoning him, and the Crown Prince, the Second Prince, and Niou all considered him a close, equal companion and made sure to include him in all of their playful pursuits. He was so busy, in fact, that he sometimes wished he could divide himself up and be in more than one place at the same time.

From time to time he heard whispers and faint reports that made him question his lineage, but there was no one with whom he could speak to confirm or dispel those rumors—if his mother ever found out he suspected the truth, she would have been mortified—and so his doubts were constantly gnawing at him. *What really happened? Who is my real father? Did I do something in some past life that I should be so troubled by doubts in this one? If only I were enlightened like Prince Zengyō,³ who also questioned the circumstances of his birth!* He murmured the following poem to himself:

*How anxious I feel ... why is there no one
For me to ask why it is I was born
Not knowing my beginning or my end*

There was no one there to reply. Whenever something happened that raised suspicions in his mind, he would obsess over it, bothered by a vague feeling that something must be wrong with him and worried that the circumstances of his life were somehow abnormal.

My mother took her vows and became a nun when she was at the height of her glory, he reflected. Was she really so motivated by sincere faith and devotion that she would make such a drastic decision to follow the path of the Buddha? Something must have happened to her, some unexpected disturbance that made her weary of the world. Is it really credible to believe that her secret never got out, that no one knows the truth? I suppose no one is forthcoming because they think that they must keep the matter secret. Mother is at her devotions all the time, mornings and evenings, and yet, given a woman's natural vanity and laxness, it's unlikely that she'll ever be able to polish the pure dewdrops on the undefiled lotus into a jewel of salvation.⁴ I hesitate to even think about the five susceptibilities⁵ that all women face on the path to Buddhahood. I want to help her achieve enlightenment so that she may find salvation in the next life.

He would speculate about Kashiwagi, wondering if the man he had heard so many rumors about had died in anguish. He became so caught up in his wish to meet Kashiwagi in some future life that he lost interest in his own coming-of-age ceremony. Of course, he could hardly have refused to go through with such an important event, but no matter how much the court showed deference to him, no matter how dazzlingly impressive he looked, he came to regard the world with a detached, jaded indifference.

His Majesty was the cloistered Third Princess's older brother. He had a close relationship with her and was thus very sympathetic to Kaoru. The Akashi Empress also continued to regard him warmly, just as she did when he was being raised alongside her own children at the Rokujō estate, where they all used to play together. She remembered what her father said to her: "He was born so late in my life, it pains me to know I will not be there for him when he grows up." Taking those words to heart, she felt that she could never dismiss or ignore Kaoru. Genji's son, the Minister of the Right, also thought the young man was special and did all he could for him.

In the old days, Genji had been called the Radiant Prince and was his father's favorite, but he also faced the jealous enmity of others and had no support from his mother's side. Still, he was a man of good judgment, discretion and calm disposition. He was mindful not to give offense to anyone at the court, and he did what he could to modestly tone down his peerless radiance so that he was not quite so conspicuous. His strength of character allowed him to emerge unscathed from the ordeal of his exile, which brought such terrible disorder to the state.

Later, that same strength was evident in his determination not to neglect his religious practices in preparing for the next life. Though he may have seemed unconcerned and nonchalant toward his devotions, he was in fact always reasonable and farsighted about such things.

In contrast, Kaoru achieved a surfeit of honors and favors while he was still very young, and his upbringing gave him an exceptional sense of pride and self-confidence—a feeling that he didn’t need anyone else. And, truth be told, there was something extraordinary about him—it seemed as if he had been destined by his karma to be an avatar, the very incarnation of a deity who would reside in this world for but a short time. It was difficult to pinpoint exactly what it was about his face or his bearing that made him seem so superior—in fact, there was no one thing about him that stood out as particularly handsome. But, as I noted, there was something about him that made people feel humble in his presence—was it his rare grace and refinement, or was it the workings of his spirit, which seemed to have nothing in common with the mass of humanity?

Miraculously, wherever he was, whatever he was doing, Kaoru had about him a fragrance unlike any scent of this world, one that wafted all around him on a following breeze, creating the impression of a perfume that truly carried a hundred paces. Any other young man who was so appealing might have been inclined to always dress up in the finest robes, but Kaoru was especially careful to dress so as not to call attention to himself. He thus found it troublesome that even when he withdrew behind something to stay out of sight, he couldn’t remain hidden for long before his fragrance gave him away. He rarely if ever scented his robes, but he didn’t have to, since the clothes in his chests absorbed his indescribable fragrance. If his sleeves just barely brushed up against the blossoms of the plum trees in the garden,⁶ his scent would mingle with theirs and intoxicate many whose sleeves were dampened by the spring rain dripping from those branches.⁷ If he plucked a sprig of mistflowers left neglected in the autumn fields, their fading scent would take on his fragrance from the breeze that trailed after him.⁸

Because Kaoru was suffused with this mysterious essence, which everyone found so wondrously strange,⁹ Niou, who was by nature highly competitive, went out of his way to scent his clothes with the finest perfumes. He worked constantly mornings and nights mixing various formulas. In the spring, he would make use of the plum blossoms in the garden. In the autumn, he would shun both the maidenflower, which others praise so highly,¹⁰ and the dew-covered bush clover, which so appeals to the stag looking for a mate;¹¹ instead, he’d opt to use chrysanthemums, which pay no heed to old age,¹² or mistflowers, with their

fading fragrance, or the humble-looking burnet—all of which he would intentionally keep until they were completely withered by the frost. Niou exhibited such a passionate fondness for making perfumes that he was considered by some at the court to be rather foppish, self-absorbed and decadent. When Genji was his age, he never gave himself over to a single obsession like this.

Kaoru, the Minamoto Middle Captain, made frequent visits to Prince Niou's residence. They were competitive even when it came to performing music, always trying to outdo each other on their flutes. As companions, however, they were on close, friendly terms. Of course, people at the court, as is their wont, would gossip about them, referring to them by the ridiculously overblown sobriquets of His Perfumed Minister of War and the Fragrant Middle Captain.

During this period, a number of distinguished lords who had attractive daughters did their best to interest these young men in accepting a proposal of marriage. Niou would respond with seductive letters inquiring after those young ladies he thought might be most attractive in an effort to learn more about their looks and personalities. None of them ever caught his fancy, however, and his heart remained set on Reizei's daughter, the First Princess. *If only I could have her*, he mused. *She would be ideal!* The mother of the First Princess, the former Kokiden Consort, came from a most distinguished family and was astonishingly refined and accomplished. By all accounts, the First Princess was just as remarkable in appearance and demeanor, and as he learned more details from the ladies-in-waiting who were close to her, his desire only increased.

Kaoru had a deep sense of the insipid nature of mundane affairs, and he was convinced that any attachment to a woman would create lingering desires and make it hard to abandon this world. He was wary of troublesome entanglements and gave up even thinking about romantic relationships. One wonders, of course, if his saintly attitude was merely a reflection of his inexperience, since he had never lost his heart to anyone. At the same time, it was impossible to conceive of him ever forcing himself on a woman without the consent of the lady's parents. The year he turned nineteen, he was promoted to Consultant at the third rank while still holding his title as Middle Captain. By virtue of the favor conferred on him by His Majesty and the Akashi Empress, his reputation now put him in the extraordinary position of having to show deference to no one, despite being a commoner. Still, in his mind he was troubled by doubts about his background and was so sensitive to the poignant sorrows of this fleeting world that he hardly ever followed his heart's desires or engaged in sensual pleasures. He was calm and deliberate in every aspect of his life, and so naturally people came to think of him as mature and sober.

Because Kaoru lived in Reizei's palace and was familiar with the surroundings, he had many opportunities to see and hear things related to the First Princess, the woman Niou had grown more and more attached to over the years. *She's just as extraordinary as people say*, Kaoru thought. *She's beautiful, has exceptional demeanor ... perfect in every way. All things being equal, if I could marry this sort of woman, then life would certainly be a pleasure.*

Reizei, who otherwise was always welcoming of Kaoru, made an exception in the case of his daughter and kept the young man as far away from her as he could. For his part, Kaoru felt that Reizei's caution was perfectly reasonable. He knew it would cause great trouble if he tried to have an affair with the First Princess, and so he made no attempt to force himself on her. He realized that if he were to let his emotions suddenly rule his head the outcome would be disastrous for them both, and so he never approached her as a suitor.

Once Kaoru achieved a lofty reputation in the eyes of the court, women who received even the most trivial note from him were prepared to set aside all reserve and yield to him. As a result, he found himself calling on many houses and engaging in numerous passing affairs. He behaved carefully and remained detached, skillfully beguiling his women without ever making any grand promises or commitments.

A man who behaves in such an evasive manner can be irritating, but, in his case, the women who were attracted to him did all they could to get closer—some even moved to the Sanjō residence to attend his mother, the cloistered Third Princess. To an outsider, Kaoru's aloof attitude toward them may have seemed cruel, but to the women concerned, the pain of loneliness caused by his indifference was still preferable to giving up all hope for a relationship. There were many women whose status was much too high to be serving at the Sanjō villa, but they put up with it in hopes of even a momentary fling. To be sure, he was kind and considerate, a man of splendid looks and character, and those women who knew him were willing to deceive themselves and overlook his aloofness.

"So long as my mother is alive," Kaoru declared, "it is my duty to always be there to look after her." The Minister of the Right, who had been thinking of giving one of his many daughters to Kaoru and another to Niou, could not bring himself to raise the subject with either of them at this time—especially after hearing Kaoru's declaration and learning of Niou's infatuation with the First Princess. Genji's son was aware that the matches he was pondering would not be considered all that attractive by the court—marriages between close relatives who were familiar with one another simply did not bring the novelty and interest of marriages between unrelated houses—but as he racked his brain trying to

come up with prospective grooms, he realized that he had no idea where to find young men comparable to these two.

His youngest daughter, born of the Principal Handmaid, seemed more beautiful and accomplished than the daughters of his distinguished wife, Kumoinokari. The girl's talents and training left nothing to be desired, and it pained the Minister to think that the court would look down on her because of her mother's status. He sent her to the Rokujō estate to be trained by his other wife, the Second Princess, who had no children of her own and was lonely.

I won't have to do or say anything overtly, he told himself. *Once the two young men learn about her, they'll definitely be interested. After all, any man of good taste and judgment in women would certainly find her attractive.* With such calculations in mind, he did not lock his youngest daughter away like some precious treasure, but encouraged her to develop a fondness for charming, stylishly modern entertainments. He furnished her quarters lavishly, adding many alluring touches that would be sure to tempt all possible suitors.

Now, this year the banquet that followed the archery contest at the palace, which was a customary part of the New Year festivities, was to be held at the Rokujō estate. The Minister of the Right made elaborate preparations, since he wanted to make sure that all the princes of the blood, including Niou, would attend. As it turned out, all of His Majesty's adult sons were present on the day of the contest. The young men he had sired with the Akashi Empress looked especially noble and handsome. For all their splendor, however, Prince Niou, the Minister of War, stood out and was a cut above them all. Prince Hitachi, His Majesty's fourth son by a concubine, did not look as distinguished as the others—though perhaps it was awareness of his lineage that made him appear slightly inferior to onlookers.

The Left Palace Guard won the contest going away, as they did almost every year, and as a result, the event ended earlier than expected. Genji's son, the Minister, who had acted as Commander for the Left side, was now preparing to withdraw to the Rokujō estate. He invited Prince Niou, Prince Hitachi, and the Fifth Prince—another son of the Akashi Empress—to ride with him in his carriage.

It was customary for the defeated team to withdraw first, but when the Minister spotted Kaoru, who had been a member of the Right side, leaving quietly, he detained him, saying, "Will you not join me in seeing the imperial princes off?"

Kaoru accepted the invitation to join the procession, which included many senior nobles and officials as well as several of the Minister's sons—the Commander of the Guards, the Acting Middle Counselor, the Major Controller

of the Right, and others. Soon, the assembled party was heading for the Rokujō estate. The excursion took some time. A light snow was falling along the way, and the twilight had a fabulous glow. It was the hour of day when the sound of flutes is most charming; as it so happened, by the time the procession arrived, music was already playing. Was there any other place—even Buddha's paradise—where an occasion of this type could bring such pleasure to the heart?

To honor the winning side, the Middle and Lesser Captains sat in a row facing south along the south aisle room of the main hall. Opposite them, facing north, sat the princes and high-ranking officials who would attend them this evening. Wine and refreshments were served, and the atmosphere grew livelier as the breeze stirred by the twirling, winglike sleeves of the men dancing "The Lover I Seek"¹³ carried in the scent of the nearby plum blossoms that were just beginning to bloom resplendently in the garden. As the scent of the blossoms drifted past Kaoru, it mingled with his own to create an even more intense fragrance that was mysterious and sublime.

The women at the party peeked out through their blinds and offered words of praise: "How unfortunate and irritating that it is too dark of an early spring evening to see clearly, but that fragrance ... how incomparable!"¹⁴

Genji's son glanced over at Kaoru. The young man was truly exquisite, looking even more handsome than usual—his figure composed, his demeanor modest, his manners perfect. "Come now, you Captain of the Right," the Minister called out. "Lend us your voice as well! Your side lost, so you're not just a guest, you know!"

And with that, in a perfect tone that was neither too dull nor too dynamic, Kaoru sang the line, "Where the gods descend."¹⁵

¹ Although the title sounds imposing, the posting was largely honorary in nature and was always held by princes of the blood (e.g., by Murasaki's father, Prince Hyōbu, and Genji's half brother, Prince Sochinomiya).

² This is the first mention of Tō no Chūjō's death.

³ Some texts give this name as Prince Kui (Kui Taishi). The reference here seems to be to Rāhula (*Ragora* in Japanese), a prince who was the son of the historical Buddha. According to some accounts, Rāhula was conceived on the eve of the Buddha's Renunciation, but was not born until the Buddha achieved his enlightenment six years later. The miraculous nature of Rāhula's birth naturally raised questions about his paternity.

⁴ *Kokinshū* 165 (Bishop Henjō): "Though the lotus leaves are undefiled by the muddy water, why is it that they deceive us into thinking the dewdrops clinging to them are jewels."

⁵ Kaoru is circumspect in talking about his mother here. The "susceptibilities" that he refers to here are the "five hindrances" mentioned in the *Lotus Sutra* that can cause a person to lose focus and concentration:

sensual desire, ill will (especially jealousy), sloth, restlessness, and skepticism. Women were thought to fall prey to these vices more easily than men.

⁶ *Kokinshū* 33 (Anonymous): “It is their fragrance more than their color that so enchants me ... whose sleeves were they, the ones that brushed against the plum tree at my abode?”

⁷ *Kokinrokujō* 600 [also *Ise shū* 335] (Ise): “Because the plum blossoms themselves praise your enchanting fragrance, this morning I dampened my sleeves with raindrops from a branch I broke off.”

⁸ *Kokinshū* 241 (Sosei): “Whose fragrance do I smell? Someone has hung his purple trousers over mistflowers in the autumn fields.” Sosei’s poem plays on the dual meaning of *fujibakama* (“purple trousers” and “mistflowers”). Trousers were scented with mistflowers, but in this case it is the reverse.

⁹ *Kokinshū* 35 (Anonymous): “After drawing near the plum blossoms but briefly, my robes were infused with a scent that people may consider suspicious.”

¹⁰ *Kokinshū* 226 (Bishop Henjō): “I plucked you only because others praise you so highly ... do not tell them, O maidenflower, that I have broken my vows and fallen.”

¹¹ *Goshūishū* 284 (Ōnakatomi no Yoshinobu): “Drawn to the frost-covered bush clover, the belling stag cries out ... do the flowers make him think of his mate?” Bush clover was associated with feminine qualities; thus it was thought to be attractive to a stag in mating season.

¹² *Kokinrokujō* 194 (Ki no Tsurayuki): “I have heard that chrysanthemums, which pay no heed to the fact that everyone ages, may live a hundred years.” Chrysanthemums, which bloom late, were associated with long life.

¹³ This dance (*Motomego* in Japanese) is an *Azuma* song, part of the repertory of native songs from the Eastern Provinces. It is also mentioned in the *Wakana* chapter, Part 2.

¹⁴ *Kokinshū* 41 (Ōshikōchi no Mitsune): “In the dark of an early spring evening, the color of the plum blossoms is hidden from sight ... but can their scent remain hidden as well?” Alluded to earlier in the *Wakana* chapter, Part 1.

¹⁵ The line is from a popular song, “My Eight Maidens” (*Yaotome*), which was usually performed right after an *Azuma* dance. One version of the lyrics is as follows: “Eight maidens, my eight maidens, arise, arise and go to the sacred space where the gods descend.” Another version goes: “Eight maidens, my eight maidens, arise, arise and go to the High Plain of Heaven where the gods dwell.” In either case, the narrative goes out of its way to associate Kaoru with the incarnation of a divine being.

XLIII

Kōbai

Red Plum

[The phrase in the original that starts this chapter gives the impression that the story continues from roughly the same time as the previous chapter. However, there is in fact a four-year gap in the narrative. The transition from Genji's generation to the generation of Kaoru and Niou takes several chapters to complete, and during the transition, which includes the following chapter, Takekawa, the narrative shifts back and forth in time.]

In those days, the Azechi Major Counselor was Kōbai, the second son of the late Tō no Chūjō and younger brother of Kashiwagi. From the time he came to serve at the palace as a page he exhibited a precocious, outgoing personality. As he rose through the ranks over the years, admiration for him at the court steadily increased, for he conducted himself most properly and enjoyed His Majesty's highest esteem. After his principal wife died, he married the favorite daughter of Tamakazura's husband, the late Chancellor.¹ When Kōbai's second wife was a young girl, she had had to endure the pain of leaving the house of her father, whom she considered her "beloved pillar of cypress." Her grandfather, Prince Hyōbu, then married her off to the late Prince Sochinomiya. Kōbai began secretly visiting her after Sochinomiya died, and once a decent period of time had passed, he no longer felt constrained about openly acknowledging her as his principal wife. His first wife had given him only two daughters. Dissatisfied and lonely, he prayed to the gods and to Buddha that his second wife would give him a son, which she did. She had given Prince Sochinomiya one daughter, and Kōbai welcomed the princess into his family, treating her no differently than any of his other children. The attendants who served the girls, however, were driven by unattractive motives, and on occasion their competitiveness and jealousy led to unpleasant incidents. Nonetheless, Kōbai's wife, being cheerful and modern in outlook, took it all in stride. Further, because she listened calmly whenever she

heard someone say anything that might hurt her daughter, she always thought better than to respond in kind. As a result, her household escaped criticism, and she came off looking admirable.

When the three daughters reached maturity, each in her own turn, the prescribed coming-of-age ceremony at which they donned their first train was held. Kōbai widened the main hall of his villa to eight pillars to create seven openings along the front facade.² He and the oldest daughter occupied the chambers facing south; the middle daughter took up residence in the quarters that faced west; and his stepdaughter was given the rooms facing east. In general, a woman who loses her father, as Kōbai's stepdaughter did, faces serious difficulties in society. However, she had received a considerable inheritance from both sides of her family and was able to conduct household ceremonies as well as her everyday affairs in an elegant and aristocratic style. Her situation gave every appearance of being ideal.

As a rule, when word gets out that a young lady is being raised with special care, many suitors will show up one after another. In the case of Kōbai's daughters, there were even hints of interest from His Majesty and the Crown Prince.

His Majesty has the Akashi Empress, Kōbai reflected, and no other woman, no matter what her merits, could possibly measure up to her. Even so, what good would it do to just humbly assume my daughters are inferior and have no prospects at the palace? Then there is the Crown Prince ... the daughter of the Minister of the Right is already in his service and appears to have no rivals for his affection. It will be difficult to compete with her, but does simply saying my daughters will have a hard time make it so? I truly believe that my daughters are superior to others. How dissatisfied would I feel, then, if I were to give up on my dream of sending them into service at the palace? After giving the matter careful consideration, he presented his oldest daughter to the Crown Prince. She was seventeen or eighteen at the time, aglow with youthful beauty.

Next, he turned his attention to his middle daughter. Noble and refined in appearance, she had a calm, reserved personality and was so charming that Kōbai thought it would be a shame to give her to a commoner. *If only Prince Niou would be inclined to take her*, he thought. As it turned out, whenever Niou met Kōbai's young son, who was serving as a page at court, he would summon the boy and keep him close by his side to be a companion in his leisure time. The boy had wit and a sparkling personality, and the expression in his eyes and the look of his forehead suggested a deep intelligence and future promise. "You should tell your father, the Major Counselor," Niou said, "that I'm not content seeing only the little brother."

When the boy told his father what Niou had said, Kōbai smiled, convinced that he had done the right thing by holding back his middle daughter. “I would much rather have my daughter, who is certainly very attractive, go to Niou than send her off to the palace where she will be considered second best,” he declared. “If I could have him take up residence here as my son-in-law, I could serve him to my heart’s content, and his princely looks and character would surely extend my life.” In the meantime, he was hurrying to complete the preparations to send his oldest daughter to the Crown Prince, which was his first priority. In his heart, he secretly prayed to the patron god of the Fujiwara clan, the deity at Kasuga: *I beseech you: let my daughter one day be Empress so that I may realize in my generation a triumph that will bring consolation to the spirit of my late father. He was so bitterly disappointed over the failure of my sister, the Kokiden Consort, to achieve that lofty position.*

With that prayer in mind, he sent his daughter on to the palace. Courtiers reported that she was flourishing and enjoyed the Crown Prince’s favor, but Kōbai’s wife was convinced that their daughter would need someone who could give her proper support and advice during the period when she was adjusting to palace life. Thus, she accompanied her child and looked after her with great compassion and consideration.

After his wife and daughter left, Kōbai found his residence rather tedious. His second daughter, who resided on the west side of the main hall, felt lonely and despondent, for she had grown accustomed to her older sister’s company. Meanwhile, his stepdaughter, the Princess who resided on the east side of the main hall, had never been unfriendly or aloof toward either of her stepsisters, but had spent night after night staying in the same room with them, practicing various arts and skills together. Indeed, when it came to trivial diversions such as Go or backgammon, Kōbai’s two daughters considered the Princess their mentor. Still, the stepdaughter was rather shy and retiring, and she rarely if ever met her mother face-to-face. Such modesty was not an especially endearing trait, but her shyness was not excessive, and her ability to delight and charm was certainly superior to that of other young women.

What with the move of his wife and daughter to the palace and his interest in matching his second daughter with Niou, Kōbai felt guilty, worried that he had been so preoccupied with his own family’s affairs that he was not adequately looking after the interests of his stepdaughter. “If you have an appropriate match for her in mind,” he told his wife, “please let me know what you’ve decided. I want to offer her the same support I give my own daughters.”

“It would seem that the girl has given no serious thought at all to such worldly matters,” his wife replied, “and I would feel bad were we to force her to marry

someone who was not quite appropriate. I'll leave it to her karmic destiny and plan to look after her for as long as I'm alive. Although I'm deeply worried about what will become of her after I'm gone, I just hope that if she abandons the world and becomes a nun, she'll be able to live her life without becoming an object of laughter and derision." She wept as she spoke of her daughter's flawless character.

Kōbai made no distinctions among his children. He treated them all with fatherly devotion. He was nonetheless curious about his stepdaughter's appearance. "It's rather cold of you to hide yourself away," he grumbled resentfully. Sometimes he would go around stealthily, peeping into her chambers in hopes of getting a good look at her—but he never caught even a passing glimpse. "While your mother is away at the palace," he told her, "I really should be calling on you in her place. Yet you treat me differently, as if I were a complete stranger ... it's unpleasant." He was sitting in front of her blinds, and so she replied to him in a voice soft and faint. Judging from the sound of her voice and from her demeanor, he imagined that her looks and dress were refined and attractive, and he was touched by what he could judge of her personality. He was confident that his own daughters were inferior to no one, but now he was more eager than ever to see his stepdaughter. *Can it be that the Princess is actually superior to my daughters? It's considerations like this that make court society, with its wide range of relationships, so difficult and complicated. No matter how much I might want to believe there's no one like my own children, I suppose it's inevitable that a better woman will always appear on the scene.*

"I've been very busy in recent months," he continued, "and it seems ages since I last heard you play the koto. My younger daughter over in the chambers on the west side is devoted to the *biwa* lute, but unfortunately I doubt she'll ever master the instrument. It's actually quite painful listening to her fumbling and faltering. Since the two of you reside in the same hall, would you mind giving her some lessons? Old man that I am, I myself never mastered an instrument ... though back in the glory days when musical performances were unsurpassed in their virtuosity, I was able just by listening to acquire some small ability myself and to achieve an adequate appreciation of all the instruments. Although you don't perform in casual, intimate settings, whenever I hear you play the *biwa* lute it brings back memories of those times, since your late father was so adept on the instrument. Nowadays the Minister of the Right is the only one who carries on the legacy of his late father, the Radiant Prince Genji. Some people—men like Kaoru³ or Prince Niou—are extremely blessed by their special karmic destiny, which makes them the equals of their forebears in all respects, and they are especially devoted to musical performance. However, the tones they produce

with their techniques on the plectrum are weak and flaccid and in no way match the vigorous style of the Minister of the Right. Your playing, on the other hand, strikes me as being very similar to the Minister's. The *biwa* sounds best when the left hand has a light, quiet touch on the strings. Also, the changes in tone produced with the plectrum sound most fresh and lively when the strings are being held down on the frets. This is typical of a woman's style of playing, and it is most delightful to hear. So, come now ... will you not play for me?" He turned toward the attendants. "Bring your mistress a *biwa*!"

Her attendants were accustomed to his presence, and few bothered to keep themselves out of Kōbai's sight. However, there was one very young lady of noble birth who thought that she should not expose herself and who willfully remained in the interior where she could not be seen. "Even your women are aloof with me," he muttered in irritation. "It's very unsettling!"

His young son arrived from the palace. The lad was wearing everyday court robes, and his hair was not done up in loops at the sides but hung loose in a most charming fashion. Kōbai found him much more attractive now than when he was dressed for formal service. He gave the boy a message to deliver to his wife, who was residing in the Reikeiden. "Tell her that I entrust her with looking after my daughter and will not be able to make it to the palace tonight. Say it's because I am not feeling well." He then added, "Do play the flute a little for me ... you might just be asked to perform in front of His Majesty, and it could prove terribly embarrassing if you're not prepared. Your playing is still rather immature." Smiling, he had his son play a tune in the lively *sō* mode. The performance was quite pleasant. "Your playing is getting less intolerable all the time. No doubt it's because you've been practicing in concert with the Princess here. The two of you should play for me." She looked uncomfortable at being prompted this way, but went ahead and performed skillfully, if briefly, with the boy, plucking the strings with her fingers. Kōbai whistled in accompaniment in a sonorous, easy tone.

A lovely red plum tree blooming near the eaves on the east side of the main hall gave off an enchanting fragrance. "Those blossoms in the garden seem to have an elegant disposition. Since Prince Niou is at the palace, you should break off a branch and take it to him. Only someone who is sensitive would appreciate them."⁴ Kōbai then added, "Back in the days when the Radiant Prince was a Major Captain still in the full bloom of youth and I was just a boy, roughly the same age as my son here, I had the honor of serving him closely. That is one of my fondest memories. Everyone at the court considers Niou and Kaoru extraordinary gentlemen whose fortunate destiny is to enjoy the lavish praise of others. However, they cannot compare to Genji, who was truly unique. Of

course, my opinion is colored by my personal feelings, is it not? Even average people like myself choke up with grief when they recall his radiance. That's why I imagine that it must be agonizing for those who were truly close to him to live on after his death." Kōbai was genuinely affected by the memory, for he broke down in tears.

He had the boy break off a branch and was about to have him hurry back to Prince Niou. Was it because he found the moment hard to bear? "Ahh, what am I to do? Prince Niou is the only remaining memento of the man I was so fond of long ago. They say that after the passing of the Buddha, one of his disciples, Ananda, memorized his master's teachings so well that he too began to glow with a radiant light. The other holy disciples were amazed, thinking that the Buddha himself had returned to them. I may be making a nuisance of myself by sending this presumptuous message to Prince Niou, but he, like Ananda, may perhaps shine his fragrant light into the darkness where I have wandered lost since Genji's radiance was extinguished."

*Moved by its own feelings, the breeze wafts the scent
Of the plum tree in my garden ... the warbler
Will surely seek out its branches, will it not⁵*

He wrote this poem in a youthful hand on crimson paper, wrapped the note up inside some folding paper his young son carried with him, and then sent it on its way. The boy, who in his innocent mind was eagerly hoping to become a close companion of Prince Niou, rushed back to the palace.

He arrived as Niou was withdrawing from the apartment just off the Seiryōden that the Akashi Empress used when attending His Majesty. Spotting Kōbai's son among the crowd of courtiers who had come to escort him away, he spoke to the lad. "Why did you leave the palace so early yesterday? When did you get back?"

"I regret having left so early, but when I learned that my lord was still here, I hurried back as fast as I could." The boy's manner was still immature, but he was practiced at this sort of thing all the same.

"You really should come visit me now and then ... not here, but someplace where we can relax, like my Nijō villa. Young people seem to enjoy gathering there for one reason or another." He ordered the boy to come with him, and they stepped away from the others to talk. The courtiers who had come to meet him kept their distance, and when they had withdrawn and it was quiet again, Niou continued their conversation. "So, you've been granted a little time away by the Crown Prince? It looked as though he was going to keep you with him all the

time ... though it must be awkward for you now that your older sister has by all accounts completely captured his affections.”

“His insistence that I be on call constantly is difficult to deal with ... I would have preferred being in your service,” the boy replied. He sat there and said nothing more.

“Well, your oldest sister certainly cut me off ... she evidently doesn’t consider me mature or respectable enough. I guess her attitude is reasonable, since she ended up with my older brother, but it still rankles. Try to find out—discreetly, mind you—what the Princess who lives on the east side of your father’s main hall thinks about me, since we both come from the same old-fashioned Minamoto lineage.”

Kōbai’s son took this request as the perfect opening to present the plum branch he had brought from his father’s villa. Niou smiled and gazed at the enchanting blossoms. He found it impossible to set them aside. “What a shame this comes after I’ve already expressed my resentments ...”⁶ The shape of the branch, the clusters of blossoms, the color and the scent were all extraordinary. “People say the red plum, which imparts a glow to a garden, is all gorgeous hues and lacks the fragrance of the white plum ... but this tree blooms with spectacular color *and* elegant scent.” Because he favored plum blossoms, Niou was always praising them.

“I take it you’re on duty this evening. In that case, you really should stay with me.” He kept the boy and would not let him go to the Crown Prince. The plum blossoms were shamed by the elegant scent of Niou’s sleeves, and the boy’s youthful heart was thrilled and delighted to be lying down so near the Perfumed Prince.

“Why wasn’t the mistress of these plum blossoms sent to serve the Crown Prince?”

“I don’t know ... I was simply told that the blossoms were meant for someone sensitive enough to appreciate them.”

Upon hearing that comment, Niou assumed that the Major Counselor must have been thinking of his second daughter when he sent the plum blossoms. Niou’s heart, however, was set on a woman from a completely different household, and so his response was ambiguous. The next morning, just as Kōbai’s son was leaving, Niou offhandedly composed the following:

*Were I one who could be lured by the scent
Of plum blossoms, would I allow reports
Of them to drift by on the passing breeze*

He added, “From now on, I want you to deal with things discreetly, without the meddling of those old men—your father and the Minister of the Right.” He repeated his instructions several times.

Kōbai’s son now thought more highly of the Princess and felt closer to her. Even though his father’s two daughters were also half sisters to him, they had always treated him as a full sibling and allowed him to see their faces. In contrast, the Princess had a genuinely calm, dignified demeanor that struck his boyish heart as ideal for a noblewoman, and he wanted to do all he could to help her. His oldest sister was flourishing in her service to the Crown Prince, and though he hoped all of his sisters would find the same degree of success, he thought it regrettable that the one who descended from the imperial bloodline should be in such an unsatisfactory situation. He went about hoping to find a way to bring her closer to Prince Niou, which is why the opportunity provided by the plum blossoms had made him so happy.

The boy relayed Niou’s reply to his father, who grumbled about it.

“What an irritating attitude! He hears reports about how the Minister of the Right and I criticize him for being too fond of elegant and amorous pursuits, and so whenever he’s in our presence, he pretends to be ever so serious and sober and tries to tone down his proclivities ... it’s actually quite amusing. Still, he has fully demonstrated that he’s capable of playing the refined ladies’ man, which is why forced shows of sincerity on his part are not very becoming.”

He sent his son off with another message:

*If the blossoms here were to brush against those sleeves
Already redolent with your noble fragrance
How the fame of their ineffable scent would spread*

“Perhaps I am being too suggestive. Please forgive me.” He spoke in a serious tone.

When Niou received the message, he was amused and smiled wryly: *He’s using all his wiles to try to get me to take his daughter.* Still, he had to admit that his curiosity was piqued.

*Were I to search for the house that sends forth
The scent of plum blossoms, will I not risk
Censure for being too fond of their hues*

Kōbai found it exasperating that Niou continued with his evasive replies. Kōbai’s wife withdrew from the palace. When she had an opportunity to

speak about what was happening at the court, she told her husband, “Our son spent the night with Prince Niou, and when he returned no one gave much thought to his enchanting fragrance. The Crown Prince, however, noticed at once and surmised that he had stayed over in Niou’s apartment. It was delightful to see his consternation when he grumbled, ‘Now I understand why he will have nothing to do with me.’ By the way, did you send a letter off to Prince Niou? I didn’t see our son carrying one.”

“Yes I did,” Kōbai replied. “Because Niou is fond of plum blossoms, I sent him a branch from the tree near the veranda on the east side—the one that’s blooming so magnificently. The Prince’s own fragrance is so exceptional that not even a lady who’s preparing robes for an important ceremony could scent her clothes more stylishly. Of course, Kaoru has no need to scent his robes in such an elegant fashion. There’s no one like him in the world. It’s uncanny, really, and makes one curious to know just what he did in previous lives to deserve such recompense. Anyway, plum trees may all share the same name, but what matters, what makes one admire them, are the roots from which they spring. It’s quite natural that a man like Niou would appreciate this tree of ours.” Even when he was speaking about blossoms, he managed to bring the Prince into the conversation.

Kōbai’s stepdaughter, the Princess, was mature enough to understand the ways of the world, and so she was fully aware of the sorts of things that went on and certainly did not ignore what she had seen and heard. Nonetheless, she had no wish to marry and assume the conventional role of wife simply for the sake of appearances.

Perhaps because courtiers are driven by the desire to gain proximity to the man of the moment who has power and influence, there were many who, with stylishly modern gestures, did everything they could to pursue of Kōbai’s daughters by his principal wife. The situation with the Princess, however, was completely different. She was quiet and withdrawn in all respects, and when Niou heard that she was the ideal match for him, he decided that he must have her. He kept Kōbai’s son by his side constantly and had him deliver secret messages. Kōbai’s wife felt sorry for her husband, who was eager to give his second daughter to Niou and ready to accept a marriage proposal immediately should he detect any interest on Niou’s part. “Nothing will come of this,” she said. “Despite my husband’s expectations, Niou has been sending all of these letters to *my* daughter, trying hard to win her. Alas, the Prince is pursuing someone with no inclination to marry.”

Niou received not one reply to all his letters, but the Princess’s refusal to acknowledge his interest only made him more determined. He would not give up

his courtship in defeat. For her part, Kōbai's wife felt there was no reason not to encourage Prince Niou. In looks and breeding he was ideal, and she very much wanted to have a chance to serve him as her son-in-law, since he was a young man with a glorious future ahead of him. Still, there were times when she worried about his pursuit of her daughter. After all, he was promiscuous and furtively called on numerous women. He was especially attracted to the second daughter of the Eighth Prince and made frequent trips to her residence in Uji. Kōbai's wife grew increasingly concerned about Niou's fickle heart and his wanton behavior, and eventually she gave up thinking of him as a serious match for her daughter. Even so, she would from time to time take it on herself, presumptuous though it was, to write replies to him secretly on her daughter's behalf.

¹ Although the rise of Tamakazura's husband is noted in the *Wakana* chapter, Part 2, when he is promoted from Major Captain of the Left to Minister of the Right, his appointment to ultimate power as Chancellor is mentioned here for the first time (as is his death).

² It was a common feature of *shinden* architecture to have five openings created by six pillars on the veranda. The aisle room would normally have a lattice shutter or blind to block the line of sight through those openings. Seven openings was obviously a mark of higher rank. A large number of the buildings at the imperial palace had nine openings (ten pillars).

³ Kaoru is identified here in the original as the Minamoto Middle Counselor. The temporal jump in the narrative explains why no mention of this promotion was made in the previous chapter. This promotion, and other matters, will be explained in subsequent chapters, which fill in some of the missing pieces. As it turns out, when the sequence of events in the narrative is put in strict chronological order, Kōbai is a Minister by this time, even though the text mistakenly refers to him as the Azechi Major Counselor. Such inconsistencies are to be expected in a text copied by hand, but they are particularly noticeable in these transitional chapters.

⁴ *Kokinshū* 38 (Ki no Tomonori): “To whom should I show them if not you ... only a person who is sensitive to the color and fragrance of plum blossoms can appreciate them” (alluded to earlier in the *Umegae* chapter).

⁵ *Kokinshū* 13 (Ki no Tomonori): “I shall attach the fragrance of plum blossoms to a message to be carried on the breeze and make it a guide to lure the warbler here.” By the use of allusive variation in this verse, Kōbai makes it clear that he is trying to lure Niou, the warbler, to his second daughter, the fragrant plum tree.

⁶ *Shūishū* 985 (Anonymous): “If even after expressing my resentment I should suffer his neglect, would it not have been better to have wept aloud” (also alluded to earlier in the *Usugumo* chapter).

XLIV

Takekawa

Bamboo River

THE STORY I am now about to tell is not directly related to Genji's descendants. It was passed on to me unsolicited by certain attendants—women much given to gossip, I might add—who stayed on at Tamakazura's household following the death of her husband, the late Chancellor. This story may seem to have no bearing on the tales of those people connected to Murasaki, but the women who told me all of these things were eager to set the record straight. "There are many inaccuracies in the stories we've heard about Genji's family," they asserted, "because some of the older women tend to get things mixed up and have gone about carelessly spreading falsehoods." They seemed very suspicious of the veracity of some of the information, but it is hard for me to say which version is true.

In any case, Tamakazura gave the late Chancellor three sons and two daughters, and he was determined to raise them all carefully, giving them every possible advantage. As the months and years went by, he was impatiently looking forward to seeing them reach adulthood. Sadly, he died before he could realize his ambitions, and his plan to send his daughters into service at the palace vanished like a dream. The Chancellor, who had been a vigorous and dignified man, bequeathed to his heirs a thriving estate of considerable personal wealth, a large store of treasures, and vast landholdings on numerous manors. Yet, for all that, people's loyalties always shift with the times and gravitate toward those who have power at the moment. Thus, as a result of his death, a general change took place and his bustling residence grew deserted and quiet.

Tamakazura had many relatives all throughout court society. Still, as a rule, personal connections among the rich and powerful are seldom close. The late Chancellor had never been an especially likable man, being impulsive and

headstrong by nature, and his dealings with members of his wife's family had been awkward and tense. As a result, Tamakazura was unable to establish a warm relationship with any of them. Of course, Genji's attitude toward her did not change, even after she married; he continued to think of her as his daughter just as he had when she was living at the Rokujō estate. Indeed, because she was mentioned second in his will and testament right after the Akashi Empress, Genji's son, the Minister of the Right, respected his father's last wishes and made sure that he always visited Tamakazura on appropriate occasions.

Each of her sons had celebrated his coming of age and was now an adult, and despite having experienced anxiety and sorrow over the death of their father, they seemed to have made their way in the world successfully on their own. When it came to her daughters, however, the situation was much more complicated. The late Chancellor very much wanted to see his daughters go into service at the imperial palace and made a formal request that his wish be granted. After sufficient time had passed for His Majesty to assume the two daughters had reached womanhood, he inquired after them repeatedly. Tamakazura was anxious and did not know how to respond. By that time, the Akashi Empress had reached an unrivaled position in His Majesty's affections and was so favored that all of the other women in his service were reduced in status and seemingly superfluous. Tamakazura felt that it would be terribly difficult for her daughters to have to struggle just to receive the Emperor's sidelong glance from afar; she did not want them to be viewed as inferior and insignificant.

Meanwhile, Retired Emperor Reizei made a fervent proposal for the older daughter, reminding Tamakazura of his long-held resentment over the disappointment that she had caused him when she did not come to the palace to be his Principal Handmaid. "Of course, now that I'm in my forty-third year, I am much older than I was when I pursued you ... indeed, you will probably consider me too old to be a desirable match for your daughter and dismiss my request. But at least you could think of me as a reliable father for her. That's why I ask you to give her to me."

His petition was so sincere that she could not decide what to do. *What's the best course of action?* she wondered. *Given my unfortunate destiny, it makes me ashamed and humbled that he should think me unpleasant and insolent, even though it was not my intention to reject him. If I send him my daughter, would he change his opinion of me this late in life?*

Her daughters were reportedly quite attractive, and there were many men whose hearts were set on them. One of them was a younger son of the Minister of the Right—a Lesser Captain in the Chamberlain's office born of

Kumoinokari. Favored over his older brothers and given special attention in his upbringing, this young man had a truly delightful personality and was especially ardent in pursuing his courtship. Because Tamakazura was related to the Minister of the Right's sons through the families of both Genji and Tō no Chūjō, she was never standoffish toward them and welcomed them warmly whenever they visited. Still, she found it annoying that the Lesser Captain was always hanging around the residence day and night, cultivating a close relationship with the attendants who waited on her daughters, conveying his hopes and desires to them, and generally making a nuisance of himself. At the same time, he was so infatuated that she felt sorry for him. Kumoinokari sent forth a constant stream of letters pleading his case, as did the Minister of the Right, who wrote on his behalf: "I realize that he is still quite young and lacks a weighty position at court, but please look on his proposal kindly."

Tamakazura had no intention of giving her older daughter to a commoner. She *did* think that the Lesser Captain might be a good match for her younger daughter—once he had risen in rank at the court and was a bit more respectable. The young man, however, was so frighteningly obsessed with the older daughter that he would surely steal her away if his proposal were denied. Tamakazura did not consider such a match entirely inappropriate, but she worried that if the young man did something untoward before her daughter gave her consent, the ensuing gossip would be derisive and damaging. With that concern in mind, she gave a stern admonition to the women who were acting as intermediaries: "Be on your guard and make sure nothing happens between them!" They found her orders burdensome.

Retired Emperor Reizei had a special place in his heart for Kaoru, who had been born of the Third Princess late in Genji's life, and treated him as his own son. Kaoru was about fourteen or fifteen when he was appointed gentleman-in-waiting at the fourth rank,¹ and though he was at an age when he might be expected to still be rather childish, he was instead mature, thoughtful and pleasant. All in all, the signs were clear that this young man had a glorious future ahead of him. Tamakazura held out hopes that he might become her son-in-law and that she would be able to serve him at her residence. Because she lived close to the Third Princess's villa on Sanjō, her sons often brought him home whenever there was some occasion to celebrate or some amusement to pass the time.

The presence of two desirable young ladies prompted the young men who visited Tamakazura's residence to take care to look and act their best. Of all the suitors who strutted about showing off and putting on airs, the Lesser Captain, who always seemed to be loitering about, was by far the most strikingly

handsome, while Kaoru was the very epitome of refined grace, at once appealing and humbling. Indeed, he was the kind of person others naturally tended to treat with special deference. Did they do so because they believed him to be Genji's son? He enthralled the younger attendants, and even Tamakazura noted how splendid he was. She would engage him in relaxed, friendly conversations: "Thinking back on your father's kindness, I am sad and disconsolate now that he is gone. Who am I to look to as a memento of him? His son, the Minister of the Right, is a weighty and dignified figure, and it's almost impossible to meet him without having a good reason to do so." Though she knew that they were not related, she thought of Kaoru as a younger brother. He in turn considered it perfectly proper to visit her residence because they shared a connection through Genji. He never exhibited the wantonness common in the world—in fact, he was so strictly prim and proper that the younger women who served at both his mother's villa and Tamakazura's residence were disappointed and would tease him about his behavior, making him uncomfortable.

During the first few days of the New Year, Tamakazura's half brother Kōbai—the Major Counselor who once sang "Takasago"—paid the customary visit accompanied by the Fujiwara Middle Counselor, who was the oldest son of Tamakazura's late husband and thus brother to Kōbai's wife. Genji's son, the Minister of the Right, also visited, bringing all six of his sons with him. The Minister was flawless in looks and character, a man of the highest reputation. His sons were strikingly handsome, and they enjoyed positions at the court that were much higher than normal for young men of similar ages. They seemed to have no cause at all to feel troubled about anything, and yet the Lesser Captain, who had always been favored by his father, appeared moody and depressed.

The Minister was separated from Tamakazura by a curtain, and they conversed just as they had in the past.

"Unless I have some compelling reason, I cannot visit you very often," the Minister said. "As the years have accumulated and my position constrains me from going out anywhere except the palace, I've grown unaccustomed to visits like this and feel awkward making them. As a result, I simply pass up all those occasions when I might talk with you about the old days. If some need arises, do not hesitate to call on my sons for assistance. I have reminded them that they are to demonstrate just how much they respect and admire you."

"You continue to honor me with your visits, even though I'm now old and no longer a person of any significance," Tamakazura said. "Your kindness makes me realize all the more just how hard it is to ever forget your late father." She then used the opportunity provided by his visit to vaguely hint at the interest Reizei was showing in her older daughter. "I've been thinking the situation over,

trying to decide what to do, and I worry that if she goes into imperial service without proper support, she's likely to suffer for it."

"I understand that you've received inquiries from His Majesty as well," the Minister replied. "Which of the two should you settle on? I wonder. One feels that Reizei, having abdicated so long ago, is indeed well past his prime. And yet, he seems to be as remarkably youthful as ever ... if I had a daughter who was sufficiently well-bred, I would want to send her to him. Unfortunately, none of mine could possibly mingle in such august company. Still, do you really think that the former Kokiden Consort, the mother of the First Princess, would stand for such an arrangement ... she *is* your half sister, after all. Others who've thought of sending their daughters to Reizei all gave up in the end, constrained by her presence."

"As I understand it, the Consort herself is encouraging the proposal," Tamakazura explained. "She has evidently expressed a desire to find comfort and distraction from her quiet, tedious life by looking after my daughter with the same affection as Reizei. Still, I'm not sure how I should take all of this."

After gathering at Tamakazura's residence, the guests were to call on the Third Princess at her Sanjō villa. Apparently, people who had once been close to her father, Suzaku, and those with a connection to Genji still felt they could not neglect their obligation to visit the cloistered Princess. Tamakazura's three sons —a Middle Captain of the Left Guard, a Middle Controller of the Right, and a gentleman-in-waiting—were set to join the Minister's procession, which by this time was becoming quite impressive.

Kaoru called on Tamakazura at dusk, joining the large crowd of mature young gentlemen, each one so exceptionally good-looking that one would be hard-pressed to find a flaw with any of them. Yet, despite the magnificence of the gathering, the young man who had just arrived stood out. It felt as if all eyes were fixed on him, and the young women sang his praises as usual.

"He really is special," one was heard to say.

"I'd really like to see him alongside our young mistress," another added—a remark that made people cringe.

Still, there was no doubting his youthful grace and good looks, and there was nothing in the world to compare with the fragrance he emitted with every little movement he made. One would think that any young lady of refined sensibility, even one who is kept locked away and knows nothing of the world, would certainly recognize just how superior Kaoru was compared to other men.

Tamakazura was in the chapel that she used for meditating, and she asked Kaoru to join her there. He climbed the stairs on the east side² and sat in front of the blinds covering the door. A young plum tree near the veranda was just now

starting to come into bud and a warbler was singing its first song of spring in a quiet, hesitant voice. Because the atmosphere of the setting was so elegant, the attendants began bantering with Kaoru, teasing him in the hope of eliciting a romantic response from the overly serious young man. He remained reserved, however, and said very little in reply. His attitude was annoying, and one of the senior women there, Saishō, composed the following:

*I imagine, if I were to pluck you
That your fragrance would smell even sweeter ...
So show me your hues, you first buds of spring*³

She's certainly quick-witted, Kaoru thought. He replied:

*If you look from afar you may conclude
The plum tree is withered, bare of flowers
But just below lie its fragrant first buds*

"If you're so eager to pluck a branch, then try brushing up against my sleeves," he added teasingly.

"Truly, the scent is more attractive than the color,"⁴ the attendants replied, and they moved closer to Kaoru, as if they were indeed going to try tugging his sleeves.

Tamakazura emerged from the interior of the room and softly said, "Really now, what a way for women to behave! Teasing such a proper, upright gentleman! Have you lost all sense of shame?"

I know their nickname for me: His Royal Primness. It's rather cold of them, he thought as he sat down.

Tamakazura's youngest son was with her. Having just been appointed Fujiwara Gentleman-in-waiting, he did not yet have permission to serve in His Majesty's private quarters, which meant that he was not participating in the customary round of New Year visits. Fruits, sweets, and wine were brought out on two fragrant aloeswood trays.

The older and more mature the Minister of the Right gets, the more he looks like his father, Tamakazura mused. *Kaoru, on the other hand, does not really look like Genji at all ... though I suppose Genji must have had the exact same calm, graceful manner when he was in the full flower of youth.* Her memories of Genji brought tears to her eyes. Her women continued to praise the scent that lingered on even after Kaoru had withdrawn.

Kaoru despised the nickname "His Royal Primness." He did not want people

to think that he lacked the elegant sensibility needed to pursue romantic affairs, and so a little after the twentieth day of the first month, when the plum trees were in full bloom, he called on the apartments of the Fujiwara Gentleman-in-waiting at Tamakazura's residence, hoping to learn how to play the role of amorous gallant. When he entered through the central gate, Kaoru spotted a man standing there dressed in the same style of informal court robes as he. Although the man was trying to keep out of sight, Kaoru grabbed his sleeves to detain him; when he did so, he saw it was the Minister of the Right's son, the Lesser Captain who was always hanging about the residence. The Lesser Captain appeared to be transfixed by the music of a *biwa* lute and thirteen-string koto coming from the chambers on the west side of the main hall.

He's really in pain over her, Kaoru thought. *But even so, it's a deep sin to pursue someone without the parent's consent.* When the music stopped, he said to the Lesser Captain, "You'll have to be my guide, here. I don't know my way around at all." They set off together and moved to a spot beneath a red plum tree near the passageway that led away from the main hall on the west side, where they sang "A Branch of Plum." Their low, murmuring voices, in combination with Kaoru's scent, which was more distinctive than the fragrance of the plum blossoms, announced their presence. The hinged double doors opened, and the women inside accompanied them most pleasingly on six-string kotos. Although women in general were not particularly adept at the *ryo* mode on this instrument, the young men were impressed by the performance, and they repeated their song. The modern technique of the accompaniment on the *biwa* lute was also superb. Kaoru was enchanted by the elegant and accomplished lifestyle of this residence, and so he loosened up a little that evening and chatted playfully with the women.

From inside the blinds, one of the women pushed a six-string koto out toward the young gentlemen, but neither of them moved to take the instrument, mutually ceding the privilege of playing to the other. Tamakazura then sent out a message requesting that Kaoru play: "I have been told that your light touch on this instrument is like that of my late father, and so I'm extremely curious to hear you play. On an evening like this, let the song of the warbler inspire you to perform." Kaoru knew that he should not decline out of reticence or nervousness, and so he played somewhat reluctantly, producing many lovely overtones.

"I rarely saw my father and was never close to him," Tamakazura remarked, "but it makes me lonely to think that he is no longer in this world. It's terribly sad when, even on the most trivial of occasions, some event evokes memories of him. It's uncanny how much Kaoru resembles my late brother, Kashiwagi ... they even play the koto in exactly the same way." She began to weep—she

tended to shed tears rather more easily these days, a sign that she was growing older.

The Lesser Captain also performed, singing “This Magnificent Estate”⁵ in a rich and sonorous voice. Because there were no meddlesome, hypercritical women present, the young gentlemen naturally encouraged each other to play. Tamakazura’s son, the Fujiwara Gentleman-in-waiting, was very much like his late father in that he didn’t seem to have any special talent at music, but preferred to drink instead. He was, however, shamed at last into participating when someone demanded from him an auspicious song for the New Year. He obliged them by joining in singing “Bamboo River.” He was still young and immature, but his performance was charming all the same. Someone inside the blinds pushed a winecup out to the gentlemen, but Kaoru did not take it right away. “I’ve heard it said that when a man gets too intoxicated he will lose his inhibitions and disgrace himself by revealing all of his secrets. Do you intend for that to happen to me?”

Tamakazura had on hand an outer garment and a long robe suffused with the appealing fragrance of her own incense, and she made a present of them to Kaoru, placing them on his shoulder one on top of the other. “What’s the meaning of this?” he asked, making a show of declining the gift. He placed the robes on the shoulder of Tamakazura’s son and prepared to leave. Although they tried to get him to stay longer, he told them, “I’m participating in the *otokotōka* this year and only stopped here to rest and have refreshments. It’s growing late, and I must be on my way.”

Because it was apparent that Kaoru was a frequent guest at this house and that everyone there was taken with him, the Lesser Captain felt sorry for himself and grew even more despondent. He resented the situation, and, as he withdrew, he sighed and composed the following:

*You all seem drawn to the blossoms
Must I wander on my own lost
In the darkness of a spring night*⁶

One of the women inside the blinds comforted him with this reply:

*Are we not moved by the beauty of things
In their season ... it is not just the scent
Of plum blossoms that captivates the heart*

The following morning Kaoru wrote a note to Tamakazura’s son, the Fujiwara

Gentleman-in-waiting. Assuming that Tamakazura and her older daughter would see the letter, he used mostly *kana* instead of Chinese characters: “I fear I may have made a spectacle of myself last night. What must everyone have thought of me?” At the end he added the following:

*Did those lyrics we sang from “Bamboo River”
Bridge the gap between us and show how deeply
Lie the feelings at the bottom of my heart*

The gentleman-in-waiting brought the letter to the main hall, where the women read it.

“What a superb hand he has,” Tamakazura remarked. “What sort of man is he, what karmic destiny does he possess, that he should be so accomplished at this young age? He was still a boy when Genji died, and his mother, the cloistered Princess, was so immature she did very little to raise him ... and yet, with all of those disadvantages, he seems far superior to others.” She tried to make her own daughters feel ashamed of their desultory writing skills. Her son’s reply was written in a truly immature hand: “It seems that everyone here thought that flimsy excuse you gave to leave early was highly suspicious.”

*You did not want to pass the night on Bamboo River
So you hastened to leave ... what are we to make of that
What other air could have attracted such deep feelings*

As it turned out, the occasion on which they sang “Bamboo River” was just the first of many visits Kaoru would pay Tamakazura’s son. Just as the Lesser Captain had observed, Kaoru captivated everyone there. The gentleman-in-waiting’s youthful heart hoped that their close relationship might allow him to be with Kaoru all the time, from morning till night.

When the third month arrived, the cherry trees were in full flower and clouds of scattering blossoms filled the air.⁷ During this season, when the blossoms were at their full glory, there was little to occupy the woman at Tamakazura’s serene residence, and with so few visitors arriving, it hardly seemed a lapse of decorum for them to sit out near the veranda. Her daughters must have been about eighteen or nineteen at the time, and they were both delightful in looks and deportment. The older sister was vivacious and refined with a bright, modern sensibility—her mother was justified in thinking that it would be inappropriate to marry off someone of her beauty and charm to a commoner. She was dressed in a long robe in the cherry-blossom style of white lined with crimson over robes

of mountain rose yellow—a tasteful choice of colors appropriate to the season—and an elegant charm seemed to cascade over her down to her softly layered hem. Her demeanor and manners were extremely proper, and her polished refinement made others feel humble before her.

The younger sister was dressed in a pale, red plum style—light crimson lined with purple—and her lustrous hair had the soft, rippling beauty of willow fronds. Her litesome figure was poised and had a lively grace, but she had a more solemn, deeply thoughtful air about her. Still, when it came to physical appearance, people considered the older sister the more gorgeous of the two.

They were seated across from each other at a Go board, and the way their hair outlined their foreheads and cascaded down their robes behind them was extremely appealing. Their younger brother, the gentleman-in-waiting, was sitting nearby, prepared to act as referee to determine who won. Just then, his two older brothers peeked in and teased him: “My, my, how the Gentleman has risen in his sisters’ estimation! Now they’re even letting him judge their matches!” When they knelt down, striking a very masculine pose, the women sitting there adjusted their robes and assumed a more formal posture.

The oldest brother, the Middle Captain, expressed his displeasure.

“While I’ve been busy serving at the palace all this time, apparently I’ve lost my place of privilege to a younger brother. I’m most disappointed.”

“My position is even more hectic than yours,” objected the second brother, who served as Middle Controller. “And here I’ve been more or less cast aside by my sisters!”

Feeling embarrassed, the sisters paused their game, and their blushing figures were most charming.

“When I’m on duty at the palace,” the Middle Captain added, “I often wish our father was still here with us.” Tears welled up in his eyes as he gazed at his sisters. He was now twenty-seven or twenty-eight, a splendid gentleman in all respects; as he sat there, he thought that somehow or other he wanted to make sure his sisters’ futures were secured exactly the way that his father had wanted.

The sisters had one of the servants pluck off a stem of blossoms from the loveliest of the cherry trees blooming in the garden.

“None of them compare to this tree,” the older sister said, taking the stem in her hands.

“When the two of you were little girls,” the Middle Captain said, “you would fight over this tree, both of you claiming it for your own. Father decided that it should go to the older sibling, but then Mother intervened and said it belonged to the younger. I didn’t cry or complain that Father never considered giving it to me, but it made me uneasy. The tree has grown very old, you see. It reminds me

of all the years that have passed in my life and all of the people who have died and left me behind. It brings feelings of grief and sorrow that are hard to assuage.” Mingling laughter and tears as he spoke with his mother, his visit was longer and more relaxed than usual. He was married now and could no longer make leisurely calls to his old home, but today he stayed on, his heart enthralled by the cherry blossoms.

Tamakazura looked much younger than a woman old enough to be the mother of these grown men, and she remained as beautiful as she had been in her prime. The main reason Reizei was so insistent in asking for her older daughter is that he was still attracted to Tamakazura. Filled with nostalgic memories of how he had longed for her in the past, he was searching for any pretext to keep the flame alive. Her two older sons, however, expressed concerns about the proposal.

“It’s certainly not a very interesting prospect,” one of them told her. “People always tend to be drawn to those who are at the height of power and influence. That’s not to say Retired Emperor Reizei isn’t a magnificent man ... who wouldn’t want to gaze upon someone with such peerless looks? But it feels as though he passed the peak of his glory long ago. The modes of a flute or koto, the colors of flowers, the songs of birds ... in their proper season, all of these things have the power to enchant the eyes and ears. Wouldn’t the Crown Prince be a better choice?”

“I’m not sure about that,” Tamakazura replied. “I’ve heard that from the moment he was appointed the heir apparent, a very distinguished woman, the daughter of the Minister of the Right, monopolized his affections. I’m concerned that if I sent your sister into his service unprepared, she would end up a laughingstock. If only her father were still alive ... one never knows what the future holds, but he would certainly have arranged some promising situation for her in the present.” Her words affected them greatly.

After the Middle Captain and the others left, the daughters resumed their game of Go. They decided to wager the cherry tree that they had been arguing over ever since they were young girls. “Whoever wins two out of three matches may claim the tree,” they agreed, making a playful challenge. Because it was getting dark, they moved the game out closer to the edge of the veranda. The blinds were rolled up to let more light in, and the attendants for both young ladies formed two competing sides fervently praying for their own mistress to prevail.

Meanwhile, the Minister’s son, the Lesser Captain, was paying his usual visit to the quarters of the Fujiwara Gentleman-in-waiting. However, the young man had gone off with his older brothers, and so his apartments were practically deserted. Noticing that the door leading out to the aisle room was ajar, the Lesser

Captain stealthily moved over to it and peeked through the opening. Such a fortuitous opportunity made him feel as though he had accidentally come across an incarnation of the Buddha. Such joy was in vain, however, since his dream of marrying the older daughter was hopeless.

His view was obscured somewhat by the mists at dusk, and yet, as he was staring intently at the scene, he realized that the young woman dressed in robes of the cherry-blossom style must be the object of his yearning. She was so lovely and graceful that he wanted to look on her as a memento of the cherry blossoms that had scattered;⁸ it made him more miserable than ever to think she was to go to another man. The young women around her in their casual attire looked delightful in the twilight glow.

The younger sister, representing the side on the Right, won the match. "This calls for a Korean fanfare,"⁹ one of her attendants cried out triumphantly.

"The late Chancellor may have decided that the cherry tree belonged to his elder daughter," added another, "but the fact that it leans to the west means it was actually inclined to be our mistress's all along. This was the cause of all the arguments through the years." The women on the Right seemed quite pleased as they gloated about the victory.

The Lesser Captain had not the slightest idea what they were talking about, but it all sounded very delightful to him. He wanted to say something and add to the merriment, but he thought better of it and withdrew, since it would be awkward to intrude on an occasion that had such an informal, intimate feel to it. From that time on, he continued to skulk around the residence hoping that he might once again have the chance to observe Tamakazura's daughters.

For several days, from morning till night, the sisters continued to dispute each other's claim to the tree. Finally, one evening, to their great regret and consternation, a powerful wind began to scatter the blossoms. The older sister composed the following:

*How great the turmoil in my heart, fearful the wind
Will scatter the cherry blossoms ... yet the blossoms
Willfully ignore me and scatter anyway*

Saishō replied, as if to console her:

*It is the very nature of cherry blossoms
To scatter as soon as we gaze at them ... so why
Should I feel any deep regret over their loss*

The younger sister responded.

*It is normal in this world that blossoms scatter
Before the wind ... but what is not common to see
Are fading colors of blossoms still on their boughs*

Taifu added the following:

*You blossoms who were inclined to scatter
On the right edge of the pond, when you turn
To foam, come, drift to the right toward me¹⁰*

One of the page girls who served the younger sister stepped down into the garden and, walking around beneath the cherry trees, gathered up many of the fallen blossoms and brought them to her mistress. She then composed the following:

*Though you may scatter, O cherry blossoms,
On the winds blowing across the heavens
I gather you up and make you my own*

Nareki, a page girl who served the older sister, responded:

*You may not want the lambent blossoms
To fall to the left ... but are your sleeves
Wide enough to cover up the tree¹¹*

“You look so selfish, trying to keep them all for yourself!” she added.

While these events were taking place, the days and months passed by in a flash, and Tamakazura, worried about the future awaiting her daughters, struggled to come to a decision. There were daily messages from Reizei. Even his Kokiden Consort wrote an earnest plea:

You seem so distant from me, as if we have no connection whatsoever. His Retired Majesty has told me that he suspects I’ve said something to you, that I’m trying to keep you from sending your daughter here, and he has taken a dislike of me because of it. Even if he’s merely teasing, it’s still unpleasant for me. If your daughter is going to come here anyway, then do make up your mind very soon.

It must be my daughter's karmic destiny to go to him, Tamakazura mused. *It makes me feel humble to receive such a message from the Consort ... I can hardly refuse her.* She had already prepared a lavish trousseau, and so she hurried to complete other more trivial details, like readying the clothes for her daughter's attendants.

When he heard about the decision, the Lesser Captain thought he would die, and desperately pressed his mother, Kumoinokari, to intercede on his behalf. She was so troubled by his complaints that she sent a message to Tamakazura: "Although I hesitate to even drop hints about this matter, I am driven to do so by a foolish heart wandering in darkness. Since you are no doubt aware of my son's hopes, I ask you to try to imagine how we must feel, and give us the consolation of thinking that he may still be chosen."

Her message was at once pitiful and unpleasant, prompting Tamakazura to sigh, "How troublesome!" She replied as follows: "It is difficult to decide what to do, and the pressure from Retired Emperor Reizei's constant proposals has me in a tizzy. If your son is serious, then I ask him to be patient for a while longer, and I will try to provide the consolation you seek in a manner that will meet with general approval."

She must have been thinking about giving her second daughter to the Lesser Captain once she had sent her older daughter to Reizei. *Still, it would look disrespectful to Reizei if I were to marry them both off at once*, Tamakazura reflected, *since the Lesser Captain is still at such a low rank.* The young gentleman, however, was not about to shift his affections from the older to the younger sister. After catching that brief glimpse, the image of her lingered in his mind; he was fixated on her, wondering when he might have another chance to see her again. The anguish he experienced once his hopes were dashed was immeasurable.

As usual, the Lesser Captain called on Tamakazura's son, the Fujiwara Gentleman-in-waiting, thinking that he would give vent to his dissatisfaction—though of course such complaints were useless. He arrived to find the young man reading a letter from Kaoru. The flustered manner in which the gentleman-in-waiting tried to hide it made the nature of the missive obvious, and so the Lesser Captain snatched it away. Tamakazura's son immediately realized that trying to hide the letter had made it seem more significant than it was, and so he made no effort to retrieve it. As it turned out, Kaoru was simply expressing vague, general resentments about relationships between men and women.

*As I count all the passing days and months
During which I suffered your cruelty*

This dark spring of regrets comes to its close

The letter irritated the Lesser Captain. *Kaoru is always viewed as so composed and elegant, while my own foolish, heartfelt complaints are treated as nothing special and subjected to ridicule.* He kept these thoughts to himself. Without saying anything further, he went off to see Chūjō, the attendant with whom he always discussed his feelings. As usual, the Lesser Captain complained to her that his hopes were in vain. It angered and annoyed him to see the gentleman-in-waiting going to his mother's chambers to ask her, "Shall I respond to Kaoru's letter?" His youthful heart fell into an even deeper funk.

His vociferous protests were so extreme and awkward to deal with that Chūjō, his intermediary, found him pathetic and difficult to deal with. She refused to respond. He then told her about the time he saw her mistress playing Go.

"How I wish I could see that dream vision once more," he said, speaking in an overly serious tone. "Ahh ... what do I have to look forward to in life? When I think of how little time remains for me to be able to speak with you like this, I realize how true it is that suffering intensifies one's yearnings!"

Chūjō was moved by his torment, but what could she say to him? It was obvious that the clear glimpse he had caught of her mistress that evening had made his longings unbearably powerful, and he showed no indication that the prospect of receiving the younger daughter would be of any consolation to him. Though she did not think his reaction at all unreasonable, she criticized him anyway in an effort to extinguish the flames of his passion. "If word should get out that you spied on my mistress, she would be offended and consider you even more outrageous and impudent. I've lost all sympathy for you. Your feelings make me anxious and vigilant."

"I see ... so that's how it is, is it? Well, since the decision's been made and my life is over, there's nothing left for me to fear. I did feel sorry for her when she lost her wager, though. If only she had summoned me that time, I could have signaled to her with my eyes and helped her win."

*Tell me, then ... why should it be improper
For one who does not count to have a heart
That does not want to settle for defeat¹²*

Chūjō smiled and replied:

*How ridiculous ... when winning and losing
Are determined by the strength of the player
How could you count on the heart alone to win*

He resented her answer.

*Take pity on me, then, and let me freely
Make the move I wish, for I have reached the stage
In this game where life or death is in your hands*

They spent the night talking, sometimes in laughter, sometimes in tears.

The following day was the first of the fourth month. While the Lesser Captain's younger brothers headed off to the palace in a flurry, he stayed locked away, lost in his melancholy thoughts. His sadness brought tears to his mother's eyes, which prompted the Minister to remark, "I thought Tamakazura would lightly dismiss any proposal from me, no matter how much I pressed her, knowing that Reizei would surely hear about it ... but now I regret that I did not bring it up when I met with her during the first month. If I myself had insisted on the match, she would certainly not have gone against my wishes."

Meanwhile, the Lesser Captain continued to send messages to Tamakazura's daughter.

*While I was gazing at the cherry blossoms
Spring was passing me by ... from this day forward
Must I wander lost in a thicket of grief*

A number of Tamakazura's senior attendants informed their mistress of the pitiful state of the infatuated young man, and they appealed to their mistress on his behalf. One of those women, Chūjō, told her, "He seems to be in such pain that his talk of putting his life and death in my hands is no idle chatter." Tamakazura felt sorry for him. What's more, she had the feelings of his parents to consider, and she knew that the Lesser Captain's resentment would be deep and bitter, which was why she was trying to placate them by offering her younger daughter instead. Still, she was outraged by the young man's hopes of blocking her older daughter's marriage to Reizei, since she had to take into account the last wishes of her late husband; he did not want their older daughter to marry a commoner under any circumstances, no matter how distinguished the man's family. For all that, she worried that sending her daughter to Reizei would not be a glorious future for the young woman. Just as she was mulling over all these things, her attendants, who tended to be sympathetic to the Lesser Captain's plight, brought in his poem. Tamakazura replied:¹³

Todav I understand at last ... althouah vou feian

*Infatuation, gazing blankly at the sky
In truth, you've given your heart to cherry blossoms*

“Really, now, how sad for him. Our mistress seems to be mocking his passion!” Her attendants grumbled, but it was too troublesome for them to revise her verse.

Tamakazura’s older daughter went to Reizei’s palace on the ninth day of the fourth month. The Minister of the Right provided her with carriages and a large escort. Kumoinokari resented the rejection of her son; however, she was unwilling to abruptly end her correspondence with Tamakazura, which had flourished as a result of her son’s proposal after languishing for years. She sent gifts of splendid women’s robes to be presented at the wedding. A note accompanied the robes: “While I was struggling to deal with my son, who has been so strangely dejected and listless of late, I knew nothing of your plans to send your daughter to Retired Emperor Reizei. It was rather cold of you not to give me some advance notice.”

The letter hinted of her dissatisfaction in a calm, gentle manner, and Tamakazura felt very sorry for her.

There was a letter from the Minister of the Right as well: “I really should call on you myself, but I have to be mindful of certain prohibitions. I shall dispatch my sons to take care of various tasks for you. Do not hesitate to make use of their services.”

He sent the Minamoto Lesser Captain and the Assistant Commander of the Guard. Tamakazura was pleased and remarked how kind the Minister was to her.

The oldest of Tamakazura’s half brothers, Kōbai, the Azechi Major Counselor, also sent carriages for the ladies-in-waiting. Because his second wife was the daughter of Tamakazura’s late husband, one would have assumed that their relationship was close, but this was not the case. In fact, the preparations for the procession to Reizei’s palace were carried out by her late husband’s oldest son, the Fujiwara Middle Counselor, along with Tamakazura’s own sons, the Middle Captain and the Middle Controller. For all sorts of reasons they were sad that their father was no longer alive, especially since this was not quite the future he had envisioned for his daughter.

The Lesser Captain made a heartrending appeal to his intermediary, Chūjō: “I accept my imminent demise, but how tragic is my life! If I could have but a word from you to show that you are moved by my plight, it would temporarily stay the inevitable and I may live on a little while longer.” When Chūjō brought the message to her mistress, she found the two sisters quietly talking, subdued and melancholy. They had long been accustomed to being together night and day, and they couldn’t stand being separated even by the doors that divided their

quarters east and west. Now they realized that they would have to live apart. The older sister had been dressed with special care for her move to Reizei's palace, and she looked exquisite. Perhaps touched by sentimentality and grief as she remembered what her father had planned for her and all that he had said, she picked up the Lesser Captain's note and glanced at it. She found it strangely incomprehensible and considered his claim that he was near death implausible.

How could he express such absurd feelings, she thought, when both his father, the Minister, and his mother were still with him to ensure a future free of anxiety? Nonetheless, she answered him at once, writing the following at the end of his note:

*You ask me for pity ... a single word
That evokes this world of impermanence
And should be granted to everyone*

"You speak of your misfortune, but I have experienced my own small share," she added to the note. "Tell him what I have said," she ordered, and Chūjō conveyed her message to him straightaway.

Considering what was happening that day, the Lesser Captain thought it incredible that she had responded to him, and it was harder than ever for him to hold back his tears. He replied at once, reproaching her with various complaints: "The gossips will blame no one but you."¹⁴

*Because death will come to the living world
Regardless of our wishes, will I die
Never hearing you utter that one word*

"If I believed that you cared enough about me to say that word over my grave, then I would gladly hurry to my death."

I regret having sent him such a response, she thought when she read his note. My attendant must have given it to him with no corrections at all! She found the matter most upsetting and decided to communicate with him no more.

Only the loveliest ladies-in-waiting and page girls were selected to accompany Tamakazura. The ceremonies welcoming her were no different from those that would have been performed if she were going to the imperial palace itself. She first went to visit the former Kokiden Consort, who conversed at length with her. Later that night, she proceeded to Reizei's quarters. The Umetsubo Empress and his other ladies had, of course, grown older with the passing years, while Tamakazura's daughter was still in the glorious bloom of youth; when Reizei

saw how truly beautiful she was, how could he have considered her ordinary in any way? He immediately conferred dazzling favors and attention upon her and behaved in an informal manner just like a commoner, which made her feel at ease. His treatment of her was truly ideal in every respect. Privately, he had been holding out the hope that Tamakazura might stay in service to him for a short while, but to his bitter disappointment, she quickly withdrew.

Reizei was always summoning Kaoru, requiring his presence day and night, for he held the young man in the same esteem he once had for Genji in the old days. Kaoru got on well with the women in Reizei's household, and he mingled freely with all of them. He showed the same kindness and goodwill toward the new arrival, though privately he wondered: *what must Reizei be thinking whenever he sees me with Tamakazura's daughter?*

During a still moment one evening, Kaoru was out walking with the Fujiwara Gentleman-in-waiting, the younger brother of Reizei's new wife. They sat down on moss-covered rocks near the edge of the pond and gazed at the garden in front of her quarters. Gorgeous clusters of wisteria were entwining a five-needle pine. Although Kaoru did not say so explicitly, he seemed to harbor a sense of grievance over not winning Tamakazura's older daughter for himself. Looking up at the wisteria blooms, he composed the following:

*If I dangled wisteria blossoms
From my hands, I could gaze upon colors
More appealing than the pine they embrace*

The gentleman-in-waiting was strangely moved and felt bad for Kaoru. He hinted that he himself had not approved of the match between Reizei and his sister.

*O wisteria, although we may share
The same color, still, I could not hang you
From the bough that my heart thought best for you*

A sincere young man, he felt sorry at how things had turned out. Though Kaoru himself wasn't terribly upset, it had been a disappointment all the same.

The Lesser Captain remained seriously obsessed with Tamakazura's older daughter, and as he considered how to handle the situation, he found his emotions so hard to control that he might well have done something that would have dire consequences. All of the suitors who had been seeking to win the young lady now turned their attention to the younger sister. Tamakazura,

mindful of Kumoinokari's complaints, assumed that the young man would now pursue her second daughter and dropped hints about that possibility. However, he stopped visiting her residence altogether.

The sons of the Minister of the Right had all been on familiar terms with Reizei. Yet after Tamakazura sent her older daughter to his retirement palace, the Lesser Captain hardly ever attended. Even on those rare occasions when he showed up at Reizei's private chambers, it was too unpleasant for him, and he would soon withdraw, as if he were fleeing the scene.

Meanwhile, His Majesty was naturally bewildered that Tamakazura, in contravention to the express desires of her late husband, should have given her daughter to Reizei. He summoned the young woman's older brother, the Middle Captain of the Left Guard, and inquired about the circumstances that led to the decision.

"His Majesty is not at all pleased," the Middle Captain later reported to Tamakazura. "That has people at the court privately wondering what in the world were you thinking. It's not like I didn't warn you this would happen ... but you had other ideas, and once you made up your mind to send her to Reizei, it was impossible for me to say anything. Now that His Majesty has made his displeasure known, the consequences for our family are not likely to be very pleasant." By the look on the Middle Captain's face, it was clear that he was extremely put out.

"Well, that may be," Tamakazura replied. She was calm and in control of her emotions. "But it's not as though I made a snap decision on this matter, and Retired Emperor Reizei's pleas were so heartfelt and insistent that I felt sorry for him. Besides, it seemed to me there is no one at the palace to look after her interests. I believe she'll have an easier time of it with Reizei now that he's retired, since his other women will be less competitive than before. That's why I felt I could entrust her to him. In any case, no one warned me plainly that my decision would be viewed negatively, and now everything's turned on its head ... even the Minister of the Right is saying that I made a grievous error. It's all very painful and awkward. Still, I suppose this was her karmic destiny."

"A person's karmic destiny, which is set by deeds in the past, isn't immediately apparent," the Middle Captain countered, "so, now that His Majesty has expressed himself this way, how can I ever convince him that their relationship was simply not meant to be? You said you were hesitant to send her to the palace because of the presence of the Akashi Empress, but then what are you to make of Retired Emperor Reizei's Consort? She's indicated her goodwill, saying she'll support and protect my sister and all that. But what if they become rivals for Reizei's affection? In that case, her support is not likely to last very

long. Oh well ... let's just wait to see how things work out. I don't think other people will avoid sending their daughters to the palace just because there's an Empress already there. So long as the atmosphere is friendly and free of jealous rivalries, service to the Emperor has been a pleasant task since ancient times. You mark my words ... once my sister makes the slightest error that arouses the enmity of the Consort, you'll hear people criticizing you, saying I told you so."

With her two oldest sons telling her much the same thing, Tamakazura was very troubled. Yet, despite their concerns, as the days and months passed, Reizei's affection for her daughter grew, and in the seventh month she became pregnant. The suffering brought on by her condition made her all the more attractive, and so it was perfectly natural that numerous gentlemen would send her expressions of sympathy, troublesome though such messages were. Indeed, how could they possibly ignore a young lady in such circumstances as these? Reizei was constantly arranging musical concerts day and night, and because he always summoned Kaoru to be by his side on those occasions, the young man would listen as Reizei's young wife played the koto. Her attendant, Chūjō, would usually accompany her on the six-string koto when she performed "A Branch of Plum," and their playing aroused emotions in Kaoru that were anything but ordinary.

When the New Year arrived, an *otokotōka* was held. It was an era when there were many people of talent among the younger members of court. Only the most skilled musicians and dancers were selected for the event, and Kaoru was appointed leader of those on the Right. The Lesser Captain, who had been so love-struck, was one of the musicians. The sky was clear and the fourteenth-night moon was bright as the party set off from the imperial palace and made its way to Reizei's palace. Spaces had been partitioned off in the main hall for both the Kokiden Consort and Reizei's pregnant young wife,¹⁵ and senior officials and princes of the blood were all present, having arrived to view the festivities. Still, no one there was quite as brilliantly dashing and handsome as the sons of the Minister of the Right and the sons of Tamakazura's late husband.

The participants in the festivities found it more daunting to perform before the august figure of Retired Emperor Reizei than before His Majesty, and so they were all extremely careful to comport themselves properly. Among the participants the Lesser Captain was especially nervous, since he knew the woman he loved would be watching him. The lusterless, homely white cotton florets that adorned the performers' caps seemed different depending on the wearer—they looked good on some, but not on others. Even so, the overall appearance and voices of the group were appealing. When the party moved near the front steps of the main hall to dance "Bamboo River," a customary number

for this event, the Lesser Captain recalled that evening a year earlier when he had casually performed the same song at Tamakazura's residence. The memory brought tears to his eyes and made it hard to concentrate on his steps and gestures. The procession then moved on to the quarters of the Umetsubo Empress, and Reizei made his way there as well to observe their performance. As the night deepened, the moon rose, pure and radiant. To the Lesser Captain, embarrassed that his tears might be exposed, it seemed brighter than daylight. Because he worried how he must have looked to the woman he loved so obsessively, he staggered about as if he were dancing on air and felt embarrassed that the winecup seemed to be pressed repeatedly on him and him alone.

The procession had moved from place to place all through the night. Just when Kaoru, who was utterly tired and worn out from the event, finally had the chance to lie down, he was summoned to appear before Reizei. "What a nuisance," he complained as he made his way to Reizei's quarters. "Can't I get a moment's rest?"

When he arrived, Reizei asked him about the *otokotōka* performance at the imperial palace. "Usually the leaders of the sides are older men of higher rank ... how wonderful that you were chosen." Reizei appeared to be genuinely delighted for Kaoru. Humming "Ten Thousand Springs," he left for the quarters of his young wife. Kaoru accompanied him. Because so many people had come from her household to view the previous night's festivities, her residence had a livelier and more modish atmosphere than usual. Kaoru sat near the door of the passageway chatting for a while with a woman whose voice he recognized.

"The moon last night was awkwardly bright, to be sure, since it exposed everything to view," he remarked. "Even so, the Lesser Captain's obvious discomfort at Retired Emperor Reizei's residence probably had nothing to do with the moonlight. After all, his face betrayed no unease at all when we were near the palace."

The women listening to him were moved to pity. "The darkness tries in vain to obscure things,"¹⁶ one of the attendants remarked, "but in our judgment, the moonlight was a little more becoming to you than to him."

From the interior of the chamber another attendant added the following:

*Neither the moment nor the song may stir
Nostalgic feelings, but do you recall
That evening you sang "Bamboo River"*

The poem was a trivial effort, and yet the tears it brought to his eyes made him realize that his feelings for the woman's mistress had been anything but

shallow.

*I understood the fickleness of this world
That night I sang “Bamboo River” ... but the hopes
I held to through the flow of time came to naught*

The women were utterly captivated by his sad, sensitive appearance. In truth, he was not given to expressions of grief and regret the way most people are, and yet something about his personality made people feel sympathetic toward him. “I’ve said too much already ... please excuse me.” He stood up to leave. Just then a summons came and, though he was feeling embarrassed, he had to make his way over to Reizei’s quarters.

“Genji once had the ladies at his Rokujō estate perform a concert for him the morning after the *otokotōka* celebrations,” Reizei said. “According to the Minister of the Right, it was a wonderful occasion. There doesn’t seem to be anyone in this day and age who can compare to him in any way ... he gathered around him so many talented women and would make even the most inconsequential event a delight.”

Moved by his reminiscences, he had his instruments tuned, giving the thirteen-string koto to his young wife and the *biwa* lute to Kaoru. He himself played the six-string koto, and together they performed “This Magnificent Estate.”¹⁷ The tones produced by Tamakazura’s daughter were still unpolished, but he had taught her very well all the same. Her accomplished style of plucking the strings had a modern feel, and she was an exceptionally skilled accompanist for both instrumental pieces and songs. It was apparent that she was someone who gave no cause for concern and was in no way inferior to others. As for her looks, well ... Kaoru assumed that she was very lovely, and he was still attracted to her. There were many other occasions when he had an opportunity to be close to her like this. While he was never standoffish, he also never behaved improperly nor expressed his resentment in an overly familiar manner. Still, from time to time, he did drop subtle hints about how sad he was that his dreams of having her had gone unfulfilled. How she reacted is unknown.

In the fourth month, she gave birth to a Princess. Observing the joyful reaction of Reizei himself, who had only one other daughter, a great many noblemen, beginning with the Minister of the Right, concluded that it was appropriate to participate in the customary celebrations.¹⁸ Of course, these festivities were not as spectacular as they might have been were Reizei still the reigning sovereign. Tamakazura cuddled and adored the baby girl, and soon messages arrived from Reizei asking that the little Princess be brought to him. Thus, when the fiftieth

day following the birth arrived, the new mother returned with her baby.

Although Reizei already had a daughter, the First Princess, this little girl was so remarkably pretty that he was absolutely taken with her. As a result, he began to spend more and more time at his young wife's quarters. This didn't sit well with the Consort's ladies-in-waiting, and they gave voice to their displeasure, pointing out that their young rival hardly warranted this level of attention. The two women themselves did not exhibit any disdain or aloofness toward one another, but a number of spiteful incidents occurred between some of their attendants, justifying the reservations that Tamakazura's son, the Middle Captain, had expressed about sending his younger sister to Reizei.

*How will all of this constant, horrid bickering end?*¹⁹ Tamakazura worried. *Will my daughter be made a laughingstock ... will she be shamed? Reizei's feelings for her are anything but shallow, but if the women who have served him for years think ill of her, she will definitely suffer for it.*

During the period when these events were taking place, Tamakazura would hear reports from time to time about how His Majesty continued to openly condemn her decision to give the older daughter to Reizei. She was troubled by this news and decided that she should send her younger daughter into service at the palace to take over her own position as Principal Handmaid, which she would resign. She had, in fact, been trying to step down for several years, but had been unable to do so, since it was very difficult to obtain permission to give up a formal public title at the court. This time, however, His Majesty drew on precedents from the distant past and granted Tamakazura's petition, since he was mindful of the wishes of the young woman's father, the late Chancellor. It appeared that the difficulties Tamakazura had encountered when attempting to resign turned out to be the workings of her younger daughter's karmic destiny.

With the fervent hope that her daughter would have an easy time of it at the palace, Tamakazura turned anxiously to a different matter. *I feel sorry for the Lesser Captain. His mother went to such lengths to plead his case ... and I did hint that perhaps he could have my younger daughter as recompense. What will she think of me now?* She sent a message with her second son, the Middle Controller, who was to bring up the matter as tactfully as possible with the young man's father, the Minister of the Right.

"Because His Majesty requested the services of my daughter as Principal Handmaid, some people at the court have been spreading rumors to the effect that I have unwarranted ambitions for both my daughters. Such gossip is troubling, and I wonder what I should do?"

"I believe His Majesty's displeasure over the matter of your older daughter is perfectly understandable," the Minister remarked. "As for your younger

daughter's appointment, declining the request to go into service at the palace simply will not do. You must make up your mind to send her there at once."

Tamakazura decided that she would send her daughter off after securing the goodwill of the Akashi Empress. It made her sad to think that if her husband were still alive, none of His Majesty's women would dare bully her daughter. Having heard reports of the older sister's noble beauty, the Emperor did not seem especially keen on accepting the younger sister as a substitute, but she served him well and comported herself with modesty and grace.

Tamakazura had been thinking about becoming a nun, but she held back after her sons spoke to her about her plans. "So long as our sisters' circumstances remain uncertain," they told her, "you would never be able to concentrate properly on your religious devotions. Wait a while longer until you put your mind at ease about them, and then you can focus wholeheartedly on your practices with nothing to distract you."

Now and then, Tamakazura paid a discreet visit to the imperial palace to see her younger daughter. She never called on her older daughter, though, even on those occasions when it would have been proper for her to do so, because Reizei continued to exhibit an interest that made her uncomfortable. She had sent her older daughter to Reizei with events of the past in mind—pretending all the while not to notice everyone's objections—in order to make up for her impertinent behavior toward him years ago. She thought that if gossip were now to spread at court that she was engaging in a youthful flirtation, even a playful one, the shame and humiliation would be too much to bear. Given the sensitive, forbidden nature of Reizei's feelings, Tamakazura couldn't very well disclose the reason for her reluctance to visit her daughter, who grew resentful as a result.

My late father always looked after me, she thought, but my mother favors my younger sister. She always takes her side—even when arguing over the cherry tree! Her attitude hasn't changed at all ... she cares nothing about me.

Reizei made it clear that he too found Tamakazura's refusal to visit extremely hard to take. "Your mother has apparently left you in the care of an old man. I suppose it's natural that she would look down on me." He felt sorry for his young wife.

A few more years passed, and Reizei's young wife bore him another child—a Prince this time. None of his other women had given him a son, despite being with him for so long, and people at the court were startled by her rare and wonderful destiny. Happy beyond words, Reizei was even more astounded, and he treasured the little boy. *If only he had been born before I abdicated, I might have been of some use to him. Now I have almost no influence at the court. What a shame!*

Reizei had always shown boundless favor to his daughter, the First Princess, but he marveled at the birth of these two adorable children and had a special place in his heart for them. His first wife, the Kokiden Consort, was disturbed, thinking that Reizei was taking his affection for his new children much too far. Evidently, a number of spiteful and unpleasant exchanges took place, and as a result, there was naturally a falling-out between the women. As a rule, even among men and women of no social significance, people tend to take the side of the first wife, who can claim the privilege of seniority. It was no surprise, then, that women of both high and low rank at Reizei's palace unanimously sided with the Consort, who was, after all, extraordinarily distinguished. Moreover, she had been with His Retired Majesty for so many years that the other women believed that she was justified in feeling aggrieved. Accordingly, they were disposed to criticize everything his young wife did, no matter how minor her perceived failing might be.

"You see! We knew this would happen!" Tamakazura's sons complained more and more frequently to her. "Were we wrong?"

Their mother, distinguished though she was with children in service to both current and retired sovereigns, was uneasy over the turn of events and found it painful to hear what her sons had to say. "It seems that many women manage to avoid the troubles that my daughter faces and live serene, pleasant lives," she lamented. "It was wrong of me to send her into service with no prospect of ever achieving the greatest fortune of producing an imperial heir."

As things turned out, all of the young men who had pursued her older daughter were well favored and had risen to prominence. A great many of them would have made quite acceptable husbands. One of them, Kaoru, who had once seemed too young and lacking substance as the Minamoto Gentleman-in-waiting, was now at the third rank,²⁰ a Middle Captain and Consultant on the Council of State. People made such a fuss over him, tiresomely prattling on about his perfume or his fragrance. Still, there was no denying that he was a man of dignity and propriety, and some of the most distinguished princes and high officials made clear their hopes of giving their daughters to him—though he would not entertain such proposals.

"Back in his youth, he seemed so callow and unpromising," Tamakazura noted, "but he's matured splendidly."

The Lesser Captain also had a fine reputation, having been promoted to Middle Captain at the third rank. "And to think, he's so handsome as well," some of Tamakazura's more spiteful attendants whispered insinuatingly. "Yes, he would certainly be preferable to the nasty, horrid situation she finds herself in." Tamakazura felt miserable. For his part, the young man never got over his

longing for the older daughter. Lamenting his own misfortune and resenting the cruelty of others, he was in the end given the daughter of the Minister of the Left.²¹ He paid almost no attention to her, however, and would often murmur or practice writing out a particular snatch of verse: “The obi clasp they use at Hitachi at the end of the road.”²² What could he possibly have had in mind?

As a result of her difficult circumstances, which allowed her no peace of mind, Tamakazura’s older daughter began spending more time at her family home. Tamakazura was filled with regret that things had not worked out as she had hoped. Her younger daughter, on the other hand, was managing a surprisingly stylish, pleasant lifestyle at the palace, and in the course of her service to His Majesty, she came to be regarded highly for her beauty and refined sensibility.

When the Minister of the Left passed away, Genji’s son, who was Minister of the Right at the time, was promoted to take his position. Kōbai, the Azechi Major Counselor,²³ was promoted to both Major Captain of the Left and Minister of the Right. Others were also promoted in due order: Kaoru rose to the post of Middle Counselor, while the Middle Captain at the third rank was promoted to Consultant. It was an age in which only those who came from the families of Genji’s son and of the late Tō no Chūjō would know the joy of such rapid promotions.

As part of the round of visits that he was obligated to make to give thanks for his recent appointment, Kaoru called on Tamakazura. He paid her obeisance in the garden in front of her residence, bowing left, right and left, then sitting and bowing the same way again. Seated inside her blinds, she spoke to him without an intermediary. “I am grateful that in making your rounds you have not avoided a place where the gate is overgrown with weeds. Your presence here reminds me of the past ... of how much I owe your father.” Her voice was noble and appealing, with a vibrant timbre that made him want to hear more of it. *She remains forever young! I suppose that's why Reizei can't stop resenting her for spurning him. Sooner or later he's bound to cause some sort of trouble.*

“Promotions aren’t all that important to me,” he said, “but at least they give me a reason to come and appear before you. When you spoke about my avoiding your gate, I take it you’re chiding me for being neglectful of you.”

“I’m mindful that this day is an auspicious one for you,” Tamakazura replied, “and that it’s not an appropriate time to drone on about the sorrows of an old, foolish woman. Yet you come by so rarely nowadays, and if I can’t speak with you directly, well ... it’s hard to tell you what I want to say. I’m facing a most vexing problem. My older daughter, who is in service to Reizei, is suffering terribly. She’s upset about her marriage, but doesn’t know where she can turn for

help. For a long time, I believed that she could rely on the former Kokiden Consort for support and that the Umetsubo Empress would accept her, no matter what happened. Now, however, both of them seem to consider her an upstart and find her utterly intolerable ... it's a miserable, awkward situation. Her little Prince and Princess remain with Reizei, but my daughter, who has been having such a hard time getting along, was allowed to withdraw to her home here to rest and try to recover some peace of mind. That, of course, just led to more malicious gossip. Reizei himself evidently expressed his displeasure. If you have an opportunity to speak with him, please give him some indication of how painful this is to me. I was so hopeful when I sent my daughter to Reizei, since both the Consort and the Umetsubo Empress had given warm assurances of support. Now that things have turned out badly, however, I blame myself for being so naive." From what Kaoru could tell, she was crying.

"You really shouldn't let it upset you so much. The anxieties that come with imperial service have been a fact of life since ancient times. Having abdicated and retired to a quiet life, nothing Reizei does is as conspicuous as it once was. His women may all seem to be on friendly terms, but that doesn't mean they're not still competing for his affection. Things that strike most people as inoffensive may feel like a grave insult to the Consort and Empress Umetsubo. Imperial wives always tend to be hypersensitive, which is why they get angry over the slightest provocation—even matters that have nothing to do with them. You must have realized that your daughter would encounter such jealousy when you sent her to Reizei, did you not? It's best if you just remain calm and completely ignore the problem. In any case, it's not my place as a man to petition Reizei about such a personal matter."

Because his manner was sober and serious, Tamakazura smiled as she replied, "Here I've been, waiting all this time for a chance to speak with you about my worries, and to what end? So you can dismiss them as inconsequential."

To Kaoru, she sounded much too youthful and unruffled to be a mother trying so seriously to manage her daughter's affairs. *Her older daughter is apparently just like her. Perhaps I find the Princess at Uji appealing because she seems to share those very same enchanting traits.*

Tamakazura's younger daughter, who was now the Principal Handmaid, happened to be home on leave from the palace during this time. It was a delight having the two of them in residence together, each in her own chambers on the east and west sides of the main hall, passing the time in quiet, elegant leisure. Kaoru felt self-conscious knowing that they could see him from behind their blinds, and so he took care to be on his best behavior, exerting exceptional self-control and conducting himself admirably.

What I wouldn't give, Tamakazura thought, to be able to look after him as my son-in-law.

Kōbai, the new Minister of the Right, lived in a villa just to the east of Tamakazura's residence. A large crowd of officials, including Kōbai's sons, gathered there to serve as attendants for the banquet celebrating the recent round of promotions. Niou had attended both the banquet for the winners of the archery contest, which had been sponsored by Genji's son in the first month at the Rokujō estate, and the banquet following the Sumō wrestling matches in the seventh month. Remembering this, Kōbai asked the young man to come to this celebration as well and brighten the event with his dazzling radiance. Niou, however, did not show up. Apparently, Kōbai had hopes of interesting the young man in one of his daughters, on whom he had lavished much care and affection, but for some reason Niou was unresponsive. As a result, both Kōbai and his principal wife set their sights on Kaoru, who was maturing into an ideal gentleman absolutely flawless in all respects.

The bustling racket of escorts shouting and carriages coming in and going out of the villa next door sent Tamakazura into a poignant, melancholy reverie as she remembered the glory days of her own house.

"At first, it seemed that my late husband's favorite daughter, who always thought of him as her beloved pillar of cypress, was destined for misfortune," she reminisced, "and when Kōbai began courting her so soon after Prince Sochinomiya passed away, I heard that people criticized them for engaging in a shockingly frivolous affair. But their love did not fade ... indeed, their relationship has been wonderful to behold. One can never tell how a marriage will end up. In the end, who has done better: she or my older daughter?"

The Minister of the Left's favorite son, who had been promoted to the posts of Middle Captain and Consultant, paid a visit to Tamakazura's residence toward evening on the day following the banquet. He was filled with nervous anticipation, since he knew that the woman he had loved from the days when he was a mere Lesser Captain was in residence. "I take no joy in His Majesty's gracious recognition of me," he said, "for, as the years have gone by, I have found no way to dispel the grief that I feel at having had my fondest hopes dashed." The manner in which he wiped away his tears had a certain theatrical flair. He was now about twenty-seven or twenty-eight, aglow in the very prime of manhood and dazzlingly handsome.

Tamakazura burst into tears. *These spoiled young men act as though the world is theirs for the taking.²⁴ They go through life caring nothing about rank or position! If my late husband were still alive, my own sons could afford to get their hearts all tangled up over some silly affair!*

Her older sons were now Commander of the Right Guard and Major Controller of the Right respectively, but Tamakazura was unhappy because they had not yet been named Consultants, even though they were qualified for the post. Her youngest son, who had been a Gentleman-in-waiting, was now a Middle Captain in the Chamberlain's office. Although his appointment was perfectly appropriate for someone his age, Tamakazura feared he was falling behind. All the while, the newly appointed Consultant continued his glib, ingratiating patter.

¹ The explicit mention of his rank, which was one level higher than usual for a gentleman-in-waiting, indicates his favored status.

² The description here is a little vague, but it seems likely that the meditation chapel is in the west hall of the villa (to face Amida's Pure Land in the west) and the stairs lead up to the entrance on the east side.

³ *Kokinshū* 37 (Sosei): "The plum blossoms that I admired only from a distance ... how much more I appreciate their color and fragrance now that I have plucked a branch."

⁴ *Kokinshū* 33 (Anonymous): "I find the scent more attractive than the color ... whose sleeves did it brush against, the plum tree at my abode?"

⁵ This song is mentioned in the *Hatsune* chapter. It has associations with the season and with the fortunes of Tamakazura's house, since she is unknowingly related to Kaoru.

⁶ The Lesser Captain's poem echoes *Kokinshū* 41 (Ōshikōchi no Mitsune): "In the dark of an early spring evening the color of the plum blossoms is hidden from sight ... but can their scent remain hidden as well?" This poem is alluded to in connection with Kaoru in the *Niou miya* chapter.

⁷ *Kokinshū* 349 (Ariwara no Narihira): "Fill the air with clouds of petals, O cherry blossoms, to obscure the path that old age will take to come to me." The allusion to this poem seems out of place in the context of the story.

⁸ *Kokinshū* 66 (Ki no Aritomo): "I shall dye my robe the deep color of the cherry blossoms ... a memento of them after they have scattered."

⁹ Reflecting the political structure of the court and the architectural design of the capital itself, in which the Left was generally considered the more powerful or favored side, the older sister, who enjoyed the privilege of age, resided on the east side of the villa (which is on the left when one is looking south, the direction that the emperor faced when looking at the capital). If the Right side won a formal contest, it was customary to play a victory fanfare of Korean-style music. If the Left won, the fanfare was Chinese-style music.

¹⁰ *Kokinshū* 81 (Sugano no Takayo, on seeing cherry blossoms floating in the stream at the Crown Prince's garden): "Because these flowers have foolishly scattered from their boughs, they now turn to foam on the water."

¹¹ *Gosenshū* 64 (Anonymous): "If only I had sleeves wide enough to cover the heavens, I would not leave spring blossoms to the mercy of the wind" (also alluded to in the *Miotsukushi* and *Maboroshi* chapters).

¹² The Lesser Captain's two poems in this exchange play on words associated with Go (e.g., *kazoeru*, "to count," *makeru*, "to lose / be defeated," and *te o yurusu*, "to allow an opponent to hold on to a stone and possibly retract a move"). Similarly, Chūjō's response makes use of these associated words and she makes a play on *makasuru*, which means either "to rely on/to count on" or "to win/to defeat."

¹³ It is not completely clear which character composes this poem. It could be one of the attendants writing in proxy, but the comments that follow suggest it is Tamakazura. The poem alludes to *Kokinshū* 743 (Sakai Hitozane): "Are the vast heavens a memento of my beloved? It seems that each time I think of you, I gaze

blankly at the sky.”

14 *Kokinshū* 603 (Kiyowara no Fukayabu): “If I die of love, the gossips will blame no one but you, even though you may seek to excuse yourself, saying it was due to the impermanence of this world.”

15 Tamakazura’s older daughter is identified here by the title *miyasudokoro*. As we saw in the *Wakana* chapter, this title, which may be loosely translated as “lady of the imperial bedchamber,” was not a formal one, but was used rather broadly to identify an imperial wife or consort below the rank of empress who conceives and gives birth to a prince or princess of the blood. Although Reizei has abdicated, these titles carry some significance, since a retired sovereign’s children could potentially be in line to be a future emperor or empress.

16 *Kokinshū* 41. See note 6 above. The snatch of verse refers to the Lesser Captain, but the allusion implicitly praises Kaoru.

17 A *saibara* mentioned earlier in the *Hatsune* chapter.

18 This sentence is a little vague, but the implication seems to be that Reizei’s joy is a cue to the nobility that the celebration of the birth will not be an affront to the First Princess and her mother, the Kokiden Consort.

19 *Shūishū* 507 (Anonymous): “The final outcome of all of this constant gossip about our relationship ... what will become of us, how will it end?”

20 The text notes his rank, which here again is a little higher than normal given his age and position, suggesting the degree to which Kaoru is favored.

21 This particular character does not appear elsewhere in the narrative.

22 Alluded to earlier, in the *Fujibakama* chapter. *Kokin rokujō* 3360 (Anonymous): “I long to see the obi clasp they use at Hitachi at the end of the road to the Eastern Provinces, if only briefly, that I may voice my complaint to you.” The poem plays on the word *kagoto*, which can refer to a complaint or to a clasp or fastener used to bind an obi. When used in the phrase *kagoto bakari*, it can also mean “if only briefly/if only for show.” Binding an obi with a clasp was a symbol of marriage at the Kashima Shrine in Hitachi, so the reason for the young man’s obsession with the line is actually fairly clear.

23 The text names him Fujiwara Major Counselor here, but, because his position had remained unchanged until this promotion, I have kept the title Azechi for the sake of consistency.

24 The text is not specific, but it seems clear that Tamakazura is referring to the sons of Kōbai and of the Minister of the Left (Genji’s son), who have been shown exceptional (and, according to the narrator, undeserved) favor in promotions.

XLV

Hashihime

The Divine Princess at Uji Bridge

IN THOSE days a certain aging prince of the blood, Hachinomiya,¹ was living in obscurity, no longer counted as a member of court society. His mother was from a most distinguished family, and at one point there was hope that he might be named Crown Prince and attain the heights of glory. His circumstances, however, changed with the coming of a new sovereign, and as a consequence of certain incidents, he was censured and the court turned its back on him. All traces of his earlier aspirations faded. In the end, his supporters withdrew one after another, their hearts filled with bitter resentment, and he was left with no one to turn to either in public or in private. It seemed that he was utterly abandoned.

His principal wife was the daughter of a Minister who served long ago. Hachinomiya's many trials and tribulations left her feeling sad and forlorn whenever she recalled the ambitions her parents had for her, and yet she found comfort from the woes of the world in the intimate, unrivaled bond she shared with her husband over the years. Their mutual devotion was truly extraordinary.

Though they were married for many years, they had no children, and Prince Hachinomiya would often wistfully express his hope that somehow they might have an adorable child to relieve their loneliness and boredom. Then, miraculously, a beautiful little girl was born to them. Their joy was boundless, and they did everything they could to love and care for her. Soon after, Hachinomiya's wife was pregnant again; and though they wanted their second child to be a boy, they had another girl. Sadly, the mother suffered terribly from the effects of the birth and died. Her husband was in a state of shock and grief.

I have lived in a world that has brought me nothing but a surfeit of unbearable sorrows, Hachinomiya told himself, *but my attachment to the beauty*

and grace of the woman I loved kept me fettered to it ... and now it's come to this. I'm on my own again, and the loneliness and tedium I suffer will be more intense than ever. Trying to raise two small daughters, constrained by my position as a Prince ... I shall look a proper fool, utterly pathetic!

He considered acting on his deepest wish by taking vows and renouncing the world, but he struggled terribly with the decision, hesitant to leave behind two girls who had no one to look after them. As he wavered, the months and years passed, and before he knew it, his daughters had grown to womanhood, lovely and ideal in looks and demeanor and a constant source of comfort to him.

The attendants who waited on the younger child did not serve her with wholehearted devotion and were always whispering among themselves, "Really now, her birth was so inauspicious!" Her mother, however, had been deeply concerned over the little girl's future, which preoccupied her thoughts even when she was on the verge of death, fading in and out of consciousness. "Have pity and look on her as a memento of me," she pleaded with her husband over and over. Thus, despite his resentment that the birth of the child had broken the karmic bond he shared with his wife from a previous life, he accepted that his beloved's death was meant to be. Remembering that his wife had begged him to the very end to look after and cherish the girl, he treated his second daughter as a precious treasure.

This younger girl was truly beautiful—so much so that it made people uneasy, since her looks might be ill-omened. Her older sister was quiet and thoughtful by nature, nobly refined and attractive in both appearance and manner. Of the two, the younger sister created the stronger impression as a woman of distinguished aristocratic lineage—a lady whom people were inclined to treat with tender favor. Their father, however, looked after each of them with equal consideration, though there were many things that he could not do for them given his straitened circumstances. As the years went by, his residence grew increasingly desolate, and the attendants, despairing of the bleak prospects facing their young mistresses, found the situation intolerable and began to leave one after another, scattering to other households. The younger sister's nurse, who had been selected without much consideration during the turmoil that followed the death of the mother, was a woman of shallow sensibility—as one might have expected given her breeding and low status—and she abandoned her charge when the girl was still quite young. As a result, the Prince had to bring her up entirely on his own.

The Prince's estate at the time was extensive and eye-catching, and the vistas created by the pond and the landscaped hills in the garden remained as lovely as ever—except that now the garden was terribly overgrown. He would spend his

idle days gazing out in reverie at the scene, but because there was no longer anyone on his household staff who could properly take care of the grounds, they were neglected. Lush green grasses and weeds grew in thick profusion while *shinobugusa* ferns, whose very name makes one long for the past, spread under the eaves as though they were taking possession of the place. The colors and fragrances of the flowers of each season or of the autumn foliage often brought him comfort, since he had once enjoyed them with his beloved wife. However, as his estate grew ever more deserted and lonely and there were fewer and fewer people he could rely upon, he began to spend all of his time on his religious devotions, fastidiously looking after the decorations for the altar in his meditation hall.

He was frustrated that his circumstances bound him to the world against his wishes, and could only assume that the obstacles he faced in fulfilling his desire to renounce it all were the effects of his karmic destiny. As time went by, he grew ever more detached from relationships with women. *At this point in my life*, he wondered, *why should I act like other men and marry again?* He became a hermit in spirit. After losing his beloved wife, it never occurred to him—not even as an idle fancy—to give himself over to normal human emotions.

There were some who reproached him for his behavior: “Why must you insist on remaining alone? You certainly experienced more than a normal share of grief when your wife passed away, but to continue to dwell on your loss after all this time ... well, you ought to show consideration for others and remarry like any other man. If you did, your neglected villa, which is an unsightly mess, would be in good shape in no time.” He had many such reasonable suggestions from people here and there hoping to establish a connection with an imperial prince, but he paid no attention to any of their proposals.

Between periods of meditation and prayer, Hachinomiya would relax with his daughters; because they were getting older, he taught them how to play the koto and engaged them in trivial pastimes such as Go and *hentsugi*.² Observing the character of his daughters, he could see that the older sister was refined, serious and contemplative. The younger girl was sweet and gentle, and her shy, deferential air was most endearing. Each had distinctive merits.

One balmy, sunny spring day, Hachinomiya was staring out absently at the pond as he always did, observing devoted pairs of mandarin ducks³ paddling about wing-to-wing, calling out to each other. As he turned his attention to instructing his daughters on the koto, he felt a twinge of jealous resentment toward these birds, knowing that they would never abandon their mates.

His daughters were still quite young, with a charming air about them, and he was so moved by the sweet tones they produced on their instruments that tears

came to his eyes.

*The mandarin duck has been abandoned
By his mate ... must his ducklings linger on
Left behind as well in this fleeting world*

“There is no end to my sorrows!” he added, wiping his eyes. He was a strikingly handsome man. His years of religious austerities had left him thin, but that only made him seem all the more elegant and aristocratic. Out of consideration for his daughters, he had put on an informal cloak that was well worn and soft. Still, his casual appearance was awe-inspiring.

The older sister⁴ quietly pulled her inkstone over and traced out words on it as though she were practicing her calligraphy. “Here ... use this instead. It isn’t proper to write on an inkstone,” her father said, handing her a piece of paper. Embarrassed, she wrote down the following:

*Reflecting upon how she was nurtured
How she left her nest, the duckling adrift
On the water comes to know her sad fate*

Not a very good poem, really, but it was extremely affecting given the moment. Her calligraphy was promising, though she was not yet able to smoothly connect her characters. “Your sister must write something as well,” Hachinomiya insisted. The younger daughter, with a childish air, took a long time to compose her verse:

*Were it not for the wings of her father
Who guarded her while shedding endless tears
The little bird would never have been hatched*

How could he not have felt sick at heart, overwhelmed with pity for his beloved daughters, who were dressed in worn-out robes and had to spend their days in lonely boredom with no attendants to look after them? Holding a sutra in his hand, he would read the scripture to them one moment, then sing the notes of a piece of music to them the next. The older sister would play the *biwa* lute, and the younger would accompany her on the thirteen-string *koto*. Though they were still immature, they had always studied and played music together, and so they were not bad at all—indeed, their performances were rather enchanting.

Hachinomiya’s father, the old Emperor, and his mother, who had been a

Consort, both died when he was still very young. He never had support from any eminent figure at the court and thus he never acquired a deep understanding of Chinese studies, which is the kind of knowledge needed to govern. Indeed, how could he have ever learned the political skills required to succeed at the court? Of all the men of imperial birth during that period, he was excessively refined and gentle, like a woman, and unable to administer his affairs. Even though the treasures passed down to him from earlier generations and the inheritance he had from his father-in-law, the Minister, seemed virtually inexhaustible, he somehow managed to squander everything. He had no idea where it all went and, in the end, was left with only the numerous extravagant furnishings that he had accumulated. No one called on him to ask how he was doing, and no one was there to offer sympathy. In his idleness he would summon the very best masters of music from the palace, and because he had already spent much of his youth pursuing such trivial amusements, he became extremely proficient at them.

Hachinomiya was the eighth son of the old Emperor and thus a younger half brother of Genji. During the period when Reizei was the Crown Prince, the Kokiden Consort, who was mother of Emperor Suzaku, plotted to have him pushed aside in favor of Hachinomiya. As a result of the disturbance that arose out of the succession struggle instigated by the Kokiden faction, which was then at the height of its power, Hachinomiya was completely estranged from Genji and cut off from all dealings with him. Later, as the line of succession came to be dominated more and more by Genji's offspring, he was no longer able to find a place at court. Over the years, he abandoned his earlier ambitions and began to live like a priest, concluding that such a life was the most that he could ever expect.

During the period of his struggles at court, Hachinomiya's residence burned down. He was stunned by this shocking setback in a life that had already experienced more than a normal share of misfortune. Because he lacked the resources to find a suitable alternative in the capital, he moved to an elegant country estate he owned on the outskirts of the capital at a place called Uji.⁵ Although he had already decided to renounce the world, it made him terribly sad to face the reality that he would have to live apart from the court.

His villa at Uji was situated near a weir constructed of wooden posts and netting that was used for fishing. This barricade increased the noise of the rapids, making the location less than ideal for a man who wanted to go into quiet retreat, but there was nothing he could do about it. Cherry blossoms, the autumn foliage, and the sounds of the river—these were the things that comforted his heart, and he was increasingly prone to lose himself in pensive meditation. Even out in the far reaches of the fields and mountains⁶ where he had isolated himself from

society, not a moment went by when he did not long for his beloved wife.

*The woman and the house I knew
Have turned to smoke ... so why is it
That I alone should linger on*

His heart smoldered with the realization that living had no meaning for him.

As time went by, fewer and fewer visitors called on this abode situated in mountains beyond mountains.⁷ Only vulgar, low-class servants or provincial mountain peasants came by to serve him, showing a brazen familiarity in his presence. As the days passed, it seemed to him that the morning fog on the peaks⁸ never cleared.

A saintly ascetic who was a master of esoteric Buddhism lived in the mountains at Uji. He had a reputation as a most learned man, but he remained secluded and hardly ever appeared at court. When he learned that a prince of the blood was living alone nearby, doing noble religious practices and studying sutras, he thought him admirable and visited regularly. The ascetic elucidated the deeper meaning of the texts that Prince Hachinomiya had been studying for many years, bringing him to greater awareness of the vain mutability of the world. Despite his spiritual progress, Hachinomiya had to explain to the ascetic why he had not chosen the path of renunciation. “Though my heart is set on rebirth in the next world, where I may take my seat on the lotus and dwell in the unsullied pond of paradise, I am too anxious about leaving behind my young daughters to take priestly vows just yet.”

As it turned out, this very same ascetic would, from time to time, travel to the capital to teach Retired Emperor Reizei about scripture and doctrinal matters. On one such occasion, after answering questions Reizei posed concerning the profound sutras they were reading, he took advantage of the opportunity to mention Hachinomiya.

“The Prince is very wise,” the ascetic remarked, “and has gained a deep understanding of the teachings of the Buddha.⁹ I believe he was truly born to follow the path of enlightenment ... a saintly man who is sincerely dedicated to his devotions.”

“But is it true that he has not yet become a priest?” Reizei asked. “The young men here refer to him as the earthbound saint ... a most poignant situation.”

Kaoru happened to be in service to Reizei at that moment and privately pondered what was being discussed: *I myself know full well the insipid nature of the world, but my practice of religious austerities is hardly enough to draw the attention of others. To my shame, I thoughtlessly let the time pass.* He listened

intently to the conversation, wondering how it was that a man could become saintly while still living in this vulgar world.

“He originally intended to take priestly vows,” the ascetic remarked, “but, as he once lamented to me, some trivial matters held him back, and now he finds that he cannot possibly abandon his poor daughters.” Holy man though he was, the ascetic was a connoisseur of the finer things. “When his daughters perform in concert,” he added, “their captivating music vies with the sound of the rapids, putting one in mind of paradise!”

This praise of the young princesses had an old-fashioned ring to it that made Reizei smile.

“One would imagine that having grown up in the house of such a saintly man they would have been completely unfamiliar with secular diversions,” he said. “What a delight to hear otherwise. He can’t very well abandon them, being so worried about their future ... apparently, he has a very difficult problem on his hands. If it happens that I should outlive him, even for a brief time, I wonder ... would he give his daughters to me?”

Reizei was—or so people thought—the tenth son of the old Emperor, and thus Hachinomiya’s younger half brother. He recalled the example of the cloistered Third Princess, whose father, Suzaku, had placed her in Genji’s care. *If only I could have his daughters ... they would be companions to me in my idleness.*

Kaoru’s thoughts were focused not on the two princesses at Uji, as might have been expected of a young man, but on their father. He now wanted more than ever to meet and observe someone whose state of mind seemed so utterly devoted to religious practices. As the ascetic was preparing to return to his mountain retreat, Kaoru spoke to him and requested his help in arranging a visit. “I very much want to go there and study under Prince Hachinomiya’s guidance, so please make some discreet inquiries on my behalf.”

Reizei sent a message to Hachinomiya: “I have heard through an intermediary about the conditions in which you are living and have been greatly moved.”

*Though my heart, weary of this tiresome world
Travels to the Uji mountains, the veil
Of eightfold clouds you’ve drawn obscures my view*

The ascetic sent Reizei’s messenger on ahead, and so the man reached Hachinomiya first. It was a rare occurrence for anyone, let alone a messenger from such a distinguished figure, to visit this humble abode in the shadow of the mountains. Hachinomiya was overjoyed and welcomed the man in a suitable manner, plying him with wine and local delicacies. He then composed his reply:

*I did not cut all ties to purify my heart
It's just that I grew weary of this world of woe
And made a home of this hut in Ujiyama¹⁰*

Because Hachinomiya refused to consider himself an enlightened holy man, it was clear that he harbored lingering resentments against the world. Reizei was deeply affected by the reply.

The ascetic conveyed to Hachinomiya Kaoru's profound desire to follow the path of the Buddha: "The young man told me that he has had an abiding interest since childhood in acquiring knowledge of the holy scriptures, but so long as he remains unavoidably caught up in the mundane world, he will be kept busy day and night with public and private matters. He said that someone as unimportant as he should have no cause to feel constrained about turning his back on the world, shutting himself away and studying. And yet his current lifestyle naturally causes him to neglect his devotions and give himself up to worldly diversions. That's why he spoke so earnestly to me, saying that after hearing about the admirable life you lead, he was eager to turn to you for religious guidance."

Hachinomiya replied at length: "Normally, the realization of the truth of mutability and the beginnings of an aversion to this world can be traced to some moment when a person suffers a reversal of fortune that makes him resentful and motivates him to pursue the path of religious devotion. It is thus remarkable that a young man like Kaoru, who has everything he wants, who has known no disappointments, should be so focused on the afterlife. In my case, perhaps it was destined that I should come to detest the world and turn to religion, as though the Buddha were giving me special encouragement. In the course of things, I was able to fulfill my wish to quietly practice my devotions; but now I sense that my life will soon come to an end without ever achieving any true spiritual enlightenment after all this time. Kaoru will be a companion in the study of the Dharma, but one who will put me to shame, since I'm all too aware that I've learned nothing of the past and future." He exchanged letters with Kaoru, and the young man set out to visit him.

In truth, the scene was even more poignantly desolate than what the ascetic had described. The villa was so simple and severe that it reminded Kaoru of a hermit's temporary grass hut. Other residences may be referred to in similar terms as mountain villas, but those are places of repose with their own special charms. Here, the violent roar of the rapids and crashing of waves made it seem impossible that one could forget one's cares, and with the fierce howling of the wind at night, there would not have been a moment to dream peaceful dreams.

The appearance of the place moved Kaoru to speculate that Hachinomiya, who was determined to find enlightenment, may have found it easier to renounce the world in this environment, which had nothing appealing about it that might distract his attention from his devotions. *But what do his daughters think about it? It's certainly a far remove from the gentle, feminine places where princesses usually reside.*

A single sliding door separated the chapel from the daughters' quarters. Given the alluring atmosphere, a young man of amorous proclivities would have wanted to make advances to see how the young women might respond and thus find out what they were like. Kaoru, however, checked himself, thinking that to engage in suggestively playful banter would undermine the true purpose of his visit. After all, he had come to this place deep in the mountains with the intention of turning away from worldly desires. Thus, he sensitively focused on expressing his concern for Hachinomiya's difficult circumstances, and continued thereafter to visit again and again. Despite maintaining his connection with the vulgar world, Hachinomiya had gained profound insight from pursuing religious studies and austerities in his mountain retreat, and, just as Kaoru had hoped, he humbly shared his wisdom without ever flaunting his knowledge.

There are many holy men and learned priests in the world, but virtuous men at the rank of bishop or abbot are often officious and aloof. They are always busy, and so they tend to be curt and blunt in manner. Kaoru found them much too pompous and overweening to ask them to clearly explain the meaning and workings of things in the world. There were also disciples of Buddha, men at a much lower rank who had accrued great merit by practicing austerities and upholding the Precepts, but they were usually vulgar in appearance, rough in speech and uncouthly familiar in comportment. Kaoru was usually occupied with official duties during the daytime and had time to reflect on profound subjects only during the quiet evening hours. He thus found it altogether unpleasant to summon such boorish disciples close to his bedchambers to discuss the teachings. In contrast, Hachinomiya was truly refined and ennobled by his suffering. The words and expressions he used when discussing the teachings of the Buddha that the bishops and disciples lectured on were simpler and more familiar to Kaoru. Moreover, though he had not achieved an especially profound understanding of the scriptures, as a man whose karmic destiny was to be born a prince of the blood he had an unusually fine, innate grasp of the true nature of the world. The two men gradually grew closer. Kaoru began to wish he could be with his mentor all the time and longed to meet him during those periods when he was busy at court and could not go to Uji.

Reizei could see how highly Kaoru esteemed Prince Hachinomiya, and so he

too began sending a constant stream of messages to Uji. Hardly a word had been spoken about Hachinomiya for years, but now gradually more and more visitors found their way to his lonely, desolate abode. Reizei would on appropriate occasions honor him with messages inquiring after his well-being, and Kaoru would take every opportunity to be of faithful service, seeing to both elegant celebrations and more serious, practical matters. In this way, three years passed.

It happened in late autumn. The seasonal Invocation of the Holy Name was at hand, and because the roar of the rapids at the fishing weir had been especially grating recently, Hachinomiya went up to the meditation hall at the temple where the ascetic lived to spend a week practicing his devotions.

While their father was gone, the two sisters felt more forlorn, bored, and depressed than ever. Kaoru, remembering that he had not called at Uji in some time, very discreetly set out during the wee hours of the night just as the predawn moon was rising. He had a very small escort and was dressed in a manner that would disguise his identity.

Because Hachinomiya's villa was on the near bank of the river, there was no need to arrange for a boat. Kaoru traveled on horseback; the closer he got to Uji, the denser the fog grew. As he made his way through undergrowth thick enough to obscure the path, he struggled against a fierce wind that shook the dew from the leaves of the trees. He was thoroughly soaked and chilled to the bone, but he couldn't complain, since he was the one who decided to come here. Having hardly ever set out on this sort of adventure, he felt sad and exhilarated at the same time.

*How much stranger than the dew dropping from leaves
Helpless in the blasts sweeping down the mountain
Are these tears of mine that fall so easily*

He ordered his escort to be quiet lest they awaken some meddlesome mountain peasant. He also took care to minimize the clopping of his horse as he cut through fences of brush wattle or waded through murmuring streams. However, for all his caution, he could not disguise his fragrance, which was carried on the wind. At house after house people started awake, wondering, *Whose fragrance do I smell?*¹¹

As they neared the villa they heard chillingly sublime music, though they could not tell what the instruments were. *I have heard that Hachinomiya always plays in this manner, but I have never had the chance to hear his koto, so famous for its tonal beauty. What a stroke of luck that I should arrive at this moment!* With such thoughts in mind, Kaoru entered and realized that he had been hearing

a *biwa* lute. The instrument was tuned to the *ōshiki* mode,¹² and though the song was an ordinary prelude used for tuning, in such a setting it had an otherworldly feel; the sound produced by the plectrum was pure and enchanting. A thirteen-string koto could be heard accompanying the *biwa* intermittently, and its graceful, feminine tone was deeply affecting.

He had concealed himself since he wanted to listen a while longer, but then a man—a guard or watchman of some sort who had clearly heard Kaoru's arrival—stepped out brusquely. "My lord has gone into retreat for certain reasons," the man said. "I shall have a messenger inform him that you are here."

"There's no need to bother with that," Kaoru replied. "I really mustn't intrude on him during the limited number of days he has to practice his devotions. It would, however, be a shame if after having drenched my robes getting here I should have to go back disappointed that it was all for naught. Please inform your mistresses about my situation ... it would be some consolation to hear at least a word of pity from them."

A knowing smile spread over the man's unattractive face. "As you wish, my lord," he said, and started back inside.

"Wait a moment!" Kaoru called the man back. "I've heard from various people over the years how well the Prince's daughters play together and have been eager to hear them. This is a welcome chance for me. Is there no hidden corner nearby where I might conceal myself for a short time? I don't want my unexpected appearance to make them stop."

Even someone of rough, common sensibilities like the watchman could recognize from Kaoru's features and overall appearance that he was a remarkably impressive person—this despite his being dressed in hunting robes.

"They play all the time," the watchman informed him, "mornings and evenings when no one is around to hear them. But whenever someone calls from the capital, even a person of lower rank, they refuse to play at all. In fact, our lord has largely kept the presence of his daughters a secret, and he has made it clear that he does not want us to tell anyone that they live here."

Kaoru smiled and replied, "It's deplorable of Prince Hachinomiya to hide them away. Everyone praises him as a rare exemplar of virtue, yet here he is, behaving secretly. Be that as it may, take me to where I may listen to them. My intentions are strictly honorable. How very strange that they should be living like this ... in truth, they can hardly be considered normal."

"As you wish, my lord. Were I to refuse, I would be criticized afterward as a man of no judgment." So saying, he showed Kaoru to a spot in the garden in front of the residence that was closed off by a fence made of a lattice of bamboo. The watchman then called the escort into a gallery in the west hall and received

them there himself.

A gate in the wattle fence appeared to lead to the residence beyond, and so Kaoru pushed it open a crack and peeked through. Gazing across the misty garden, enchanting in the pale light of the moon, he could see the two sisters sitting just inside their raised blinds. A page girl was seated on the veranda, looking thin and cold in her soft, shabby robe. Several grown-up attendants were sitting there as well, dressed in a similar manner. The sisters were seated inside in the aisle room. One of them was partially hidden behind a pillar. A *biwa* lute was set out in front of her and she was turning over the plectrum with her fingertips, toying with it. When the moon suddenly emerged from behind a cloud and brightly lit up the scene, she said, “I may not have a fan, but I can still call forth the moon with this.”¹³ The lovely glow of her face, which peeked out from behind the plectrum, was utterly adorable.

The other sister, who was reclining nearby, was leaning over a *koto*. “I’ve heard of people calling forth the setting sun,”¹⁴ she said, “but you are certainly prone to some peculiar notions!” She was smiling, and her figure seemed a little more dignified and modestly refined.

“Even if this plectrum can’t call forth the moon,” her sister retorted, “that doesn’t mean the *biwa* and the moon aren’t connected!”¹⁵ Their silly, sisterly exchanges touched Kaoru with their warmth and charm. They were not at all what he had imagined earlier from his distant vantage. Though he would on occasion hear younger ladies-in-waiting reading romances handed down from the past—stories that invariably included scenes involving characters like these two sisters—he himself had always remained skeptical, doubtful that such things could ever actually take place in real life. Yet here he was, finding himself irresistibly drawn to these young women. *It’s true ... remarkable things really do occur in out-of-the-way places in this world!*

Because the fog was thick, he could not make the princesses out all that clearly. Just as he was hoping the moon would emerge from behind the clouds again, it appeared that someone stepped out from the interior of the residence and announced the arrival of a visitor, for the blinds were lowered immediately and everyone moved back inside. Neither sister look flustered; their quiet, gentle movements as they concealed themselves without so much as a rustle of their robes created an impression of endearing feminine softness, and he found their extreme elegance and courtly grace alluring.

Kaoru silently withdrew and then had a messenger rush back to the capital with orders to bring a carriage.

“I came at an inconvenient time,” he told the homely watchman, “but as things turned out, my visit has given me joy and some small comfort from my

cares. Inform your lord's daughters that I have arrived ... and do be sure to let them know just how soaked I am as a result of my exertions." The man went off and delivered the message.

The two princesses, who never imagined that they might be spied on like this, were terribly embarrassed when they realized that Kaoru had possibly overheard their casual conversation. The breeze had earlier carried in a mysteriously wonderful fragrance, but because they had noticed it at an hour when a visitor was unlikely, they had not been at all alarmed. Their carelessness made them feel ashamed, and they didn't know what to do.

The attendant who was to deliver his message requesting an audience with the princesses struck Kaoru as much too young and inexperienced for the task. He thought that timing was crucial in all matters, and because the fog had not cleared yet, he took advantage of the moment to stride over to a spot in front of the blinds and kneel there. The unsophisticated young attendants had no idea what to say to him and seemed ill at ease even offering a cushion.

"It's discomfiting to be left outside these blinds," Kaoru said. "If my heart were really impulsive and shallow, would I have bothered traveling the rugged mountain path all the way here? This is a most peculiar welcome, I must say. Still, I would hope that if I were to come through the drenching dews over and over, you might at least recognize the sincerity of my feelings." He spoke in a genuinely earnest manner.

Not one of the younger attendants was capable of a smooth, coherent response —indeed, they felt so awkward and embarrassed that they wanted to disappear. As a result, some time passed while they went to wake up the more experienced women. The older sister, uncomfortable that the delay in replying would create the impression that they were teasing Kaoru, spoke up at last. "We are, as you can tell, inexperienced in such matters, so how could we pretend to know how to answer you?" She spoke in a hushed, reserved tone, her voice noble and gracious.

"I realize that it's customary for a woman to pretend that she knows nothing of the aching sorrow in a man's heart, even when she is all too aware of his feelings. But it's especially disappointing that you in particular should feign complete ignorance about me. I imagine that, since you reside in the house of a remarkable, enlightened man, you too have a clear understanding of the world. Thus, it would be best to use your wisdom to judge the depth or shallowness of my feelings, which are too powerful for me to keep hidden any longer. Must you cut me off, believing I am driven by wanton passions? There are some who have urged me to be more amorously inclined, but I stalwartly refuse to yield to such temptations. Reports about me must no doubt have reached you. How happy it

would make me if I could turn to you as a companion, one who would listen in sympathy to my stories about tedious court society, or if you would come to trust me enough that I in turn could provide a diversion from your feelings of isolation and brooding sorrow.” He said many other things besides. She, being diffident, found it hard to answer him and left it instead to an old attendant who had just been roused from sleep to respond in her place.

This older woman, who was known as Bennokimi, was anything but reticent.

“Really, now … this is unacceptable. How rude to leave his lordship seated in such a spot! He should be seated *inside* the blinds! These young women … they know nothing about protocol.”

The two sisters felt ill at ease, since the voice speaking so bluntly was that of an old woman.

“It is exceedingly strange, you see,” Bennokimi continued, “but due to the circumstances of my young mistresses’ father, who is no longer counted as one who resides in this world, we receive neither visits nor expressions of concern from those people one might assume would still remember him. That’s why your unexpected devotion to my lord is so moving, even to the heart of someone as insignificant as I am. My young mistresses feel grateful to you as well … it’s just that they are shy and have a hard time expressing their emotions.”

Kaoru found Bennokimi’s forwardness and excessive familiarity offputting, but her demeanor suggested that she was a woman of good breeding. Further, her voice had a lovely, noble lilt. “I was feeling as though I was being utterly ignored, and so your appearance gives me cause to rejoice,” Kaoru replied. “I’m especially relieved to hear that my feelings are clearly understood.”

He came inside the blinds and sat down, leaning against a pillar. The women peeked around the side of the standing curtain to catch a glimpse of him, and in the faint, gathering light of early dawn they could see that the hunting robes he was wearing to disguise his identity were, as he had said, soaked through. The air around him was wondrously suffused with an ethereal fragrance.

Bennokimi, the old woman with whom he had been speaking, began to weep.

“I hesitate to say more, lest perhaps I go too far and give offense. But for many years I’ve prayed fervently to be granted an opportunity to pass on to you a sorrowful tale about your past, to somehow let you know at least a small part of your background. Your visit here is a sign that my prayers have been answered, and this is a joyful moment for me. Unfortunately, I’m blinded by tears that come too quickly and cannot speak right now.”

Kaoru could tell from the way she seemed to be trembling as she spoke that her grief was sincere. In general, older people tend to break down and cry more easily, but he still found it odd that she should be so affected.

"I have come here many, many times, always traveling the dewy path on my own," he told her, "but until now, no one has understood me the way you have. You say that this is a joyful moment for you ... so, please tell me all you know."

"Such opportunities as this are certainly rare," she replied. "And even if they do come around again, life is uncertain, and one never knows what the morrow will bring. In any case, all I want to tell you is that there was once an old woman like me ... they called her Kojijū, and she served your mother, the cloistered Princess, at her residence on Sanjō. Anyway, I heard that she passed away. Though I have reached that stage in life when so many of the women with whom I was once familiar are gone, I was sent from a distant province five or six years ago to be in service to the young princesses here. You probably don't know much about it, but you may have heard rumors about a man named Kashiwagi, who was the older brother of the current Fujiwara Major Counselor. He was Commander of the Right Gate Guard when he died ... it seems like it all happened just yesterday, for my sleeves have never dried from the tears of sorrow that I shed over his passing. That's why it feels like a dream when I count on my hands the years that have gone by since his death and realize that during that time you have grown from an infant to the mature man I see before me. I am called Bennokimi, and my mother was Kashiwagi's nurse.¹⁶ I served him closely mornings and evenings, and though I am not a person of any significance at all, he would from time to time secretly confide in me, disclosing certain matters that he could not keep inside his heart. As he lay dying, his end approaching, he summoned me and spoke a little about his final wishes. There is one thing in particular he said that I must tell you about ... since I've said this much, you may have already guessed, but if you feel that you want to hear the rest of the story, then I should tell you later in a setting that is quiet and more relaxed. As it is, the young women here are feeling awkward and embarrassed, nudging each other as if to indicate I've already said too much ... and they have reason to feel that way." And with that, she finally fell silent.

Kaoru found her story passing strange, uncanny like a dream or the unsolicited revelation of a spirit medium. Still, the old woman had spoken of matters that had always vaguely troubled him, and he was eager to find out more from her. There were, however, too many eyes on them at that moment, and he felt it would be discourteous to spend the night caught up in stories of days gone by so soon after meeting Bennokimi.

"I'm not exactly sure what you're referring to," he replied, "but I'm deeply moved to hear you speak of things that happened in the past, and I most certainly want to hear the rest of the story from you. But the fog is lifting, and it would be awkward for me to be seen in these humble robes by your young mistresses, who

would no doubt censure me for my disgraceful appearance. Thus, I regret that I cannot stay as long as I would like.” As he stood up and prepared to withdraw, they heard the faint sound of the bell at the temple where Hachinomiya was staying during his retreat. The fog lay thick all around them.

Kaoru experienced poignant melancholy at being separated from his mentor by the eightfold bank of clouds at the mountain peak,¹⁷ and this aroused his sympathy for the suffering of the two sisters. *They seem to have tasted all of life's miseries*, he reflected. *No wonder they remain locked away from the world like this.*

*The black-pine slopes I crossed on Mount Makinoo
To come to you are now obscured in the dense mists ...
In dawn's faint light I cannot find my homeward path*

“It feels so desolate!” Wavering, he turned back.

His splendid figure at that moment would have been considered stunning even by those back in the capital who were accustomed to seeing him all the time. How much more remarkable he must have looked in the eyes of those living in this mountain villa. The older sister, who seemed to feel uneasy having someone reply for her, responded in the same gentle, diffident manner as before:

*In this time when autumn mists further veil
The path up the slope, we feel all the more
Isolated from the cloud-covered peaks*

Her faint sighs indicated a sensitivity that was anything but shallow.

Although the area around the villa was not especially pleasing, many things about the locale stirred feelings of pity in him. But because the dawn was advancing, he felt embarrassed that he might be exposed to view. “You were not forthcoming, and there remain so many things that you haven’t told me … but I should save my complaints until we’re better acquainted. Even so, if you treat me like you would any other man, then I shall hold your lack of judgment against you.” He moved over to the place on the west side of the villa that the watchman had prepared earlier for the escort and sat there, lost in thought.

“The fishermen seem to be making a fuss down by the weir,” one of Kaoru’s men remarked. “But they don’t sound all that enthusiastic … perhaps the sweetfish aren’t running.” The other men in the escort all seemed to know what he was talking about. Fragile-looking boats piled up with brushwood were moving to and fro, each one going about its mundane task. Their insubstantial

appearance as they drifted uncertainly served as a reminder that life was just as precarious. *In this mutable world*, Kaoru mused, *am I justified in thinking that simply because I live peacefully in a jeweled palace, I too am not adrift, subject to the vicissitudes of life?* He called for an inkstone and wrote the following to the older sister:

*As he is crossing the rapids to gauge the heart
Of the divine princess at Uji Bridge, spray drips
From his punt pole and dampens the ferryman's sleeves¹⁸*

“You seem to be lost in melancholy thoughts,” he added, and then had the watchman deliver the note. The man appeared to be chilled through, the skin on his face covered with goose bumps.

The older sister was ashamed of the quality and scent of the paper she had to use for her reply, but she felt that she had to compose a verse without delay.

*Constantly soaked by the spray that drips from his pole
The sleeves of the ferryman punting back and forth
Across the Uji River must surely molder*

“I feel as if it is my fate to have been cast adrift ...” Her writing had an endearing air about it that made her seem exquisitely attractive. He felt drawn to her and was reluctant to leave. But he heard his men shouting, announcing the arrival of the carriage that he had called for, and all he could do was summon the watchman. “When your lord, Prince Hachinomiya, returns, tell him that I shall definitely pay a visit then.” Kaoru removed his damp robes, which he presented to the watchman as a reward for his services, and changed into the set of court robes he had ordered when he called for the carriage.

The story that the old woman told him remained very much on his mind. The alluring image of the two sisters, who were far more noble than he had ever imagined, also stayed with him, and such thoughts made him realize how weak-willed he remained, how hard it would be to renounce his attachments to this world. He sent a letter to Uji—not a conventional love note, but a missive set down on thick white paper in a calligraphic style he chose after careful consideration and with brushstrokes that created beautiful gradations in the shading of the ink. He wrote the following:

Concerned that I might come across to you as too forward, it pains me now to think that, alas, I was overly reticent in your presence, and left unsaid

many things I wanted to tell you. As I mentioned very briefly when we spoke, from now on you must ease your fears and permit me to appear before your blinds in a more relaxed manner. I was informed of the planned length of your father's retreat in the mountains and look forward to visiting him to clear away the fog of dejection that overcame me when the mists at Uji prevented me from going to see him.

He wrote other things besides—all very sincere, earnest, and proper. He chose a lower-ranking aide in the Left Palace Guard to act as his messenger and gave the man instructions: "Find the old woman called Bennokimi and give this to her." Kaoru felt sorry for the watchman at Uji—the man who looked so cold that day—and so he also had the messenger take a large number of *hinoki* cypress boxes filled with food and delicacies to give to him.

The following day, Kaoru sent a letter to the temple where Prince Hachinomiya had gone into retreat. He imagined that the recent autumn storms must have made the monks there feel isolated and distressed, and so he sent generous offerings of silk and padded cotton for Hachinomiya to distribute to them on the day his retreat ended. Kaoru included sets of cotton, silk, surplices and robes to be given to each of the virtuous priests who had conducted services for his mentor.

The watchman at the Uji villa exchanged his old clothes for the elegant hunting robes and soft singlet of white twill, with its ineffable scent, that Kaoru had doffed and left behind for him. Unfortunately, the man couldn't change his status or homely appearance, and he ended up feeling very self-conscious, since everyone praised the scent of the sleeves while condemning him for wearing a fragrance inappropriate for a man of his lowly position. No longer able to feel relaxed or to behave as he wanted, he decided to rid the robes of the scent that so startled and disturbed everyone. However, Kaoru's fragrance had so thoroughly permeated the cloth that he could not wash it out and was left with a dilemma.

Kaoru thought the older sister's reply utterly flawless—at once modest and charming. Her father, hearing that there had been an exchange of letters, perused Kaoru's himself. "Well now," he remarked, "I see no problem with this. It would be improper to treat it as a love note. He seems different in temperament from other young men, and his interest in my older daughter may arise from passing hints I dropped to him suggesting he take care of her after I'm gone." So saying, he sent a message expressing his gratitude to Kaoru for all of the many gifts sent to the mountain temple during the retreat. On receiving this message, Kaoru felt that he should make another visit to Uji.

That reminds me, he told himself. Niou dreams about how delightful it would

be if he could have an affair with a woman who lived off in a remote mountain abode like the one at Uji. I'll tell him about that place to rouse his interest and get his heart astir with anticipation. With that plan in mind, one quiet evening he went to call on his friend.

They chatted about various things as they always did, and during the course of their conversation, Kaoru brought up Hachinomiya's circumstances at Uji. Niou was thoroughly intrigued, captivated by the detailed description of what Kaoru had observed that early morning when he met the two sisters. Niou's reaction was exactly what Kaoru had expected, and so he continued his account in order to make the situation sound even more alluring.

"This is all very well," Niou said resentfully, "but what of the reply she sent you? Why won't you let me see it? If I were in your place, I'd show you the letter!"

"Oh really?" Kaoru retorted. "Apparently you've received numerous letters from all sorts of ladies, but do you allow me the slightest glimpse of even a single page? Be that as it may, there is no way a man as insignificant and inexperienced as I could possibly keep these young ladies at Uji secluded away just for himself, and so I thought I ought to have you meet them ... though, in all honesty, I have no idea how you would ever be able to visit them in such a remote spot. After all, it's much easier for a man of lower status like myself to carry on a clandestine affair if he so desires. It seems that there are many fascinating young women hidden away. And if that's the case, then naturally there must be other women who are every bit as attractive as these two sisters ... ladies living in an obscure corner, hidden away in a mountain village in some melancholy, isolated abode. For years, I looked down on the two ladies I've been telling you about, ignoring everything that I heard about them on the assumption that living with a holy man completely cut off from the world had made them uncouth rustics. But if they are as lovely as they appeared in the faint light of the mist and moon, then they are flawless. Their looks and demeanor must be considered truly ideal."

By this time, Niou was genuinely jealous. *Kaoru is never excited by common affairs, he thought, so if he's this deeply impressed, these women must be extraordinary indeed.* His curiosity was now running wild.

"You must check them out further," he said, encouraging his friend—though it was amusing to Kaoru to see Niou so obviously irritated by the hateful constraints imposed on his behavior by his lofty status as prince of the blood.

"Come now," Kaoru replied, "they mean nothing to me. You know perfectly well that I avoid frivolous affairs in order to keep my heart free of passing attachments to this world. If I were to give myself over to passions I can't

control, I'd be acting contrary to my greatest hopes."

"My, what noble sentiments," Niou replied with a laugh. "Now if only you can live up to those arduous saintly ideals you're always going on about!"

Truth be told, Kaoru was far more preoccupied with what the old attendant had intimated than with the charms of the older sister or reports of her beauty. Such mundane matters had never been all that interesting to him.

It was now the tenth month, and around the fifth or sixth day Kaoru traveled again to Uji.

"This time you really should take in the fishing weir, my lord," several of his men urged him, but Kaoru refused to do any sightseeing.

"I am not some sweetfish fry," he said. "Why would I approach the weir and vie with the mayfly to see whose life can be shorter?"¹⁹

He made his way discreetly, as he always did, to Hachinomiya's villa. He traveled lightly in a humble-looking wickerwork carriage and consciously dressed in informal court robes of stiff, plain silk with trousers cinched at the ankles.

Hachinomiya was overjoyed to see him and arranged for a delightful repast of local delicacies. When it grew dark he had an oil lamp set beside him and, summoning the ascetic, had the holy man lecture on the deeper truths of the various sutras he had been reading. They didn't sleep that night, not even dozing off for a few moments. The effect of the roar of the river and the howling of the wind, the rustling of fallen leaves and the churning of the rapids, was beyond poignant—the place was sublimely frightening and desolate.

Thinking that dawn must be approaching, Kaoru recalled that night when he heard the two sisters performing. He took advantage of the moment to mention how the sound of a koto could stir the emotions. "On my previous visit I arrived just before dawn, wandering lost in the fog, and happened to catch a few strains of a song so exquisite that I wanted to hear more."

"After I forswore the earthly pleasures of colors and perfumes," Hachinomiya replied, "I forgot all of the music I had learned in the past as well." Summoning an attendant, he had a seven-string koto brought out. "No, no ... I'm no longer up to it. Perhaps if I could follow your lead, it might come back to me." He called for a *biwa* lute and encouraged Kaoru to perform.

"I can hardly believe that this is the same instrument I heard so briefly that morning," Kaoru said as he was tuning the *biwa*. "It makes me wonder ... did the overtones produced by the koto make this instrument sound so special on that occasion?" Feeling inadequate, he didn't even try to play.

"Really, now," Hachinomiya replied, "that's rather unkind of you, don't you think? Just where would you find the skills to play music pleasing enough for

your discerning ears in a place like this? It's inconceivable." He began to play the koto, and the lonely sound of the instrument produced a frisson in Kaoru—an effect heightened by the soughing of the wind in the pines at the summit.²⁰ The Prince performed haltingly, pretending to have forgotten how to play, and stopped after one elegant song.

"From time to time, quite unexpectedly," he said, "I will hear faint sounds of a thirteen-string koto echoing through this house and wonder if my daughters haven't acquired some ability on the instrument. Then again, it has been a long time since I last paid any attention to such mundane matters as teaching them how to perform. They both play their instruments as they please, with only the rhythm of the river waves to beat time for them. Of course I can hardly imagine them usefully keeping time by themselves."

He sent a message to his daughters: "Come now, play something for us." But they would not hear of it, shrinking back into their rooms. That Kaoru had unexpectedly overheard them playing for their own amusement was one thing, but to perform now would merely serve to expose their flaws. Their father repeatedly urged them to play, but in the end they declined, giving all manner of excuses. Their decision left Kaoru keenly disappointed.

At times like this, Hachinomiya, contrary to his own true objectives, was ashamed that his daughters lived in a manner others would consider bizarrely out of touch with the world. "While I was raising them," he said, "I didn't want to let others know of their existence. But when I consider the possibility that I could die any time—today or tomorrow even—I worry that my daughters, who have long lives ahead of them, may come down in the world and end as homeless beggars. That concern is the sole fetter that keeps me bound to this world."

Kaoru looked on him with compassion.

"My circumstances at present are not so certain that I could formally offer to act as their support, but in saying so I do not want you to consider me cold or remote. Be assured that, for as long as I'm alive, I shall not waver from my promise to you, briefly spoken though it may be."

"You have made me very happy," the Prince replied.

When Hachinomiya retired to undertake his predawn devotions, Kaoru summoned Bennokimi, the old woman who looked after the two princesses. She was almost sixty now, yet she retained an air of courtly grace and refined manners as she spoke to him about various things. She wept constantly as she related the story of Kashiwagi—how his unrequited longings made him suffer until he fell ill, wasted away, and died.

Her stories of the old days would certainly touch anyone's heart, even if she

were speaking about the misfortunes of a complete stranger, Kaoru reflected. *But in my case, I've been anxious for years to learn the truth about the past, about what happened and how my life began. I've even prayed to the Buddha for a clear explanation of these matters. Now, I have this unexpected opportunity to hear these heartrending tales of the past, which are almost like a dream to me. Perhaps this is a sign that my prayers have been answered.* Kaoru was finding it difficult to hold back his tears.

"Well now," he said, "it seems there remains at least one person who knows the truth of what happened long ago. Are there others who have known about this amazing, distressing story? In all my years, I never heard anything about it."

"No one else knew ... just Kojijū and I," Bennokimi replied. "I never said a word to anyone. As you see, I'm a woman of no significance whatsoever, but because I served him closely day and night, I naturally observed what was happening. Whenever Kashiwagi's yearning was more than he could bear, he would use the two of us as go-betweens to take a letter to the Third Princess ... of course, it would be inappropriate of me to divulge any details. When he was about to die, he left me with a few last words, which have proven to be a heavy burden for someone of my lowly status. Ever since then I've been praying with all my heart that I might somehow find a way to pass along his testament, even though I know I'm unworthy, and now that I've met you, I know the Buddha really does exist in this world. I have some items that you must look at. I sometimes asked myself what was the point of keeping such things, and I wondered if I shouldn't burn them all. You see, I realized that I could die at any time and worried that if I left them behind, they might fall into someone else's hands and the secret would be exposed. Then you began calling on my lord from time to time, and because we came to expect your visits, I began to feel reassured and once more resolved to pray wholeheartedly for this moment. Surely it is the working of karmic destiny that we should meet like this."

She cried as she told him everything she remembered about the circumstances of his birth.

"... Then, during the upheaval that followed my young lord's death, my mother, who had served him as nurse, fell ill and passed away soon after. I fell into an even deeper depression, and while I was wearing a double layer of mourning robes, preoccupied with my sorrows, an undistinguished man who for a number of years had been eager to have me as a wife used his wiles to get me to go with him to the far western provinces of Kyūshū. I cut off all ties with life in the capital, and only after my husband died did I return ten years later to a world that felt completely different to me. Thanks to my father's relationship with Prince Hachinomiya, I have had the privilege of going in and out of this

household from the time I was a child. Since I'm now an old woman who can't very well mingle in court society, I came here to serve his daughters. I had hoped that on my return to the capital I might be allowed to attend Retired Emperor Reizei's Consort ... she was, after all, Kashiwagi's younger sister, and I knew so much about her family. But I had come down so much in the world I felt awkward about approaching her, and so here I am, decaying away like a withered tree hidden deep in mountain recesses.²¹ Kojijū died, you know ... when could it have been? Now, in my old age, when so few of the people I knew long ago in the prime of their youth remain alive, it makes me sad to think of the many who have gone, leaving me behind while I continue to live on." Just as she did at their first meeting, Bennokimi continued talking until daybreak.

"That's enough for now," Kaoru said. "There is no way you can tell me everything about the past in one sitting. Let's continue another time in a private place where we can feel comfortable that no one will overhear us. I have a vague recollection of Kojijū ... I must have been only five or six at the time. I heard that she came down with a chest cold and died suddenly. Had I not met you, I would have lived out my life guilty of the grave sin of never properly honoring my real father."

She handed him a musty-smelling bundle of papers that had been tightly rolled up and sewn inside a pouch. "See to it that these are disposed of under your supervision. Your father collected these letters and gave them to me to keep, saying he did not have much longer to live. I intended to give them to Kojijū the next time I met her so she could return them to your mother, but we were separated and I never had the chance. I've been filled with personal regrets and sorrows ever since."

Kaoru nonchalantly tucked away the letters he had just received. It bothered him to think that an old woman like Bennokimi might divulge this secret unsolicited, since it made for such strange, fascinating gossip. She promised him over and over that she would never let the secret out. Despite her reassurances, however, he felt uneasy, his mind in turmoil.

He had a meal of gruel and steamed rice. Yesterday had been an official day off from duties at the palace, but today the period of abstinence His Majesty was observing would end. Moreover, Reizei's daughter, the First Princess, was ill, and so he definitely had to go and pay his respects. As a result, he had no free time and had to return to the capital. Nonetheless, he assured Hachinomiya that as soon as this busy period was over he would call again before the autumn leaves in the mountains fell.

Hachinomiya was overjoyed to hear this and replied, "I feel the radiance that you bring each time you visit us always dispels the gloom of the mountain shade

a little."

On returning home, Kaoru immediately looked at the pouch Bennokimi had given him. It had been made by sewing together pieces of Chinese brocade, and the words *For the Princess* were written on it. A slender cord had been used to tie it shut, and the knot was secured with a seal that bore Kashiwagi's name. Kaoru felt apprehensive, afraid to open the pouch. Among the papers of various hues were five or six letters, the handful of replies his mother had written. In addition, there were five or six sheets of stiff Michinokuni paper on which Kashiwagi had, in his own hand, described his many sorrows: how his illness had grown worse; how he was nearing the end of his life; how trying it was for him to get off even a short message to his beloved; how the approach of death made his longing to see the Third Princess all the more intense; how she had renounced the world by changing her appearance and becoming a nun. The characters that he had scrawled down the pages looked like the weird tracks of a bird.

*My soul, soon to depart for that far realm
Where we can no longer meet, is sadder
Than the one who turns away from this world*

He had added at the end of the letter, "We have no need to be concerned about the future of the child whose remarkable birth has brought me such joy, and yet ..."

*Were I to live I would watch from afar
As my child grows tall like a pine seedling
Secretly planted amidst rocky crags*

The letter looked as though he had stopped writing halfway through, and the calligraphy was wild and disordered. It was addressed to Kojijū. The paper, which was now home to silverfish, was old and smelled moldy. The ink, however, had not faded. The words, still sharp and clear, looked as if they had just been set down. *What Bennokimi said is true. If this ever fell into someone else's hands ...* He was moved to anxiety and compassion for his father and mother.

Had there ever been an affair like this one? He had intended to go to the palace, but he was now so preoccupied with troubling thoughts that he decided against it. When he went to see his mother, he found her reading a sutra, serenely untroubled and youthful-looking. She quickly hid the sutra from him,

embarrassed that such practices might be considered inappropriate for a woman. In contrast to his oblivious mother, his mind was racing, filled with all of the things he had just learned. But he would keep that knowledge to himself.

Why would I ever tell her that I know the truth?

¹ Hachinomiya means “the Eighth Prince.” It is not in the original text at this point, but appears later when more of Hachinomiya’s background is explained. I am introducing the name here in this fashion as a matter of convenience.

² This game is mentioned in the *Aoi* chapter. It involves writing down radicals or parts of a Chinese character and trying to guess the whole character.

³ The text identifies the birds simply as *mizudori*, “water birds.” Since they are a symbol of spring and of faithfulness and devotion, I have chosen to identify them as mandarin ducks—a likely choice in any case, one that has deep associations in Chinese and Japanese poetry with marital felicity and the season of rebirth. Wild geese would be another possibility, but they are more often associated in this narrative with autumn.

⁴ Hachinomiya’s daughters are referred to in the text as *ōigimi* (“eldest daughter/sister”) and *nakanokimi* (“second or younger daughter/sister”), nouns that are used for other characters, including Tamakazura’s daughters in the previous chapter. This is not at all confusing in the original, since the narrative context makes identification clear, but it is worth noting that traditional poetic names for these two important characters were never settled in the same way that they were for many of Genji’s lovers. Arthur Waley tried to remedy this by naming these key female characters Agemaki and Kozeri. However, while I admire the aesthetic impulse to provide such names, I am not comfortable making that sort of intervention. An important characteristic of the story is that many of the female characters are “nameless” in the sense that they are identified solely in terms of their relationship to a male character. Not providing specific names seems appropriate in this case, since the act of identifying them simply as Hachinomiya’s older and younger daughter helps to emphasize both their precarious social circumstances and their status as imperial princesses. Later in the text, I identify these characters as the Uji princesses.

⁵ *Kokinshū* 983 (Kisen): “I live in my hermitage southeast of the capital, in a place that people in this world of woe call Ujiyama, mountain of sorrows.” Uji is a place name, but because of orthographic conventions at the time Murasaki Shikibu wrote, the word could be read in *kana* as *ushi*, a homophone meaning “sorrow.” Uji is thus not only physically on the margins of court society; its name also has religious, otherworldly associations.

⁶ *Kokinshū* 947 (Sosei): “Where shall it go, this heart that longs to abandon the world? It seems that I must wander in fields and mountains” (the poem is alluded to earlier, in the *Kashiwagi* chapter).

⁷ *Kokin rokujō* 2841 (Anonymous): “Do come here, guided by the light of the moon ... it is not far across the foot-wearing mountains beyond mountains.”

⁸ *Kokinshū* 935 (Anonymous): “Like the sorrows of this world that constantly trouble my heart, the morning fog on the peaks where the wild geese wend their way never clears.”

⁹ The text uses the word *naikyō*, literally, “inner teachings,” to distinguish Buddhism from the “outer teachings,” *gaikyō*, which refers mainly to Confucian works. The use of this word reinforces Hachinomiya’s political fecklessness and his otherworldly preoccupations.

¹⁰ Hachinomiya’s poem alludes again to *Kokinshū* 983, the verse by Kisen noted earlier. The play on Uji/*ushi* will become a dominant, recurring element throughout the final chapters of the narrative. However, this poem also suggests that Hachinomiya did not voluntarily choose to follow the religious path at Uji and thus hints at a lingering bitterness that Reizei picks up on immediately.

¹¹ *Kokinshū* 241 (Sosei): “Whose fragrance do I smell? Someone has hung his purple trousers over

mistflowers in the autumn fields” (alluded to earlier in the *Niou miya* chapter).

12 This mode is equivalent to the key of A.

13 *Wakan rōei shū* 587: “We raise a fan to call forth the moon, hidden behind mountain ranges; winds blow through the empty heavens, and we know them by the swaying trees.” This allusion is especially noteworthy because the source of the verse is the *Chih-kuan* (*On Cessation and Contemplation*) by the Chinese monk Chih-I (538–597), which was an important Tendai text on meditation. The moon and wind stand for truth, which may be blocked from view or invisible to humankind until some evidence, expedient teaching, or symbol (such as a moon-shaped fan, or in this case a plectrum) makes them evident. Murasaki Shikibu is remarkably consistent in fitting poetic allusions to a narrative situation, and here she has the younger daughter cite a verse that reveals the extent of the unusual influence of her religious father.

14 The playful reference here is to a Chinese-style *bugaku* dance called “The Masked Warrior King” (cf. the *Wakana* chapter, Part 2). As part of the dance a rod or baton was lifted toward the sun. This rod was called a *bachi*, a homophone for “plectrum” (though different Chinese characters are used to distinguish the items).

15 The plectrum could be stored by slipping it into a space between the tailpiece (*fukuju*, the piece of the instrument on the bottom front of the soundboard where the strings are attached) and the face of the soundboard. Beneath the tailpiece was a round acoustic hole called the “hidden moon” or “dark moon” (*ingetsu*), and so the younger sister is defending her poetic allusion by stressing a figurative relationship between the plectrum and the moon. Some *biwa* lutes of the period had three acoustic holes, two of which were shaped like a crescent or half-moon.

16 Bennokimi’s mother was thus Kojijū’s aunt. This relationship is explained in *Wakana*, Part 2. The text here identifies Kashiwagi as the Acting Major Counselor, the position to which he was posthumously promoted.

17 *Kokinshū* 380 (Ki no Tsurayuki, sent to someone leaving for Michinokuni): “Though you go down to a province covered by an eightfold bank of clouds, do not let your heart be separated from the one who longs for you.”

18 *Kokinshū* 689 (Anonymous): “Will she wait for me this night as well, my divine princess at Uji Bridge, with her single robe spread out alone on her rush matting?” Kaoru’s allusive variation on this *Kokinshū* poem provides the title for the chapter. In comparing himself to a ferryman through the use of the conventional image of damp sleeves, he in turn conflates the older sister at Uji with Hashihime, the guardian deity of Uji Bridge (in certain folk tales Hashihime is the name of a lady or wife who waits at a bridge for her husband or lover and is eventually transformed into a demonic figure by her jealousy, but it is unlikely that Kaoru is referring to such an inauspicious figure in this case). The otherworldly connotations of a bridge as a liminal space between realms of existence is important to keep in mind in this context. Kaoru is effectively ferrying back and forth between the worlds of his secular responsibilities and his religious inclinations, and for that reason *Hashihime* could be translated as “goddess of the bridge.”

19 Most species of mayfly (*hiomushi*) live only a few hours (or days) after reaching the adult stage and mating, and thus were a potent symbol of the transience of life. Kaoru thinks of *hiomushi*, which was also an ancient name for dragonflies, because the name of the insect calls up an association with the name for sweetfish fry, *hio* (adult sweetfish are called *ayu*). *Hio* were caught at the weir, and their early death also symbolized the transience of the world, which Kaoru wishes in turn to abandon.

20 *Wakan rōei shū* 469 (Saigū no nyōgo) [also *Shūishū* 451]: “The soughing of the wind in the pines at the summit seems to harmonize with the notes of the koto … which keynote—the koto’s, the wind’s—first set the tuning?”

21 *Kokinshū* 875 (Kengei, a monk, on being laughed at by some women for his looks): “Yes, I do indeed look like some withered tree hidden deep in mountain recesses, but if my heart could bloom like flowers, I would wish it so.”

XLVI

Shiigamoto

At the Foot of the Oak Tree

AROUND THE twentieth day of the second month, Niou, the Minister of War, set off on a pilgrimage to Hatsuse. Although the pledge that he had made to undertake this religious journey was an old one, he had allowed several years to pass without fulfilling it. Now, however, he had a special reason to make the trip, and he was looking forward to breaking up the journey by stopping over in the vicinity of Uji, which was on the way. The fact that Niou was romantically drawn to a place whose name calls forth feelings of sad regret¹ suggests the insincerity of his motives. A large escort of senior nobles and officials accompanied him, alongside many lower-ranking courtiers, leaving hardly anyone behind at the palace.

Genji's son, the Minister,² had inherited from his father a handsome, expansive estate away from the capital on the far side of the Uji River. He ordered his retainers to prepare the residence there to receive Prince Niou's party. He thought he really ought to go out and personally welcome Niou on his return from Hatsuse, but at the last minute he was warned to observe a period of strict abstinence and purification, and so he sent his apologies for not being able to attend. Though Niou understood, he felt a little disappointed until he discovered that Kaoru had come from the capital to meet him the day of his arrival at Uji. Niou had good reasons to be pleased that his friend was there to welcome him. For one thing, he was especially eager to learn more about the sisters living in the villa across the river. For another, if the Minister had come to meet him, it would have been hard to relax, since the presence of a man of such high status demanded formal behavior. In any case, all of the Minister's sons were in attendance—the Major Controller of the Right, the Consultant who also served as gentleman-in-waiting, the Acting Middle Captain, the Lesser Captain

who served in the Chamberlain's office, an Assistant Commander of the Guards, and one other. Because Niou was the favored son of both His Majesty and the Akashi Empress, he was generally held in the highest esteem, with his relatives from the Rokujō estate being the most solicitous and serving him devotedly as *their* prince.

The Minister's estate had been prepared for the guests in a most delightful fashion. Boards for Go, backgammon, and *tagi*³ were brought out, and the men spent the day playing games as the mood took them. Niou was exhausted, since he was not used to the exertions of travel; this gave him yet one more reason, apart from his interest in the villa across the river, for wanting to rest at Uji. As dusk approached, he ordered musical instruments be brought out for a concert.

As is often the case in a remote locale like this, the tone of the various instruments seemed to achieve greater purity by mingling with the sounds of the river. The music wafted on the breeze over to the villa of the devout Hachinomiya, which was so near that a single push of the punt pole was all it took to cross over to it. Hearing echoes of the music, the old Prince was reminded of his life long ago. "How sweet the flute sounds!" he said, speaking to himself. "I wonder who's playing? I once heard Genji perform ... he produced a delightfully captivating tone. But the man playing now achieves such soaring clarity, such generosity of spirit, that his music resembles the playing style of the former Chancellor, Tō no Chūjō, and his sons. Ahh ... it's been so long since I've heard music like this; it really takes me back. For so many months and years I've lived without this sort of diversion, in circumstances where it hardly matters if I'm alive or dead. Indeed, so many years have come and gone to no purpose at all." He felt sorry for the situation in which his daughters found themselves, and hoped that somehow he could find a way to put an end to their isolation in these remote hills. His mind was in turmoil. *All things being equal, I'd like to have Kaoru as a son-in-law, but he doesn't seem especially interested in such a match ... and young men nowadays are so shallow, how could I marry my daughters to the likes of them?* Bored and lost in these melancholy thoughts, dawn seemed to take forever to arrive, though the spring night was short. In contrast, the intoxicating revelry of the pilgrims spending a night on the road in their lodgings across the river made it feel to them as though the evening had passed all too quickly. Niou in particular was disappointed at the prospect of having to go home so soon.

Against a backdrop of skies covered with mist as far as the eye could see, one could take in the cherry blossoms—some already scattering, others just coming into bloom—or the reflection of the willow trees lined along the riverbank—some raising their branches up, others bending softly downward.⁴ Niou, who had

never experienced the unusual elegance of such vistas, found it hard to leave these rare wonders behind. For his part, Kaoru did not want to pass up the opportunity to call on Hachinomiya, but he wavered, concerned that he might be seen as impulsive if he were to sneak away from the crowd and row across the river on his own. As he was trying to decide what to do, a letter arrived from the Uji villa.

*In the mountain winds I hear the strains of music
Blowing, sweeping away the mist ... yet white waves rise
In the distance to keep us separated still*

The poem was written in a marvelous cursive style. When Niou realized the letter was from the place he was longing to visit, he was delighted and said to Kaoru, "Let me answer this."

*Though waves between this bank and yours come between us
Still I beseech the breezes of Uji River
Blow across these waters, take my message with you*

Kaoru went to Hachinomiya's villa, bringing Niou's poem with him. He invited several young courtiers who were especially fond of music to accompany him. As they punted across the river, the men performed a Korean-style court song, "Ode to Drinking." The landing on the riverside pavilion at the Uji villa had been constructed in an elegant style wholly in keeping with the setting, and the party disembarked with a fitting show of decorum. This villa was very different from the residence across the river. The wickerwork screens, which gave off the feel of being in a mountain village, were distinctively simple; in order to prepare a space where he could receive his guests, Hachinomiya had gone to the trouble of completely clearing away his attractive furnishings. Without making a great fuss, he set out several ancient stringed instruments of unrivaled timbre, and the party performed "Cherry-Blossom Maid" in the low, serene *ichikotsu* mode. Everyone assumed that Hachinomiya would play his seven-string koto, but instead, he casually joined in from time to time on the thirteen-string koto. Perhaps because they were not used to hearing music in this style, the younger men were thoroughly enchanted by the tones he produced. A delightful reception, with local delicacies appropriate for the setting was provided, and the place was far more elegant than any of the guests from the capital had ever imagined it might be. The attendants there included many who did not seem humble or vulgar, but carried themselves like descendants of

imperial families, as well as old men of the fourth rank who, though not princes of the blood, were of royal descent all the same. For a long time, these people had been concerned that Hachinomiya did not have enough servants to be ready for an occasion like this when he was obliged to entertain honored guests, and so an appropriate number of them came to assist. Those who served the wine were not at all unpresentable, and since they were advanced in years, their bearing and manners had a wonderfully old-fashioned charm. As the guests tried to imagine the sort of lifestyle that the two princesses led, no doubt there were some whose hearts were aroused by the very thought of them.

One whose emotions were stirred was Niou, but unlike the others, he felt constrained by his imperial status, which did not allow him to pursue affairs as freely as he wished. Still, on this particular occasion he found it impossible to suppress his desires, and so he had a branch of exquisite cherry blossoms broken off and, after choosing an attractive page in his service to act as messenger, sent it over to Hachinomiya's daughters with the following poem attached:

*Calling at this abode, aglow with fragrant
Mountain cherries in bloom, I adorn my cap
With a spray of blossoms from those very trees*

"These fields are near and dear to me,"⁵ he added. Wondering how best to respond, the sisters were at a complete loss. The older attendants advised them that it really wasn't proper at a moment like this to be overly fastidious and take too long to reply; thus, the older Princess had her younger sister write down the following:

*The spring traveler seeking a chance to break off
A spray of cherry blossoms to adorn his cap
Passes a peasant's rustic hedge along his way*

"You may have come here through your precious fields, but not because this place holds any appeal for you ..." she added. Her calligraphy was exceptional.

Just as Niou had prayed it would, the river breeze carried the captivating sounds of music unimpeded back and forth between the villas. Kōbai, the Fujiwara Major Counselor, arrived from the capital with a message of greeting from His Majesty. With such a large escort now assembled for Prince Niou, the party set off on the return trip with tremendous noise and bustle. The younger members of the group were disappointed at having to leave so soon, and they glanced back over and over. Niou told himself that he would find a suitable

occasion to come to Uji again. With the cherry trees in full bloom and a spring mist spreading in all directions, the scene he gazed at was magnificent, inspiring many poems in both Chinese and Japanese. However, because it was too much trouble to ask about those verses, I have not recorded them here.

Niou was feeling dissatisfied, since he had not been able to fully convey his feelings. Even though he had no go-between, no one to guide him,⁶ he was constantly sending letters to Uji. Hachinomiya would from time to time encourage his daughters to write back to Niou. "You must answer him. Just don't write in a way that makes your letter look like a love note. If you're not careful, you'll only arouse his passion. The young man is quite fond of amorous pursuits, and now that he has found out you're here, it seems unlikely that he would pass up the chance to court you." At the urgings of her father, the younger daughter would send the replies. The older sister, however, was cautious by temperament and would have nothing to do with such frivolous correspondence.

Hachinomiya always felt sad and lonely, but this year he found it harder than ever to make it through the idle time of the spring season and would often lose himself in pensive reverie. As his daughters approached the fullness of womanhood, their features grew lovelier with each passing year until they reached perfection. This, however, was a source of unease for him. *Would I not have fewer regrets about raising them in this isolated abode, their father agonized, were they were less attractive?* The older sister was now twenty-five, the younger twenty-three.

The Prince had reached an age, sixty-one, at which he had to be especially careful.⁷ Forlornly sensing that his death was imminent, he practiced his religious devotions with even greater dedication than usual. He was no longer attached to the mundane concerns of this world and thought of nothing but preparations for the journey to the next life; one would have expected him to be headed on the path to the paradise of the Pure Land. A single impediment, however, stood in his way—his anxiety over the future of his daughters. People who observed him were moved to great compassion for his plight, imagining that, despite his boundless willpower, his heart would certainly be in turmoil when the moment came for him to leave his children behind.

If only he could find someone for them! Though the prospective groom might not be everything that Hachinomiya wanted, he would give his consent to the proposal anyway. All the while, he'd pretend to know nothing about the matter, so long as the man was acceptable—someone with a good reputation and a rank that court society would recognize, a gentleman who was also drawn to his daughters and would take care of them with a sincere heart. It would certainly bring him peace of mind if both of them could make a reliable match and live a

normal, secure life. Nonetheless, it seemed that none of the men who called on them was all that serious. Some of these suitors would occasionally be moved by the playfulness of their youthful hearts to send flirtatious messages to the young princesses when they stopped near the Uji villa on the way to and from a pilgrimage. It offended Hachinomiya to think that these sophisticated men from the capital might be speculating about his daughters' lifestyle in this gloomy place and might, in fact, be mocking them by treating them as a curiosity. As a result, he would not permit even the most perfunctory reply to their proposals. Niou, of course, was a different matter—his desire to have the Uji sisters was extremely intense, suggesting that he shared a karmic bond with them from a previous life.

When autumn arrived, Kaoru was promoted to the post of Middle Counselor. His fortunes were now more glorious than ever, and though his rise brought greater responsibilities, it also brought him many more anxieties. For years, he had been troubled by vague concerns about his birth, but now he knew the truth. He was deeply moved by the manner in which Kashiwagi had passed away so long ago, and so he resolved to carry out rites and prayers in order to lighten the burden of his father's sins. He felt a certain kinship with the old woman, Bennokimi, who had told him the truth, and discreetly did what he could to look after her and treat her with kindness.

He had not called on the villa at Uji in a long time, and so he went to pay a visit. It was the beginning of the seventh month. The signs of autumn were not yet visible in the capital, but chill winds were already blowing in the vicinity of Mount Otowa, and the leaves were starting to change color around Mount Makinoo. By the time he reached Uji, Kaoru was completely enraptured by the gorgeous scenery. Hachinomiya was more delighted than usual to see his young companion, but on this occasion, he spoke on and on about the depressing thoughts that preoccupied him. "After I'm gone," he said, "call on my daughters and look after them in any way you deem appropriate. Count them among those you will never abandon."

"You have made this request of me before," Kaoru replied, "and I assure you that I will keep my promise and never shirk my responsibilities to them. I do not want to become bound by any relationships, and I am cutting ties to the world. The time left to me is short, and my future does not hold out much hope that I can be of any help. However, for as long as I remain in this world, I very much want to show you that my intentions toward them have not changed." These words pleased Hachinomiya.

The moon rose during the middle of the night. It shone bright and clear, but one sensed that it would soon sink behind the rim of the mountains.

Hachinomiya invoked the Holy Name in a keenly poignant voice, and then reminisced about the past.

“I wonder what the court is like these days? Many people used to assemble at the palace on an autumn night like this and perform music before my father, the old Emperor, and I remember the skilled musicians who vied with one another to perform magnificently. It was all very grand, and yet I found greater beauty in the more intimate, heartfelt performances that took place late at night after most people had retired. You could hear the faint strains of music plaintively flowing out from the chambers of the imperial consorts and wives, women known for their gentle, modest dispositions ... of course, they were competing desperately against each other, but on the surface they always behaved kindly toward their rivals. Women are unreliable in all respects, mere companions to bring one comfort and pleasure ... but they also stir powerful emotions in men. That’s why they are such deeply sinful creatures, is it not? Parents are always lost on the dark path that is the love for their children, but sons are far less cause for concern. A daughter’s future, on the other hand, is more limited, and I suppose it’s really best for a parent to simply accept that it does no good to worry ... though one can’t help but be anxious.” He was speaking in general terms, but how could he not feel that way about his own daughters? In his heart, Kaoru felt bad for his mentor.

“I myself have never truly mastered any of the arts,” Kaoru replied, “perhaps because I’m quite sincere in my desire to renounce all mundane things and avoid attachments. But, while such accomplishments may indeed be inconsequential, I must say it is difficult to give up the pleasure of music. Even the wise, saintly disciple of Buddha, Mahākāśyapa,⁸ could not stay still when he heard music, but would stand up and dance.”

Kaoru seemed impatient to hear the sisters play again, having caught only that brief, tantalizing display of their talents a year ago. Hachinomiya took this as the perfect opportunity to bring his daughters closer to the young man. He went to their quarters himself and pressed them to perform. They played in turn a thirteen-string koto very faintly, but quickly stopped. Given the elegant atmosphere of the place, which was becoming increasingly desolate, and the sublimely melancholy aspect of the sky here, Kaoru found their informal performance enchanting and wondered how to get them to open up and play in concert.

“I have done what I could to bring you together,” Hachinomiya said. “I will have to leave the rest to you young people, who still have a long future in front of you.” He retreated into his chapel and composed the following before the statue of the Buddha:

*Though this grass hut may fall to ruin when I'm gone
I know that you will not forsake this koto's air
That your promise, the word you gave, will not wither⁹*

"I have this unhappy premonition that this will be the last time we meet," he added. "The thought is unbearable to me, which is why I end up repeating the same foolish things over and over." He was weeping. Kaoru replied:

*In what age to come would I abandon
This hut woven of grass, bound forever
By the vow I make this long autumn night*

"I shall call on you again when the wrestling matches are over at the end of the month and I am free of my public duties."

Since Hachinomiya had withdrawn, Kaoru was left alone. He summoned Bennokimi, the old attendant who, unbidden, had told him about his past, and he had her fill in the many details that she had left out. The slanting light of the setting moon illuminated every corner of the room where he was seated, and his figure, which was visible to the women through the blinds, was dashingly handsome. The sisters were also seated inside the blinds, further back in the interior of the room. He did not behave like the usual amorous suitor, but spoke to them quietly and respectfully. They responded to him in appropriate fashion.

Niou is keen to meet them, Kaoru reflected, but why is it that my own feelings are so different from normal men? Their father has indicated that he would accept a proposal from me. So why do I feel reluctant to seize this opportunity? I'm certainly not averse to the idea, and it's not unthinkable for me to take one of them as a wife. The prospect of talking with them like this, of sharing feelings on the poignant beauty of blossoms in spring or of the foliage in autumn, is hardly unpleasant. It would indeed be disappointing if it were their destiny to go to some other man. It felt to him as if they were already his women.

Kaoru returned to the capital during the night. Thinking back on the figure of Hachinomiya, who forlornly sensed that he had little time left, he told himself that he would call on the Prince after the busy period at the court passed.

Niou was also thinking about going to Uji during the autumn to view the foliage and was looking for an appropriate opportunity to make the excursion. He continued sending one letter after another. The younger sister did not believe that he was taking his courtship seriously, and so she would answer him only occasionally, sending trifling notes that she went to no great trouble to write.

As autumn progressed, Hachinomiya's terrible sense of desolation only

deepened, and so he thought that he should go off on one of his quiet retreats to concentrate on prayer and meditation. He spoke to his daughters, telling them what they needed to know in order to manage after his death.

“The final parting is inevitable for all ... it’s the way of the world,” Hachinomiya began. “But if you have someone who can bring you comfort and console your heart, then you’ll be able to control your grief. It’s distressing to have to abandon you in your precarious situation, with no one to take care of you in my place, and yet it serves no purpose at all to let your situation become an impediment to my salvation that will leave me wandering in eternal darkness in the next world. Of course, there’s no way for me to know what will happen after I leave this world, which in any case I turned my back on while I was still living with the two of you. Even so, I implore you: do nothing that would bring shame and ridicule on our house—not just for my sake, but for the sake of your long-departed mother. Unless you can make a match with a man who is worthy of you, do not let the blandishments of suitors persuade you to leave this mountain villa. Accept that your karmic destiny is special, that you are not the same as others, and resolve to stay here for the rest of your lives. If you resign yourself wholeheartedly to your fate, then the months and years will pass by uneventfully. It is for the best, especially for women, to cut ties with the world and live hidden away, avoiding the calumny and censure from others that lead to unhappy consequences.”

No matter what, his daughters were incapable of conceiving what might become of them in the future. They felt considerable trepidation, questioning how they could possibly survive even for a short while if they were left behind on their own. They were so upset that no words could express their reaction to the bleak future their father had described. In his heart, he had long ago abandoned this world, but he had remained close to his daughters, always with them mornings and evenings. Thus, when he suddenly began talking about how he would soon depart, his attitude of resignation was enough to make them feel aggrieved—though he certainly did not intend to cause them pain.

The day before he was to go on his retreat he wandered around his residence, stopping here and there, looking over his villa. It was an unusual thing for him to do. Tears came to his eyes as he took in the humble, fragile abode where he had spent so much of his life. *Once I am gone, how will my young daughters ever manage to get by locked away in such a place?* His splendid looks created an air of purity and grace as he invoked the Holy Name. He summoned the older, mature attendants.

“Look after my daughters and serve them well,” he ordered. “It’s common to see the fortunes of people of low status—those who are destined from the

beginning for comfortable obscurity—fall to ruin and their families disappear from court society. But if my daughters were to suffer a shameful reversal of fortune, it would dishonor my imperial ancestry, even if no one else noticed. It's normal for people in this world to feel lonely and despondent. So long as a woman lives in an appropriate style that accords with the status and customs of the house into which she was born, she can remain above reproach in the estimation of others and in her own heart. Even though you may want my daughters to marry into households that are flourishing and counted as distinguished, if the situation is not to their liking, then you must not let them be pressured into marrying some rash, thoughtless man whose social status is beneath them."

Just before dawn, as he was preparing to set off, he went to see his daughters. "You must not feel lonely while I'm away," he told them. "Be of good cheer and entertain yourselves with music. Things in this world don't always turn out the way we might wish, but you mustn't be downcast." With that, he left them, looking back again and again.

The sisters felt increasingly isolated, and they discussed their situation at length. "If one of us were to go away from here, how would the other be able to get along? Our present and future prospects are so unsettled; what will become of us if we are ever separated?" They passed their days trying in mutual sympathy to comfort one another—tearful and serious one moment, smiling and playful the next.

On the evening when their father was expected to end his retreat, the princesses were waiting impatiently for his return when a man arrived from the temple with a message from him: "I fell ill this morning and cannot return home. It's probably just a cold, and I am receiving various treatments. I miss you more than ever and am eager to see you." His daughters were startled by the news and, worried about his condition, had thick, padded robes hurriedly prepared and sent up to the temple. Two or three days went by, but he did not improve. The sisters sent one message after another, but their father, too weak to write, sent verbal replies: "It's nothing to be all that alarmed about. I'm just not feeling well. As soon as I'm a little better, I'll go back down the mountain."

The old ascetic stayed by his side to serve the Prince. "Your illness doesn't seem all that severe," he told Hachinomiya, "but you may well be approaching the end of your life. Why must you lament your daughters' situation? Everyone's destiny is different, and so you shouldn't fret over matters you can't control." He instructed the Prince to distance himself more and more from worldly attachments and admonished him, saying, "You mustn't leave the temple right now."

It was around the twentieth day of the eighth month, the season when the skies take on a melancholy cast, when morning and evening mists cover everything far into the distance. The sisters at Uji were pensive, concerned about their father's illness. The predawn moon was shining bright and the surface of the river was clear and calm. They had the shutters on the side of the villa facing the temple raised and were gazing out when they heard the faint reverberations of the temple bell signaling the start of a new day. Just then a group of men arrived and tearfully announced that Hachinomiya had passed away during the night. His daughters had been constantly fretting about their father, wondering how he was doing and fearing the worst. Still, to learn of his death in this sudden manner was a shock, and they were so stunned by this turn of events that they couldn't even cry, but simply collapsed, prostrate with grief.

In experiencing the extreme sorrow that comes with the death of a loved one, it is common for survivors to at least be with the deceased and witness his passing. Thus, it was natural for the sisters, who had no idea what had happened during their father's final hours, to feel a sense of unease in addition to their sorrow. They had given no thought to how they should continue living on even for a short time after their father's death, and finally they broke down in tears, not wanting to be left behind. But the mortal path is one that all must travel, and so their tears served no purpose whatsoever.

The ascetic saw to all of the arrangements for the funeral and memorial services, keeping the promise that he had made to Hachinomiya years ago.

"Even though our father has passed away," the sisters implored him, "we would like to see his face and figure one final time."

The ascetic, however, refused their request. "What purpose would it serve to do that now? Before your father died, I counseled him that he would likely never meet you again, and just as I urged him to free himself from all attachments, now that he is gone, I advise you even more strongly to do the same." He said no more.

After hearing about the austere conditions that their father had endured at the temple, they considered the ascetic's extreme, saintly detachment detestably cold. Their father's most profound, longest-held aspiration was to take the vows of a novitiate, but it had proven impossible for him to abandon his daughters, who had no one to look after them. For as long as he lived, he could not bring himself to leave their side. Providing support in this way may have prevented him from taking vows, but, at the same time, he thought of the princesses as a comfort for his isolation and refused to be separated from them. Thus, by the time he set out on the mortal path, neither the hopes of the deceased nor those of the ones left behind to mourn were ever fully realized.

When Kaoru heard the news, he was overcome with a sense of loss and disappointment—it hadn't been that long since he last saw his mentor, and there remained many things that they would have discussed in quiet conversation if he could have met with him one last time. Dwelling on the sad truth that life is evanescent, he wept uncontrollably.

"It's possible that we may never meet again," Hachinomiya had told him, but the Prince was always making such remarks, since he was more sensitive than others to the ephemerality of a world in which the parting of death could come any day between morning and evening.¹⁰ Kaoru had grown accustomed to hearing such admonitions, but he never imagined that death might actually come so soon.¹¹ He was beset by feelings of unbearable sorrow and sent to the ascetic's temple long, heartfelt letters of condolence that were in turn conveyed to the sisters at Uji. They received no such letters from anyone else, and no one bothered to call on them; thus, despite being frantic with grief, they were moved to realize how genuinely devoted Kaoru had been to them all these years. *To be preceded in death by one's parent is normal, Kaoru reflected, but to those left behind, the loss still seems immeasurable. How devastated must his daughters feel, then, since they have nothing to provide them comfort in their present circumstances?* Knowing what would be required for the funeral and memorial services, he sent the proper provisions and offerings to the ascetic's temple. He also provided the older attendants at the Uji villa with all that was needed to arrange for readings of sacred texts there.

The sisters felt lost, as though they were passing through a night without end. The ninth month arrived, and the sad autumnal scenery of the fields and mountains, which heralded the coming of cold seasonal rains, called forth a further deluge on sleeves already damp from tears. It seemed as if somehow the rustle of falling leaves and the roar of the rapids mingled with the cascade of their tears¹² to intensify their sorrow. The attendants, who could see how distraught their young mistresses were, worried that the two might not live out their allotted span of years and tried desperately to provide some comfort, even though they themselves were distracted. Priests from the ascetic's temple came to the Uji villa to pray and invoke the Holy Name, while those who were observing the prescribed rites and prayers went in and out of Hachinomiya's old quarters to gaze on the images of the Buddha there—images that now served as mementos of the late Prince. The forty-nine-day period of confinement passed with poignant services of mourning and remembrance.

Prince Niou sent many letters. The sisters, however, were simply not up to replying. Their attitude, which he could not comprehend, filled him with resentment. *They seem to have put me completely out of their thoughts ... they*

certainly never treat Kaoru this way! He had considered making an excursion to Uji when the autumn foliage was at its peak to have the members of his party compose verses in Chinese. In the end, however, he reluctantly gave up his plans, since this was hardly the time for such amusements.

The period of confinement was over. Because everything has a limit, Niou assumed that the tearful mourning of the sisters must be over as well, and so he composed a very long letter. It arrived in the evening just as a chill rain was about to fall.

*How are you faring in your mountain villa
In autumn when stags cry for a mate ... at dusk
Tears cover my sleeves like dew on bush clover*

“It would be cruel of you to feign indifference to the sad elegance of the sky you see before you. It’s the season to make one’s way to withering moors and gaze pensively over them.”¹³

“What he says is true,” the older sister remarked. “We’ve been negligent about replying to his many letters, so please answer this latest.” As she always did, she pressed her younger sister to do the writing.

The younger sister, however, was lost in her own thoughts. *Since Father died, I’ve lingered on. Yet in all that time, did I even once consider pulling my inkstone in front of me? So many dreary, painful days have gone by!* Her eyes misted over again and, blinded by her tears, she pushed the inkstone away.

“I really can’t write anything just yet,” she said at last. “The fact that I’ve gradually roused myself to do even this much makes me realize that it’s true what they say: there’s a limit to how long one may grieve. I hate myself for letting my sorrow wane like this.” She looked so sweet as she broke down and wept that her older sister, who understood such emotions all too well, was filled with sympathy.

The messenger had left the capital at dusk and arrived in the evening a little after dark. The sisters spoke to the man through an intermediary. “How can you think of going back to the capital tonight? You should rest here this evening.”

“Ah, but I must return ... I will come again when you have a reply,” the man said. Because he was hurrying to take his leave, the older sister felt sorry for him; though she herself was not in a calm state of mind, it bothered her to see him leaving empty-handed. She composed the following:

*Gathered near the rustic fence, deer cry mournfully
Joining voices with ours at this mountain villa
Enveloped in fog obscured by a mist of tears*

Enveloped in joy, surrounded by a mist of tears

She wrote the poem on dull gray paper. Because she could not write smoothly or clearly in the dark, she did not bother trying to follow proper form, but let her words follow where the brush led them. She wrapped the letter up and had it delivered to the messenger.

The messenger was certainly on his guard that dark rainy night as he made his way through the dangerous, bandit-infested hills of Kohata, though Niou had chosen a man who was not frightened by such things. He spurred his horse on, hurrying along eerie mountain paths overgrown on either side with bamboo grass, and quickly reached his destination. By the time he appeared before Niou, his robes were completely soaked. He received a generous reward for his service.

The letter was in a hand Niou had not seen before, the calligraphy more mature and accomplished. Which of the sisters had written it? He couldn't put it down, but continued gazing at it. When he showed no inclination to retire to his bedchamber any time soon, the ladies-in-waiting in service that night muttered amongst themselves.

"He stayed up all this time waiting for a reply, and now he just keeps staring at it! Whoever she is, he certainly seems to have fallen for her."

They were all put out because they wanted to go to sleep.

Niou got up very early the next morning and hurried to write his reply while the mists were still hanging heavy in the air.

*Who could hear the crying of a deer
Whose mate is lost in the morning fog
And remain unmoved by her sorrow¹⁴*

"You wrote that you are joining voices with the deer, but my voice is no less mournful," he added.

If we are too responsive or show too much interest, it will only lead to complications, the older Princess thought. When we were hidden away, cared for under Father's sheltering shade, we lived entirely free of worries. Now, we live on without him against our wishes. If we become entangled in some affair, no matter how trivial or unsolicited, our behavior would surely wound our father's spirit, for he was anxious about just such entanglements and wanted to protect us from them. She was by nature excessively timid, fearful and cautious in all matters, and would not respond to Niou. She did not consider him unworthy or take his motives to be those of ordinary men driven by baser instincts. The

unforced manner in which he wrote, the words he used—these things suggested a man of charm and elegance. Of course, she had little experience with such letters, and while this one seemed dazzlingly praiseworthy to her, it would have been inappropriate for someone of her station to respond to such dashing, sensitive pleas. And so, she decided that it was best to let it go and spend the rest of her life obeying her father's admonition to remain hidden away in these mountain recesses.

She had no such qualms when it came to Kaoru, whose letters were always serious and sober, and she would reply to him without reserve. After the formal period of confinement and mourning was over, he paid a visit to the Uji villa. The sisters were still wearing modest robes out of respect for their father, and they continued their austerities by residing on an earthen floor in chambers where the mats and floorboards had been removed.¹⁵ Kaoru went into the aisle room off the east side near their quarters and summoned the old attendant, Bennokimi. With his intoxicating fragrance and dazzling appearance filling a household lost in the darkness of grief, the sisters felt awkward and could not bring themselves to reply to him.

"They mustn't be so aloof like this," he said, "but should treat me in a manner that accords with their father's last wishes. If they did, then my talks with them would have some value. I'm afraid that I've not learned the arts of fawning and putting on airs, and so I find it hard to express myself adequately when I have to converse through an intermediary."

"Contrary to our expectations," the older sister replied, "we have survived till today, but it feels as though we're wandering lost in a dream from which we cannot awaken; since we're still in mourning, we're loath to go out and look upon the light of the sun or moon. That's why I cannot move over toward the edge of the veranda to speak directly with you."

"If you say so ... but perhaps you're being a little overly modest," Kaoru replied. "No doubt it would be a sin for you to just go about happily as you please in the light of the sun or moon. However, your reticence makes me feel constrained, uncertain what to do. I would like to try to cheer you up, if only you would share some small portion of your feelings."

"He is deeply considerate," her attendants pointed out, "and wants to comfort what must appear to him to be truly extraordinary grief."

Though the older sister was indeed filled with sorrow, she gradually collected herself. Once she had recovered her sense of judgment, she understood from the respect he had shown her father in the past the kind intentions that motivated him to cross fields and moors to come to this remote place. She moved a little closer to him. Speaking gently and at some length, he expressed his sympathy

for their grief, which he found perfectly natural, and told them about the promises that he had made to their late father. He did not come across as rough and overbearing, and so she did not feel awkward or uncomfortable. Nevertheless, it was excruciating for her not only to let an outsider hear her voice but also to reflect back on all those days following her father's death when she had been dependent on Kaoru to manage their affairs. She felt diffident and small before him, and he could tell from her faint voice and brief answers that she was truly despondent. Listening to her moved him to pity. When he caught a peek of her figure through gaps in the gray curtains, she appeared to be utterly miserable. He recalled the image that he had of her from that early dawn when he glimpsed her through a veil of mist—an image that prompted him to compose the following:

*Looking at the changing colors
Of the withered reeds brings sad thoughts
Of your sleeves, now dyed mourning gray*

The older sister replied:

*With their colors changed, my sleeves now serve
To shelter the dew ... but for myself
There is no place where I may settle*

"The unraveling strands ..." ¹⁶ Her voice trailed off at the end, and she moved back into the interior of the room, evidently unable to bear her terrible anguish any longer.

He was torn by sympathy and disappointment, but he couldn't very well keep her from withdrawing at a moment like that. As if the situation weren't awkward enough already, the old attendant, Bennokimi, came out to take her mistress's place and began talking to him of sad events—some recent, some long ago. However, he could not bring himself to dismiss her as some peculiar, decrepit hag, for she had witnessed many remarkable and shocking incidents. Instead, he engaged her in conversation, assuming an air of warm familiarity.

"I was just a child when Genji died," Kaoru remarked, "and so I learned at an early age that the world is a place of suffering. By the time I reached manhood, things like position or rank, the stuff of honor and reputation in this world, had no appeal to me. And then I had to witness Prince Hachinomiya pass away ... a man whose heart was content to live out a simple, quiet existence. His death stirred in me an even more profound awareness of the transience of life, and

though it may seem I'm being romantically suggestive when I say I consider the situation of his daughters, who have been so heart-wrenchingly abandoned, a fetter binding me to this world, you may rest assured that I intend to never break the promise I made to be a companion to both of them for as long as I live. Still, I must say that after learning from you the unexpected truth about my true father, I feel more than ever the urge to turn my back on the world and take vows."

Because he was now weeping, Bennokimi broke down as well. His demeanor so put her in mind of Kashiwagi that memories of the tragedies of long ago—things she had forgotten—came back to her after all these years and, by adding even greater sorrow to her current woes, rendered her incapable of expressing her feelings.

Bennokimi was the daughter of Kashiwagi's nurse. Because she spent many years in a distant province, Bennokimi's ties to Kashiwagi's household were no longer very strong by the time she returned to the capital. Fortunately, her father, who attained the position of Middle Counselor of the Left¹⁷ during his lifetime, was uncle to Hachinomiya's wife. Through that connection, she was brought in to serve at the Uji villa following the death of the princesses' mother.

Bennokimi was accustomed to such service, since she did not come from an especially distinguished background, but Hachinomiya recognized in her a woman of discretion and judgment and put her in charge of his daughters. She had managed to keep the secret of that scandalous affair between Kashiwagi and the Third Princess, in part because she never had an opportunity to tell her two young mistresses about it, despite being always in their presence and caring for them intimately for many years. Still, even if Bennokimi had not been thoughtless enough to spread the story far and wide, old women are known for being garrulous and prone to passing along unsolicited gossip. For that reason, Kaoru, judging from how excessively shy and reserved the princesses were around him, assumed they must have heard about the affair. Uneasy and distressed by the possibility that they in turn might tell someone, he did not want the sisters to go to other men. *No, he thought, it's best to keep them for myself.*

Now that Hachinomiya was gone, Kaoru did not feel comfortable staying the night. As he prepared to go back to the capital, he recalled the evening early in the seventh month when the late Prince warned him that it might well be the last time they would ever meet. Why had he not heeded the warning? Why had he not visited again before it was too late? Their last conversation and Hachinomiya's passing had both occurred during the very same autumn, had they not? Not many days separated those events, and it dismayed him not knowing what world the Prince inhabited now.

The villa seemed extremely austere, with none of the furnishings or

accessories one might have normally expected. Still, it was clean and uncluttered and provided an elegant, well-ordered abode. Priests were going in and out of Hachinomiya's old quarters, which were partitioned off from the rooms on the east side where his daughters resided. Though the ritual implements that he once used for his meditations and prayers remained in his chapel just as he had left them, Kaoru overheard some of the priests say, "We shall move all of the statues and images of the Buddha to the temple." It broke Kaoru's heart to imagine how forsaken the sisters would feel once these priests left them on their own. Just then, a member of his escort reminded him how late it was, and he snapped out of his melancholy reverie. As he was leaving, he heard a flock of wild geese calling out as they passed overhead.

*In a sky veiled by persistent autumn mists
Wild geese cry out to teach again the sad truth
I know too well ... this world is ephemeral*

When Kaoru next met with Niou, he immediately broached the subject of the Uji sisters. Niou, thinking that the princesses would now be over the worst of their grief and thus more receptive to him, sent a letter avowing his fervent devotion. The sisters, however, were in an awkward situation and found it difficult to compose even a brief reply. *Prince Niou is known far and wide for his romantic dalliances, they brooded, and he now seems to consider us objects of desire. But wouldn't any response sent from a hermitage buried beneath a tangle of weeds come across as terribly uncouth or old-fashioned?*

The two sisters talked constantly to each other about their circumstances.

"In spite of everything," the older sister remarked, "it's shocking how quickly the days and months have passed. It never occurred to me that Father, whose life was filled with uncertainties, would die so suddenly ... and, having constantly heard and seen things that give proof of the fleeting, unsettled nature of life, I naively assumed that not much time would elapse between Father's passing and my own. As I ponder all that has happened, even though I was aware the world is capricious, I simply spent my days in serene contemplation, living as if there was nothing to fear or be ashamed about. But now the howling of the wind, the presence of people who normally don't come to a place like this, the sound of people clearing their throats to announce their arrival ... all of these things tear at my heart and make me feel afraid, lonely and miserable. It's much too much to bear!" Not a moment went by when the two of them were not in tears. Living on in that melancholy state, the year drew to a close.

It was the season of snow and sleet, and though the doleful sound of the

winter wind is the same everywhere, it made the sisters feel as though they had withdrawn to this mountain retreat for the very first time. "Happily, the New Year will soon be upon us," their ladies-in-waiting said, trying to change the mood and encourage them. "There was so much loss and sorrow this past year, we can hardly wait for the spring to come, when everything will surely be renewed!" Such hopes struck their mistresses as implausible. The only people who regularly called on the Uji villa were monks from the temple on the mountain above, and they had come only because their father had occasionally gone into retreat there to meditate. The old ascetic used to visit once in a while to ask after their father's health, but what reason would anyone have to come here now? It made them sad to think that fewer and fewer people would appear. Some of the local peasants—men they had never deigned to even look at while their father was alive—checked on them from time to time following Hachinomiya's death, and they found such rare acts of kindness praiseworthy. Now that it was winter, other peasants brought them firewood.

The ascetic would send the princesses items like charcoal from his hermitage. "I served your father for many years," he wrote, "and it would be depressing to stop doing so now that he is gone." Recalling how their father would always, without fail, send padded robes up to the monastery in winter to protect the monks against the cold mountain winds, the sisters did the same this year. They came out near the veranda and tearfully watched as the priests and acolytes, moving in and out of sight amid the drifts of deep snow, wended their way back up the mountain with the robes.

"Even if Father had taken the tonsure and become a priest like those men," the older sister observed, "so long as he was alive, people naturally would have come and gone from our villa. No matter how sad and lonely we might have felt had he taken vows, at least we wouldn't have been completely cut off from him."

*Now that he is dead and the rugged path
Leading up the cliffside has been cut off
What do you see in the snow on the pines*

The younger sister replied:

*Would that I could think of the departed
As fleeting snow that continues to pile
Atop pine needles deep in the mountains*

“How I resent the snow ... for though it may disappear, it always falls again.”

Kaoru knew that once the New Year arrived he would be extremely busy, and therefore he paid a visit to the Uji villa near the end of the twelfth month. The snow was piled so dauntingly high that even gentlemen of ordinary rank no longer showed up at the villa. The kindness shown to the sisters by a man as distinguished and handsome as Kaoru, who journeyed here with no concern for himself, made it clear that his feelings were anything but shallow. As a result, they received him with greater attentiveness than usual and had cushions and the like brought out for his comfort. Their attendants also pulled out a brazier and other furnishings that were not mourning gray and dusted them off, after which they talked about how happy Hachinomiya had always looked whenever he was waiting in anticipation for a visit from Kaoru. Although the older sister was still shy about speaking directly to him, she worried that she would seem insensitive if she didn't; sensing that there was no other proper recourse, she addressed him. She was not especially open or overly familiar, but she did speak a few more words than she had on previous occasions, which made her seem exceptionally attractive and superior.

I cannot go on if all I can do is speak with her like this, Kaoru thought. *How suddenly the human heart changes! Was it destined that I should fall in love with her?*

“Prince Niou is suspicious and holds a grudge against me. At some point, I may have inadvertently revealed the poignant request your late father made to me, asking that I look after you ... though I must say that he's the kind of man who never lets anything escape his notice. He may very well have figured out your father's intentions on his own. In any case, he has been after me to speak with you on his behalf, always complaining about your aloof attitude and accusing me of being a clumsy messenger. His charges are unjust, but I can't just flatly refuse to serve as his guide to this village.¹⁸ Why must you behave so coldly toward him? Evidently you've heard rumors that he's given to wanton pursuits, but in his heart he's a man of amazingly deep sensitivity. I've heard that he disdains anyone who is susceptible to insincere flattery and yields a little too easily. Such women strike him as frivolous and uninteresting. Instead, he favors a lady who lets things run their course ... one who is gentle and unassertive, who goes along with what society takes as acceptable behavior, who generally overlooks minor indiscretions and accepts them as the workings of karmic destiny. That's the kind of woman Prince Niou wants to give his heart to and be with his whole life. He knows that if a relationship begins to crumble, collapsing like an earthen bank and muddying the waters of the Tatsuta River,¹⁹ the woman's reputation will be sullied and the couple will never recover what

they once shared. He's a man of deep, unwavering devotion who would never behave in a thoughtless, capricious manner toward a woman—so long as she rarely contradicts him and her character suits his temperament. I have observed Niou up close and know things about him that others do not. If you think a relationship with him might be suitable and are drawn to such a match, then I will do absolutely everything in my power to be of service to you. I shall rush madly back and forth between here and the capital until I collapse from exhaustion!"

Because he was so earnest, the older Princess did not believe Kaoru was speaking about her, and so she considered answering for her younger sister as a mother might reply on behalf of her daughter. Still, she felt that she lacked the words to say what needed to be said. "How should I answer such a proposal? I have no idea what to say when you go on and on like this describing Prince Niou's romantic preferences." She laughed quietly—laughter that struck Kaoru as sweetly gentle and elegantly appealing.

"I don't think that you should take what I've said as necessarily referring to you. You should at least acknowledge the sincerity of my motives, since I've gone to the trouble of making my way here through the snow, and consider the situation from the perspective of an older sibling. Apparently, Niou is interested in your younger sister ... he has hinted as much in letters to her. Of course, it's difficult for someone like me, who isn't directly involved, to know what's really going on between them. Which of you replied to him?"

It's a good thing I never answered Niou, the older sister thought, *not even in jest. It really wouldn't matter all that much, but I would be ashamed and upset were Kaoru to assume that I've developed feelings for Niou and then report that to him.* Unable to respond, she wrote the following:

*I have seen no other tracks, no letters
Save for yours crossing the bridges that span
The cliffside paths on mountains deep in snow*

She passed the poem to him, and Kaoru replied, "These denials on your part only serve to make me more anxious."

*By serving as guide, will I also be the first
Who crosses over to you, the hooves of my steed
Cracking the ice that closes up the mountain streams*

"If I do reach you, then the reflection I see²⁰ in those streams will be a sign that

my feelings are not shallow.”

Taken aback by his unexpected advances, she did not respond. It did not appear to Kaoru that she was being excessively detached or remote, but, by the same token, she possessed none of the coquettish charms of young women nowadays. Though he was talking to her through her blinds, he could sense from her demeanor that she was most appealing, quiet, and gentle by nature. Kaoru considered her to be perfect, his ideal woman, and yet, whenever he opened up about his feelings for her, she would behave as if she had no idea what he was talking about. He would have to quickly change the subject and talk about the past to cover his embarrassment.

“It’s getting late, the snow is getting worse, and the sky seems to be clouding up again,” someone in his escort remarked. With his men now clearing their throats, Karou realized it was time to go home. “It pains me to look around and see the condition of your residence. There’s a place in the capital, quiet as a villa in the mountains with very few people about, and it would make me happy if you would consider moving there.”

The attendants, catching some of what he said, smiled at the wonderful prospect of living in the capital. The younger sister was of a different mind altogether. *What a repulsive suggestion! How could anyone think that would be a good idea?*

An elegant arrangement of fruits and sweets was brought out to Kaoru, and wine accompanied by tastefully prepared delicacies was served to the men of his escort. The unattractive man who served as watch for the villa—the one who had once caused such a stir with those perfumed robes he had received—was on duty, his unpleasant face sporting a full, wildly bushy beard. Kaoru considered him unreliable, but he called him over anyway. “How are you getting along?” he asked. “Now that Prince Hachinomiya has passed away, you must be feeling rather forlorn.”

The watchman wept softly, his face contorted by sorrow. “My station in life is such that I have nowhere else in the world to turn to for support. I lived for more than thirty years beneath the Prince’s protective shade; now that he is gone, what other tree would ever afford me such shelter, even if I were to go live amidst the fields and mountains?”²¹ His weeping only made his face more unattractive.

Kaoru had the rooms once used by Hachinomiya opened. A thick layer of dust covered everything. Only the altar to Buddha, with its decoration of flowers, remained the way it had been. The dais, where the Prince likely practiced his devotions, had been cleared of items and swept clean. Kaoru remembered a promise he had once made to Hachinomiya: when he finally fulfilled his true wish and took vows, he would come to live at Uji.

*The space at the foot of the oak tree
Where I sought guidance beneath the shade
Has now become empty and barren²²*

Kaoru was leaning against a pillar as he composed his verse. The young attendants, peeking out at him, gushed about how splendid he looked.

The sun had gone down. Word was sent to the stewards who administered Kaoru's various manors in the vicinity of Uji that fodder was to be brought for the party's horses. Kaoru was unaware that these men had been summoned, and since he had wanted to make this trip as discreetly as possible, he felt ashamed and awkward when he saw the stewards noisily arrive, accompanied by a crowd of uncouth provincials. He covered up his real reason for being there by explaining that he had come to see Bennokimi, then gave the stewards an order to see to the general upkeep of the villa here as well. With that, he departed.

The New Year arrived, the skies turned balmy, and the ice melted at the river's edge. The sisters at Uji gazed pensively on all this, thinking it a wonder. The holy ascetic from the temple above sent them a gift of spring greens—parsley from the banks of mountain streams and bracken fiddleheads²³—along with a message: "These were picked in spots where the snows have melted." Seeing the greens piled up on trays used to make offerings to the Buddha, one of the attendants remarked, "How delightful it is to be in a place where we can follow the passing of the days and months by observing the seasonal changes in plants and trees!" Hearing them chatter on like this, their mistresses wondered what they could possibly find so charming in those greens. The older Princess composed the following:

*If I could look upon those bracken fiddleheads
As greens from the mountain's peak that our father plucked
Then maybe I too would know that spring has arrived*

Her younger sister replied:

*Now that our father is gone, for whose sake
Should I pluck the shoots of parsley sprouting
At the riverbank where the snow lies deep*

They passed their days like this, talking and exchanging trivialities.

Not an occasion on the calendar went by without some message from both Kaoru and Niou inquiring after the princesses. Because many of these messages

were tediously annoying and inconsequential, it seems that the sisters followed their usual practice of refraining from writing them down, and so there is no correspondence for me to pass along.

When the cherry blossoms came into full bloom, Niou recalled the poems he had exchanged with the younger sister during the spring a year ago. The young gentlemen who had been there with him to witness the scene gave voice to their laments, noting what a pity it was that all things must pass. “Truly, we shall never again see a residence like the villa of that refined, gracious Prince.” His comment stirred in Niou a powerful urge to see Hachinomiya’s daughters.

*This spring, unimpeded by the mist, I shall pluck
A branch from that cherry tree I saw at your house
On my journey last year and wear it in my cap*

He felt no constraints, no inhibitions in composing this. The sisters looked askance at the transparent display of his amorous interest in them. At the same time, their lives were so tedious, and the letter itself so beautifully written, that despite its superficial appeal they felt as though they had to acknowledge his sentiments. The younger sister composed a reply:

*You say you will pluck a branch to wear in your cap
But where, exactly, will you find your cherry tree
For the deep mists here dye the blossoms mourning gray*

After being coldly rejected yet again, an exasperated Niou found their attitude deplorable.

Whenever the situation became too much for him, he would vent his frustrations by complaining to Kaoru, who was the only one to whom he could speak about the princesses. Kaoru was amused by his irritation and would respond by assuming the confident pose of a guardian who had every right to speak on behalf of the sisters. If he spotted some evidence that Niou’s intentions were less than pure, he would admonish his friend. “Really, now ... how am I supposed to act as a go-between when your motives are so questionable!”

Niou, knowing that he had to handle the situation tactfully, justified himself by saying, “I understand that ... it’s just that I haven’t yet found a woman who really suits my preferences.”

Now, Genji’s son, the Minister, had been hoping to make a match between his sixth daughter, Roku no kimi, and Prince Niou, and so he was terribly disappointed that the young nobleman would not even consider the proposal.

For his part, Niou explained the reasons for his reluctance in private: "Such a marriage would have nothing to commend it. On top of that, the Minister is so officious and proper that he would be sure to chastise me whenever he finds out about any little dalliance I may indulge in ... how terribly tedious!"

That year, the residence of Kaoru's mother burned to the ground, and the cloistered Third Princess had to move back to the estate at Rokujō. As a result of all the chaos that ensued, Kaoru was unable to visit the villa at Uji for a long time. Being serious and sincere, he was not at all like other men. Calm and unflustered, he confidently assumed that the older sister was already his woman. Operating on that assumption, he felt that as long as she remained unwilling to yield her heart to him, he should not do anything that she might consider disrespectful or thoughtless. At the same time, he wanted her to fully understand that he had not forgotten the wishes of her late father.

The summer of that year was hotter than normal and everyone found it oppressive. Kaoru remembered how cool it was by the riverside and immediately hurried off to Uji. He set off in the cool of the morning, but by the time he arrived, blinding sunlight was streaming into the quarters on the east side of the villa. As a result, he decided to move to the aisle room off Hachinomiya's old quarters on the west side. He next summoned the homely watchman.

The sisters were in the central chamber of the villa praying before the Buddha in their father's chapel, but Kaoru sensed that they were preparing to withdraw to their own rooms—apparently, they did not wish to be so close to him. They tried to move as quietly as possible so as not to be detected, but because they were nearby, he naturally heard their movements and was unable to sit still. Earlier, he had noticed a small hole next to the latch on the edge of the sliding door that separated the aisle room from the main chamber, and so he pulled aside a folding screen standing in front of the door and peeked through the hole. Kaoru was disappointed to find his view blocked by a standing curtain set up on the other side. He was about to return to his seat when a gust of wind lifted open the blinds at the veranda.

"Goodness me ... we're completely exposed!" he heard one of the attendants say. "Push the curtain over behind the blind there."

It was for Kaoru a fortunate mistake on the woman's part, for now when he happily peeked through again he could see that all of the standing curtains, short and tall, had been repositioned inside the blinds. Just then, the sisters were withdrawing to a room on the far side, passing through a sliding panel directly across from Kaoru's door.

He spotted the younger sister first—she had stepped into his line of sight when she went over to peek around one of the standing curtains and watch the

men of Kaoru's escort moving about here and there trying to catch the cool river breezes. She wore vivid orange trousers over a dark gray singlet,²⁴ an unusual, bright combination hinting that the disposition of the wearer was somewhat more cheerful than her older sister's. Having just finished her devotions, she still wore a ritual red silk sash, which hung across her chest and shoulders and was tied at the back. She was holding a rosary, which was partially concealed by her sleeves. Her tall, slender figure gave her a charming air, and her lovely, thick, lustrous tresses, which appeared to reach down just short of the hem of her robe, had been perfectly combed right down to the ends so there wasn't a single tangle. Her profile was adorable, and she exuded a lambent beauty—soft, gentle, yielding. Kaoru sighed in longing, for the young woman reminded him of Niou's sister, the First Princess, whom he had once glimpsed briefly.

The older sister now sidled into view. "There's nothing to block anyone from seeing us through the sliding door over there," she pointed out, looking warily over in Kaoru's direction. Her reserved, attentive appearance struck him as a mark of her distinguished breeding. The shape of her head and the flowing lines of her hair spoke of a noble sensibility slightly more refined and graceful than her sister's.

"There's a folding screen on the other side of the door," one of the young attendants nonchalantly replied. "There's no way the young lord would have time to peek through so quickly."

"But imagine how awful it would be if he did," the older Princess replied, anxiously slipping into the room beyond. Her demeanor seemed to add a touch of proud superiority to her elegant beauty. Like her younger sister, she was dressed in a single layer of dark mourning robes with trousers in the same color combination, but she seemed to carry herself with more poise and with a gentle charm that so touched him he was moved to pity. Her hair had a spare, clean look to it, perhaps because the stress she suffered had caused some of it to fall out. It was thinner at the ends as well, but its dark sheen made it seem exquisite all the same, shimmering with bright streaks of kingfisher blue as it cascaded down like silk threads. She was carrying a sutra written on purple paper in one hand—a hand slimmer and more delicate than her sister's—and she looked very thin, as if she had lost weight. Just then, the younger Princess, who had been standing up a moment ago, sat down in front of the sliding door directly across the room. She looked straight back in Kaoru's direction and smiled. She was ravishing.

¹ *Kokinshū* 983 (Kisen): “I live in my hermitage southeast of the capital, in a place that people in this world of woe call Ujiyama, mountain of sorrows” (alluded to several times in the previous chapter).

² The text here identifies Genji’s son as the Minister of the Right, but near the end of the *Takekawa* chapter he is promoted to Minister of the Left. This promotion is subsequently overlooked for the most part in the “Uji” chapters, which suggests that the earlier chapter was either partially spurious or that the author herself confused this detail. Since there is no way to determine the origin of the inconsistency, I will refer to Genji’s son as “the Minister” from here on.

³ This game, similar to Tiddly winks, is mentioned in the *Suma* chapter.

⁴ *Kokin rokujō* 4155 (Emperor Kenzō [attribution from *Nihon shoki*]): “Willow trees lining the rice-straw banks of a river ... as the waters flow along some rise up, others bend downward, but their roots remain solid, unmoving.”

⁵ *Man'yōshū* 1424 (Yamabe no Akahito): “I came to pick violets in the fields of spring, but I find the fields so precious to me I spent the night sleeping there” (alluded to earlier in the *Makibashira* chapter).

⁶ *Gosenshū* 785 (Minamoto Nakamasa): “I long to go on the road to Ōmi, even though I have no one to guide me, for I feel forlorn here on this side of the barrier gate.”

⁷ Hachinomiya has entered a *yakudoshi*, an unlucky year (cf. the *Usugumo* chapter). The text does not give Hachinomiya’s age, but it certainly has to be sixty-one, since the only other option would be forty-nine, which does not fit with the story of the late birth of his daughters. Moreover, forty-nine would make him younger than Reizei, which is impossible.

⁸ Mahākāśyapa (Mahākashō in Japanese, but just Kashō in the text) was one of the ten principal disciples of the Buddha. He was considered the most rigorous when it came to ascetic practices and austerities and was deemed by the Buddha to be his worthy successor in the *Flower Sermon*, a text that had a major influence on the development of Zen.

⁹ This poem plays on the words *hitokoto* (meaning both “one word” and “koto’s air/song”) and *kareji* (meaning both “will not forsake/will not grow distant” and “will not wither”).

¹⁰ *Wakan rōei shū* 794 (Fujiwara Yoshitaka): “In the morning, one walks in pride along earthly roads, cheeks in the full flush of health, but by evening, all that remains are white bones rotting in the fields beyond the city.”

¹¹ *Kokinshū* 861 [also *Tales of Ise*, section 125] (Ariwara no Narihira, composed when he was in failing health): “I have long heard it said that death is a path we must all take in the end ... I just never imagined that I would set out on it so soon.”

¹² This is probably an allusion to a poem in section 87 of *Tales of Ise*, attributed to Ariwara no Yukihira: “Which is higher, I wonder, this waterfall, or the cascade of tears I shed as I wait vainly day after day to rise in the world?”

¹³ *Shinzenzaishū* 526 (Tomohira Shinnō [Prince Tomohira]): “More than the withered lower leaves of bush clover, the sight of the sere highland moor where the stag lives moves me to sadness.”

¹⁴ *Gosenshū* 372 (Ki no Tomonori): “Though I am not a stag who has lost his mate in autumn mists, still I must raise my voice and cry out.”

¹⁵ The room is at a lower level than the surrounding aisle rooms or verandas. The space in which the floorboards were removed to reveal the earthen floor was called a *tsuchidono*, and this custom was not an uncommon ascetic practice for the aristocracy.

¹⁶ *Kokinshū* 841 (Mibu no Tadamine): “The unraveling strands of her wisteria robe are now twisted into a thread on which the mourner strings her pearly tears of grief.”

¹⁷ Her father’s position was *Sachūben*, which explains the origins of Bennokimi’s (Counselor’s daughter) name.

¹⁸ *Kokinshū* 727 (Ono no Komachi): “I am no guide to the village where the fisherfolk live, so why does he seem to always voice his resentments, saying he wants to view the bay?”

¹⁹ *Shūishū* 389 (Takamuko no Kusaharu): “Has the bank beneath the sacred mountains and groves where the gods reside collapsed? The waters of the Tatsuta River run muddy.”

²⁰ *Man'yōshū* 3807 (Anonymous): “My love for you is not shallow like the reflection you see when you

peek into the mountain spring and see the image of Mount Asaka.” The line also alludes to *Kokin rokujō* 985 (Anonymous): “In the shallow mountain spring I see the image of Mount Asaka ... but this love that I feel for her is anything but shallow.” Both poems are alluded to earlier, in the *Wakamurasaki* chapter.

[21](#) *Kokinshū* 292 (Henjō): “Beneath a tree that a poor, lonely hermit reaches after crossing the moors, the autumn leaves have scattered, leaving no shade to shelter him.”

[22](#) *Utsuho monogatari [The Tale of the Hollow Tree]* 212: “The foot of an oak on the mountain where laymen practice their devotions ... ahh, how cold and uncomfortable it is, since it is not meant to be used forever ...” This poem plays on the word *toko*, which may be written with either the character 床 (“floor,” “space,” or “bed”) or 常 (“always,” “forever”).

[23](#) Japanese parsley (*seri*) is the common name of a type of water dropwort. Its shoots are eaten in early spring. *Warabi* is technically speaking not bracken (the Japanese fern belongs to a different genus), but bracken is also used as a common name for ferns, and so I have adopted it here. *Warabi*, like many ferns, produces fiddlehead shoots that are edible. The name “fiddlehead” has a slightly rustic quality I believe is appropriate for this plant.

[24](#) This color combination was not unusual for mourning robes. A similar combination is mentioned earlier, in the *Aoi* chapter.

XLVII.

Agemaki

A Bowknot Tied in Maiden's Loops

THE PRINCESSES had lived so many years at Uji that they were accustomed to the river winds. This particular autumn, however, as they hurried to prepare for the memorial services marking the first anniversary of their father's passing, those winds sounded unbearably depressing. Kaoru, along with the ascetic from the mountain temple, took care of most of the necessary arrangements. The princesses, following the instructions of their ladies-in-waiting, saw to many of the finer details, such as providing vestments for the priests and decorations for the sutra scrolls and the like—though they were in such a fragile emotional state, they might not have been able to manage these preparations had they not had assistance from others. Kaoru personally called on them to express his deeply felt sympathies on the occasion when they would don their mourning clothes for the last time. The ascetic visited as well.

At the time of Kaoru's visit, the sisters were busy twining together threads of five colors to make decorative cords for the stands that would hold ritual incense. With threads lying scattered all over, they chatted as they went about their task. The older sister remarked, "I linger on, combing through these tangled threads."¹ Kaoru glanced around the edge of the blind through a gap in the standing curtains, and as soon as he caught a glimpse of the spooling frame that the sisters were using to twine the threads, he understood at once the meaning of the older sister's poetic allusion. Fascinated that she should be experiencing feelings of sorrow similar to those once expressed by Lady Ise, he murmured a line from one of Ise's verses: "A thread on which to string my tears, like jewels ..." ²

The older sister was reluctant to respond to him in a way that might indicate she recognized Ise's poem, since she worried about coming across as too

forward. She simply replied, “These threads are nothing I may twine into a string ...”³ The moment she called up this line by Tsurayuki, who likened to a slender thread the sad loneliness of parting in this world, she was reminded yet again of the ability of poetry to truly express the sentiments in one’s heart.

Kaoru was writing out his prayers for the memorial service and instructions for the dedication of the sutra scrolls and images of the Buddha that he was donating. He took advantage of having the inkstone in front of him to write the following:

*Let’s plight our troth, bind our fates forever
Like the ends of a cord joined together
To make a bowknot tied in maiden’s loops*⁴

The older sister, who as always found his advances troublesome, replied:

*How could our fates be intertwined forever
Since these pearl-like tears that fall so easily
Are too fragile to string on the thread of life*

“If the threads are never intertwined,” Kaoru protested, “then how could you ever hope to string your tears?”⁵ Her reply made him feel both despondent and exasperated.

Because she had managed to parry his advance and turn the subject of their conversation away from their relationship, it seemed awkward to continue pressing his case, and so he spoke in earnest about Prince Niou.

“I have witnessed various things that suggest he is by nature a bit too eagerly inclined to pursue romantic affairs, and now that he has begun corresponding with your sister, I must tell you he can be quite obstinate and will not take no for an answer. Still, you don’t have to be all that concerned about him, so why is it that you go out of your way to behave in such an aloof manner? I’ve observed your lack of understanding of the ways of the world, which is apparent in your standoffish attitude, and I resent your persistence in carrying on like this even when I’ve spoken honestly with you. Clearly, it has been useless for me to say anything, for matters have gone quite contrary to my expectations. In any case, I want you to clearly indicate which way you’re leaning when it comes to my proposals.”

“I’m speaking directly with you now, am I not?” she replied. “Surely that proves I’m not opposed to your wishes. It’s just that most people would consider it improper for a man to approach me as closely as you have, and our

conversations are likely to seem suspicious and give rise to idle gossip. Your own failure to understand the situation reveals a certain degree of shallowness on your part. It may be true as you suggest that no one with even a modicum of sensitivity could ever live in an isolated mountain villa like this without feeling some lingering sorrow and regret, but I am by temperament dull and lack a sense of judgment when it comes to such matters. As for the proposals you mentioned ... I have no idea how to respond. Our late father frequently spoke about what might become of my sister and me in the future, but despite all the advice he gave, not once did he mention anything about the sort of proposals you're making. So, I have to assume that he wanted us to remain here as we are and give up all thoughts of leading a normal life. Of course, my sister is a little younger and has many years ahead of her, and in my heart I feel responsible for her welfare. That's why it distresses me to think of her hidden away deep in these mountain recesses like some withering tree,⁶ and I wonder if it might be possible to make some arrangements for her." She sighed, her thoughts in turmoil. Kaoru was deeply affected.

Even though she was trying to behave like an adult by looking out for her younger sister, Kaoru realized that it was not unreasonable for a young, inexperienced Princess to find it difficult to decide right away on a proposal such as his. He summoned the old attendant, Bennokimi, as he always did, and spoke with her.

"I began visiting this place some years ago, motivated by my concerns with the life to come. Near the end of Prince Hachinomiya's life, when he seemed lonely and depressed, he asked me to look after his daughters as I thought best, and I promised him I would do so. Now, however, your older mistress is willfully opposed to her father's plans and comes across as overly proper and insensitive. Why is that? What's going on here? I'm beginning to have doubts and can't help suspecting that some other man is to have your mistresses. Surely *you* would know if there are any such plans, would you not? I know that I'm strange—different from others—and this mundane world holds few attractions for me. Still, I can't help thinking I must be linked to the princesses by some karmic bond from a previous life. What else could have brought me to this place, which now feels so intimately familiar? From what I understand, people are already gossiping about my connection with Hachinomiya's daughters. All things being equal, I believe it's best not to contravene their late father's final requests. If only I could have a normal relationship with the older sister! I'm fully aware that she is of imperial blood and that I'm just a commoner, but it's not as if there haven't been examples in the past of marriages between people of different social backgrounds!" He paused for a moment, and then continued. "I

have told her all about Prince Niou, but she seems unwilling to accept my assurances that there is no cause for concern regarding his temperament. All that leads me to believe that she has someone else in mind for her younger sister. That's why I ask you again: what is going on? Why is she behaving like this?"

He looked so downcast as he was speaking that a scheming attendant of less virtuous character—of whom there are many in the world—might have responded with words of praise and flattery to placate him. Bennonkimi was not like that, however. Though she believed in her heart that a match between the older Princess and Kaoru would have been ideal, she spoke to him honestly.

"The two of them have always tended to resist the plans others have for them, and that may explain why they've shown no inclination to accept a normal relationship with a man. Even when their father was alive, those of us who had served them over the years never considered this house a sturdy tree that we could gather beneath for shelter and depend upon for protection. Those women who could not bear to give up their lives to serve in this isolated villa all eventually took time away and withdrew, each one scattering to other households as best they could. Even attendants who had long-standing connections with Prince Hachinomiya have for the most part given up and left, while the ones who have remained in service complain about how hard it is to stay, even for a little while longer, now that he's gone.

"I've heard them go on and on, making all sorts of impudent and inappropriate remarks to the princesses. 'When your father was still alive,' they'll say, 'he was bound by your imperial lineage to maintain appearances and constrained by an old-fashioned refinement that made him reluctant, out of a sense of compassion, to arrange a marriage for you with anyone other than men of proper status and breeding. Now that the two of you find yourselves with no one to turn to for support, you may have no choice but to accept a proposal from a man who is beneath you. True, some people might harshly condemn you for doing so, but such outrageous criticism would never be taken seriously, and those who make it would simply end up exposing their own lack of sensitivity and understanding of the realities of life. After all, who in the world would want to spend their lives in the dire circumstances you two face? Even hermits who live deep in the mountains surviving on pine needles and practicing extreme austerities find it hard to give up their lives, and so each carries out his devotion to Buddha's teaching in his own way, following separate paths according to his particular sect.'

"I gather that the attendants have said many other things like this, and naturally their words upset the youthful hearts of my mistresses. Still, the older Princess in particular refuses to yield, even though she is deeply concerned about

her sister and wants to find a suitable match for her. She has grown accustomed to the kindness you've shown over the years by visiting this villa tucked away in the mountains, and so she no longer thinks of you as an outsider. Now that the two of you are discussing various intimate matters, it's clear that she has decided it would be best if you would take her younger sister as a wife. From what I can tell, she does not consider Prince Niou a serious suitor, despite the letters and poems he sends."

"I accepted Hachinomiya's poignant last request," Kaoru replied, "and I intend to continue coming here and to maintain my relationship with his daughters for as long as I live, no matter how short a span that may be. Perhaps it looks to you as if I'm indifferent to the question of which one to take as a wife ... indeed, I'm quite happy to hear I'm considered worthy of the younger Princess. But my heart is drawn to her older sister, and despite my long-standing desire to turn my back on this world, I cannot change my feelings and give her up. My attachment is not some ordinary, passing fancy. How happy I would be if I could just tell her everything I want to say with nothing coming between us ... if I could just speak directly and talk about things that are happening in this uncertain world ... if she would just open her heart to me and stop being so reserved.

"I can't discuss personal matters with my brother or sister⁷ since they are much older and too distinguished, and so I feel terribly isolated. It has been my lot in life to have to constantly keep inside myself all the things I think and feel about what's going on at the court ... things that may strike me as moving or delightful or troubling depending on the occasion. I have no one else to turn to, and that's why I want a closer relationship with the older Princess. I can't very well speak freely about intimate matters or my personal feelings to the Umetsubo Empress,⁸ whose kindness I have come to rely upon as if she were my parent. As for my real mother, who remains cloistered in her Sanjō residence, she is so youthful-looking that I find it hard to think of her as a parent ... and, in any case, she's a nun, so I can't very well speak with her in a close, familiar way. There *is* the daughter of Retired Emperor Reizei, I suppose, but she has been kept away from me,⁹ and I always felt constrained and awkward around her. So you see, I have had no close companions in my life, and deep in my heart I'm quite lonely. To make matters worse, I'm extremely clumsy and artless when it comes to romantic pursuits ... it is my nature to feel uncomfortable engaging in even the most trivial, playful bantering, and so I find such games excruciating and embarrassing. My inborn awkwardness is most evident whenever I try to speak with someone whom I genuinely adore. I stumble over my words and can't express my true sentiments, which leaves me feeling

resentful and downhearted. Yet, the older Princess pays no notice at all to what I'm going through, and I find her behavior toward me excessively stubborn and insensitive. Regarding the matter of Prince Niou, I would ask her to leave that to me ... she may rest assured that I would never do anything that is not in her sister's best interests."

If only my mistresses could be married as Kaoru proposes! What an ideal outcome for a household as forsaken and desolate as this one! Bennokimi was eager to serve as go-between, but her older mistress and Kaoru were both so serious and distinguished that she felt awed before them. She did not reply to his remarks, nor did she share her true thoughts and feelings with either of them.

Kaoru wanted to stay on for the evening and spend the night talking quietly with the woman he desired, and so he idly let the time pass until sunset. She was bothered by his decision to stay. Though he had said nothing explicit about his intentions, it was clear from his testy demeanor that he was gradually losing patience and might do something rash. Her apprehension made it increasingly painful to open up and engage him in intimate conversation. Still, his behavior was usually above reproach and he was always so remarkably kind and considerate toward her that she simply couldn't bring herself to treat him callously. In the end, she relented and received him. She had the panel doors dividing the main chamber from her late father's chapel opened and the length of the wicks of the oil lamps adjusted to brighten the room. To ensure that she was shielded from his gaze, she had an additional folding screen set up in front of her blinds. Lamps illuminated the space outside the blinds as well, prompting Kaoru to complain as he lay down off to the side of the room, "I've not been feeling well and look a frightful mess. These lamps will expose my miserable state."

The Princess had fruits and other refreshments brought in to him, though she did not make a formal show of the preparations. She also had some appetizing dishes taken out to the men of his escort to go along with the wine that they were enjoying. They had withdrawn and gathered in a passageway some distance off in order to give Kaoru and the Princess a chance to talk in private. She remained wary and did not let down her guard, but her manner and speech were so exceptionally tender and enchanting that he lost his heart to her and, despite his straitlaced personality, could no longer control his burning passions.

Feeling impatient, and knowing that the only things keeping him from her were the flimsy barriers of a screen and a blind, he found his own timid willingness to let this opportunity pass beyond absurd. Still, he maintained a cool facade, sharing stories about various incidents in the world at large that had moved or amused him.

Meanwhile, the Princess, sitting inside the blind, called for her attendants to

come closer. However, because they thought that it might be inappropriate to interrupt the couple's intimacy, they didn't just keep their distance but withdrew even further away. They all lay down and went to sleep, leaving no one to adjust the wicks and keep the oil lamps in the chapel burning brightly. The Princess, distraught at the prospect of being left alone with a man in a darkened room, quietly called out to her women, but she failed to wake any of them.

"I'm afraid that you'll have to excuse me," she said. "You see, I'm not feeling well at the moment and need to rest for a while. Let us talk again in the morning."

It sounded as though she was about to retreat into an interior room, and so he quietly pushed the screen over to one side and slipped inside the blinds. "A man who has had to struggle through the mountains to get here has experienced even greater discomfort than you're feeling now, but at least I've had the consolation of being able to speak with you like this. If you go inside and leave me on my own, I'll be completely devastated." As he had surmised, she was frightened. Since she was already halfway through the door that led into the adjoining chapel, he grasped her sleeves to stop her from leaving. She was mortified and angered by his actions.

"So *this* is what you meant when you said you wanted 'nothing to come between us.' What a shocking way to behave, barging in here!" The haughty, contemptuous attitude that she displayed as she disdainfully chided him made her even more alluring.

"Since you refuse to acknowledge my desire that nothing come between us," he replied, "I have to let you know how I feel. How can you possibly consider my behavior shocking? I shall swear a vow of devotion before the statue of the Buddha here. You must stop fearing me ... it's really too much, since I've never once considered doing anything to defy your will. Everyone assumes that we've consummated our affair, yet here I am continuing to act the fainthearted fool—a fool, I might add, different from other men, who would have done with you as they pleased by now." He repeatedly stroked her abundant, cascading hair away from her face and gazed at her features in the dim, bewitching light of the lamps. She was just as lustrously beautiful as he had dared to hope.

There was nothing in this lonely, isolated house to hinder a person of licentious character from having his way with the Princess, and Kaoru couldn't help but wonder what might happen if someone other than he were to come calling here. *Would such a man stop short of acting on his desires and control himself as I have? If someone else did take her, how much would I regret my indecisiveness then?* Yet despite his anxiety about the dangerous consequences of his own hesitation, he couldn't help feeling sorry for her at that moment—she

looked so pathetic, weeping as if she were suffering indescribable misery. He decided not to force himself on her, but to wait for the time when she would yield to him of her own volition. It hurt him to see her in this extreme distress, and so he tried, with tender delicacy, to calm and soothe her.

"I never imagined that you had these base desires," she complained bitterly. "Here I let you come indecently close to me, near enough to invite suspicions and idle gossip, and you repay me by exposing these sleeves of inauspicious hue to your gaze. Your behavior bespeaks the shallowness of your sensibility and makes me realize just how worthless I really am. Nothing you do or say can comfort me." She was truly at her wits' end, humiliated and discomfited that he should have seen her gray mourning clothes in the dim lamplight—robes she had so innocently donned earlier that day.

"You have just cause to dislike me for being inconsiderate," he replied, "and I am too ashamed to say anything in my defense. It's also perfectly understandable that you would mention the color of your sleeves and plead that you are in mourning. And yet ... well, you have observed signs of my good intentions over the years and must have realized how I feel. And it's not as if we're meeting for the first time ... so why do you feel the need to act so diffident toward me? It's unreasonable of you to conclude that my behavior somehow makes you worthless."

He went on to confess all his secret, unbearable longings for her, beginning with that early moonlit dawn when he first saw her playing music in concert with her sister. As she was listening to him, she felt uncomfortable, thinking among other things how peculiar it was that he had been spying on her. *How embarrassing! He was always so cool and serious, and yet he felt this way about me all along.*

Kaoru placed a short-framed standing curtain between them and the altar and lay down next to her for a brief period. The richly aromatic incense and penetrating scent of star anise that wafted toward them from the chapel was unsettling, for the depth of his spiritual devotion to the Buddha was extraordinary compared to others.

My original and most fervent hope to leave worldly things behind would mean nothing if I were to rashly give in to my base desires and do something despicable while she is wearing mourning colors. I must subdue my passions, he told himself, at least until the period of mourning has passed, and wait for her attitude toward me to soften on its own.

The atmosphere of an autumn evening naturally gives rise to all sorts of poignant feelings even in places not as lonely and isolated as the Uji villa. Here, the howling of the winds at the peak of the mountain and the chirring of insects

in the rustic wattle fencerow echoed in mournful melancholy. Kaoru spoke to her of the evanescent nature of the world, and he was extremely pleased by the proper, sensitive way that she would respond to him. Her ladies-in-waiting, who earlier had been sleeping so soundly, had withdrawn to rooms in the interior of the residence, having assumed from the sound of things that the couple had consummated their relationship.

The Princess recalled what her father had once told her. *He spoke the truth*, she realized. *The longer a woman lives in this world, the more likely it is that unpleasant surprises will befall her*. The thought was unbearably sad, and she felt that the sound of the rapids was drawing forth her tears and that her grief would merge with the current of the river.¹⁰

Dawn finally broke. The men of the escort were up and clearing their throats to urge their lord to get ready to return to the capital. Kaoru found the whinnying of their horses delightful, since it conjured in his mind those scenes of lodging on the road that he had heard others describe. He slid open a panel door on the east side to face the early morn and, together with the Princess, gazed up at the sky, which stirred profound emotions. She slid out a little, still in a sitting posture; because she was very close to the narrow eaves, she was able to make out the dewdrops on the *shinobugusa* ferns as they gradually became visible in the dawn light. Seated next to each other, they exuded a radiant beauty and made a wonderfully attractive couple.

“How I long to spend my days with you,” Kaoru said, “sitting just like this, with no other purpose but to enjoy as one the moon and the cherry blossoms, idly chatting about trivial, mundane matters.” His voice was filled with tender affection, and slowly her fears were allayed.

“If only I could have a screen or blind between us as we talk,” she replied, “I wouldn’t feel this terrible awkwardness and shame ... then truly there would be no barrier separating our hearts.”

The sky grew brighter, and they heard wings flapping nearby as a flock of birds took flight. The faint echo of a bell in the distance signaled that it was four o’clock—the end of night and beginning of a new day. “You must leave now,” she told him. “I couldn’t stand it if people saw you leaving.” From her expression, it was obvious that she felt it would be shameful to be observed.

“How can I just make my way home through the morning dew like some common paramour, pretending that something happened between us? What do you think people would make of *that*? They’d think it strange, that something was amiss. It’s better to be calm in this situation and at least act normally ... though our relationship is eccentric, from now on you should treat me as if we were really married. You may rest assured that I have no ulterior motives and

will do nothing to cause you distress. It's spiteful of you not to acknowledge a heart whose devotion to you is pure and sincere." Kaoru gave no indication that he was about to leave any time soon.

Shocked and panicky, she was at a complete loss. "I do understand how you feel," she pleaded, "and in the future I'll do just as you wish. But for this one time at least I ask you to comply with my request."

"Ahh ... how unkind you are ... how unkind," he sighed over and over. "I know nothing about these 'partings at dawn' that poets are always going on about, and I will surely lose my way if you make me leave now."

Just then, he heard the faint crowing of a cock somewhere and thought of the capital.

*In the dim light of dawn such poignant feelings
Gathered in these many sounds, these cocks crowing
To tell the sorrows of a mountain villa*

She replied:

*I thought these mountains so remote
No bird's cries would ever be heard
Yet the world's woes call on me here¹¹*

He saw her off as far as the sliding panels that led to her quarters, then returned through the door by which he had entered last evening. He lay down, but he could not sleep. Her lingering presence made him yearn for her.¹² Had he felt this strongly about her earlier, he would not have been as passive as he was all these months. The very idea of returning to the capital was depressing to him.

The Princess, mindful of what others might be thinking, did not lie down right away. *It has been my misfortune to have to make do with no one to rely on for support. The world seems a place where unwanted, unexpected entanglements are inevitable, since some of my attendants are given to pressing all sorts of proposals on me and urging me to accept a suitor.*

She continued to ponder her circumstances. *From what I could tell last night, Kaoru is flawless in looks and character, and my late father told me that if the gentleman was sincerely interested, he would not object to the match. Still, I would prefer to continue to go on living as I am. How happy it would make me to see my younger sister able to live a normal life. She is in the prime of youthful beauty and fairer than me in looks and demeanor; if I could somehow arrange a marriage between her and Kaoru, I would do everything in my power to support*

her. As for my own affairs, is there anyone who would look after me? If only I could think of Kaoru as someone less extraordinary, then my heart would surely have yielded to him by now, after having grown familiar with him over all these years. Yet he is so dauntingly superior ... I can't help feeling shy and diffident in his presence. No ... it's best to live my life as I am, on my own. Weeping softly, feeling ill from the stress of the previous night, she waited for dawn to fully break before going into her sister's chamber and lying down beside her.

The younger Princess had been lying there uneasily, thinking it strange and unusual for the attendants to be whispering among themselves. Now that her sister was beside her, however, she felt happy. She gently pulled the bedclothes over the older Princess. However, as she did so, she caught a whiff of Kaoru's unmistakable scent, which had suffused her sister's robes, and was reminded of the troubles that scent had caused their unattractive watchman. Disturbed that what her attendants had been muttering was true, she said nothing and pretended to go back to sleep.

Meanwhile, Kaoru summoned Bennokimi and spoke carefully and at some length, dictating a note the old woman was to give to his lady—a staid and proper missive with no poem and with none of the usual flowery expressions of love. He then took his leave.

I tried to escape his advances by lightly dismissing his poem about the bowknot fastened in maiden's loops, she thought when she saw his letter, and, though I tried to keep him at two-arms' length¹³ whenever I met him, my sister must surely think that I've given myself to him. It was all terribly humiliating, and she spent the entire day in bed, excusing herself by claiming that she was not well.

Her women pleaded with her: “My lady, the memorial service will be upon us in just a few days. You’ve picked a most inopportune moment to be indisposed, since no one else can see to it that all of the details are properly arranged.”

The younger Princess finished twining the decorative cords on her own, but she pressed her sister for help. “I don’t know how to make the floral ornaments.”¹⁴ Using the cover of darkness to hide her shame, the older Princess got up that evening and completed various tasks with her sister, including tying up the decorative knots. A letter from Kaoru arrived, but she had a proxy write the reply and again excused herself by saying, “I’ve been ill since morning, so ...”

“Most improper,” her women murmured in disapproval. “Really ... how childish!”

When the period of mourning ended, the sisters at Uji put away their gray robes. Though it had never occurred to them that they might outlive their father,

they now realized how quickly the months had passed. The sight of the two of them despondent, tearfully dwelling on their unexpected misfortune, was too pitiful to behold. Since they had worn robes of darker shades for so many months, the change to clothes of lighter hues was quite refreshing; since the younger Princess was in the full bloom of youth, she exuded a glowing appeal that surpassed even the charms of her sister. Indeed, whenever the attendants washed and combed her hair, her splendid appearance was enough to make one forget the cares of the world.

Whenever the older Princess observed her sister, she felt happy and reassured and privately wondered how anyone could possibly think such a beautiful lady would look inferior next to Kaoru. Since there was no one else to turn to for support, she was determined to care for her sister as a mother would.

Kaoru had been waiting impatiently for the time when his lady would finally change out of those mourning robes that made him feel so tentative and deferential. When the ninth month arrived, he called on the Uji villa again and sent in a note to her: "I should like to talk directly with you as we always do." She, however, refused to receive him, replying that because she was not feeling well it was too troublesome to meet.

He sent in another note: "How coldhearted you are! What must your women be making of your attitude?"

"It upsets me to contemplate that the time has come when I must put away my robes of mourning," she replied. "The prospect is so depressing, I simply cannot bring myself to speak with you."

Kaoru, who was hurt and angry, summoned Bennokimi—as he always did—and vented his frustrations. The women of the villa had only Kaoru to rely on for support, and he alone brought comfort to their lonely, isolated existence. They would talk amongst themselves about how wonderful it would be if, as they hoped, he took their older mistress for his wife and moved all of them to a more normal residence in the capital. After discussing the matter, they decided that the least they could do was allow him entrance to their mistress's chambers.

Although the older Princess did not fully grasp what was going on, she sensed something was afoot. *He's quite close to Bennokimi and is probably enlisting her as an ally. I've good cause to be concerned about her intentions and mustn't let my guard down. In romances of old, there isn't a single example of a lady who initiates an affair on her own. It's always the lady's women ... one can never be too careful about the wiles and plots of one's attendants. If Kaoru is really that put out with me, then maybe I should offer my younger sister to him. He seems temperamentally incapable of treating in cavalier fashion any woman he has taken for his own, even one who is not especially beautiful. Once he*

catches a glimpse of my sister, he will certainly consider her adequate recompense for his disappointment in me. Of course, even if I propose the match to him, no man is just suddenly going to accept the substitution, and he has already indicated to Bennokimi that he does not prefer my sister and would be reluctant to take her, since people might see in his change of heart evidence of a shallow, fickle character. She mulled over her options. Her own experiences made her feel that keeping her plans secret from her sister would be a grave injustice, and so, out of a sense of compassion, she divulged everything.

“Our father asked that we never do anything to bring shame or ridicule to our family line, even if it means that we have to spend the rest of our lives in this forlorn state. We committed a terrible sin by causing his heart so much turmoil, which disrupted his religious devotions and kept him bound to this world. I want to do all I can to fulfill the final requests that he made when he left us behind, and so I couldn’t care less if my life is lonely and isolated. Even so, it is unbearably troubling to me that our ladies-in-waiting seem to resent what they take to be a stubborn and perverse coldness on my part ... and, I must admit, their opinions have some merit. You see, I too believe that it would be painfully sad and pitiful for you to go on month after month spending your days in the same solitary, forlorn circumstances that we find ourselves in, and it would bring a measure of consolation and honor to me if I could at least arrange for you to marry and live a normal life.”

What could she possibly be thinking? The younger Princess deplored her sister’s suggestion. “Did our father ever insist that you alone should live out your life this way? He seemed to have been much more concerned about me; my inability to get by on my own caused him much anxiety about my future. Yet, if I were not here to see you every morning and evening, how else would I be able to console you in your loneliness?”

Her sister sounded so resentful that the older Princess sympathized and was forced to acknowledge the validity of her feelings on the matter. “Yes, I suppose you’re right ... it’s just that I’m confused and upset that my women apparently think me unpleasant and irrational.” She spoke no more of her hopes and plans for her sibling.

It was evening, but their guest gave no intention that he intended to go home —a most vexing situation. Just then, Bennokimi came in with a message from Kaoru, muttering on and on about how he had good reason to feel bitter. Her mistress, however, merely let out a sigh and did not reply. *What should I do?* the Princess thought. *If only Mother or Father were still here, then at least I’d have someone who could deal with this situation. I’d accept their decision as my destiny. After all, one cannot do as one’s heart desires;*¹⁵ *that’s just the way the*

world is—and anything they might have chosen for me would have seemed normal, and I'd have been able to conceal my faults and avoid the ridicule of others. The older the women who've remained here grow, the more confident they feel about their own cleverness. They're always telling me what's on their minds, what a perfect match I would make for the Middle Counselor ... but can I trust their advice? They lack normal experience of the world, and their minds and hearts are so shallow that their thinking is entirely one-sided.

The insistent manner in which her women recommended Kaoru's proposal—almost as if they were dragging her along to force her acceptance—was terribly unpleasant, but she was steadfast in her refusal. Her sister, who usually could be counted on to commiserate with her regardless of the problem they were facing, was at a loss when it came to matters such as this, and so she proved to be disengaged and uncomprehending. As a result, the older Princess simply withdrew into herself, contemplating the strange fate that had befallen her.

“You really must wear robes of everyday hues,” her attendants would say, pressuring her to change. She was shocked by their attitude, since it appeared that they were all of one mind, determined that Kaoru should have her. Because he was in such close proximity, there was nothing to prevent him from having his way with her, and it was as useless for her to try to hide away in a dwelling like this as it was for the flower of the wild pear to try to hide itself away in the mountains.¹⁶

Kaoru had been discreet and avoided talking openly to any of the women about his relationship with their older mistress. He had concluded some time ago that he should conduct his courtship in secret so that no one would be able to tell when the affair actually began. He did, however, let it be known that his intentions were honorable. “If she is unwilling to yield her heart to me,” he remarked, “then I shall continue on as I have, speaking with her like this, with blinds between us.”

Bennokimi and the other older women discussed the situation among themselves, whispering quite openly about it. Despite their efforts to facilitate the courtship, however, they looked pathetic in their mistress's eyes—not only because their thinking was shallow, but also because they were so set in their ways.

The older Princess was distressed by what was happening, and when Bennokimi entered her chambers that evening, she could not keep her feelings to herself.

“For years I heard my father praise the Middle Counselor as a trustworthy man of extraordinary goodwill, and so I came to rely on him for everything after my father died. We've grown scandalously close as a result, and now his

devotion is tinged with an amorous passion that I never expected to see in him. What's worse, his resentment of me is unreasonable and hard to bear. After all, if I were in an ideal position and could live a normal life, why would I even think about shying away from him? But I resigned myself years ago to having no prospects for a normal life, and that's why I find his proposal so terribly painful. I'm also filled with regrets for my younger sister, who will soon pass the prime of her youth. What will living in this isolated household mean for her future? If the Middle Counselor is truly as sincere about fulfilling my father's last wishes as he says he is, then I want him to show her the same consideration and affection that he gives to me. And if he does, then I'll relinquish all the feelings I hold inside, so that my heart and my sister's will be as one, and do whatever is necessary to acknowledge his hopes and bring the two of them together. May I ask you to gently convey my sentiments to him?"

Bennokimi was deeply touched by the demeanor displayed by her older mistress who, while seemingly shy and embarrassed, managed to speak of her own hopes and dreams. "I have been aware of your feelings about this matter for a long time," the old woman replied, "and I've explained them quite clearly to the Middle Counselor, but he insists that it's impossible for him to simply shift his affections as you wish. He also has to consider the Minister of War, who is becoming increasingly resentful, and swears that he will support your sister and do all he can to arrange a match for her with Prince Niou. To have the both of you married to such splendid noblemen would be wonderful. Even if your mother and father were still here and together exerting extraordinary efforts to raise and support you, they could hardly have arranged for better marriage proposals than these, which have arrived one right after the other. It's presumptuous of me to say so, but it makes me sad and alarmed to see you facing such uncertain prospects with no one to rely upon, and I worry how things may end up. Although I cannot foresee how the Middle Counselor will feel about you in the future, I'm convinced that, at the very least, his proposal is a sign of the bright, auspicious destinies that both you and my young mistress will enjoy.

"It's perfectly understandable that you do not want to oppose your late father's last requests, but when he made those requests, he was simply urging you to be cautious and warning you not to marry someone who was beneath you if there was no appropriate suitor. He mentioned on many occasions how happy and relieved it would make him if the Middle Counselor were inclined to make you his wife and secure your future. It seems that there are many women who, having lost their loving parents, end up being cast adrift and finding themselves in a most unfortunate situation not at all to their liking, regardless of whether

they are of high or low birth. Because such examples as these are all too common, no one ever blames a woman who through no fault of her own finds herself caught in a bind. In your case, you would be even less subject to censure. After all, the Middle Counselor is ideal in looks, sincerity and kindness. It's as if his proposals were made expressly for you and your sister. Even if you willfully withdraw from the world and carry out your devout aim to focus on your religious devotions as you wish, do you honestly think you can live amidst the clouds and mists like some immortal?" Bennokimi went on at length in this fashion; the Princess found her words extremely unpleasant and tiresome, and she lay prostrate on her bedding.

The younger Princess, who had been observing her sister's reclining figure with a sense of pity and regret, lay down to sleep next to her as she always did. All the while, the older Princess was fretting about what would happen next, uncertain about how to handle Kaoru if he came to her. Their villa had no hidden spaces where she could retreat and conceal herself, and so she pulled a soft, lovely robe over her sister and, because the night air was still warm, withdrew a short distance away and lay down again.

Bennokimi informed Kaoru of all her mistress had said. *What is driving the Princess to turn her back on the world like this?* he wondered. *Did she learn the truth of the world's mutability at the side of her saintly father?* Because her heart seemed all the more in tune with his own, he could not despise her as someone who was making a pretense of her wisdom. "If that's how she feels," he said, "then naturally she would think it improper to see me now, even with a blind or curtain between us. But, come now ... find some place where I may discreetly enter her private chambers." On hearing his words, Bennokimi set about complying with his orders. She dismissed most of the attendants early and told those ladies-in-waiting who were in on the plot to make preparations.

A little later that evening, the wind suddenly picked up and blew violently, causing the crude, rickety shutters to rattle and squeak. Kaoru was certain that the Princess would not be able to hear him enter her chambers because of all the noise, and so Bennokimi stealthily led him there. The old attendant was concerned that the Middle Counselor might make a mistake, since her mistresses were in the same room. However, the princesses were accustomed to sleeping together, and it might have seemed odd to ask them to retire to separate quarters. Besides, Bennokimi assumed that Kaoru was well enough acquainted with the sisters not to confuse them.

As it turned out, the older Princess was wide awake, fearful that something was afoot. As soon as she heard Kaoru enter, she quietly got up to make her escape, hurriedly slipping out through the curtains around her bedding. She felt

terrible for her sister, who was innocently sleeping away, and it broke her heart to imagine what would happen. *If only we could hide together*, she thought—but it was too late to go back now. Trembling, she looked on in the dim, flickering lamplight as Kaoru, wearing only a single under robe, lifted one of the panels on the standing curtains and entered their bedchamber with an impudent expression, as if the place belonged to him. *How dreadful! What must my sister be thinking?*

With these thoughts running through her mind, she opened up a folding screen along the front of a crumbling wall and withdrew behind it, where she sat feeling miserable and uncomfortable. It was deeply upsetting to think that her sister, who had vehemently deplored the very idea of a future as wife of the Middle Counselor, might now mistakenly think she had planned this shocking tryst and hate her for it. As she reflected sadly that all of their troubles stemmed from having been left behind in this world with no one to support them, she had the sensation that she had last seen her father's figure departing for his retreat up the mountain only just this evening. She was filled with longing and grief.

When Kaoru entered the chambers and saw a woman sleeping alone, his heart leapt with joy, since it appeared that everything was going according to plan. But then it gradually became apparent that the woman was not the Princess he desired, but someone slightly more beautiful and alluring in appearance. Her shock and desperation as she startled from her slumbers made it clear that she had absolutely no idea what was happening, and he was moved to sympathy at her plight. At the same time, he was extremely angry, provoked by the callous behavior of the older sister who had fled into hiding. Though he could hardly deny that he was attracted to the younger Princess and did not want her to go to another man, he was nonetheless frustrated that his true desires were being denied. *I don't want the Princess to think I'm a man of fickle, shallow character, but I have no choice but to spend the night here. If it's my destiny after all to end up with the younger sister instead, well ... it's not as though she's a complete stranger to me.* With those thoughts in mind, he regained his composure and, behaving the same way he did that earlier night with the Princess he loved, he did not force himself on her sister, but passed the time engaging in gentle, courtly conversation until dawn broke.

The older attendants, thinking that they had given the couple more than ample time, were just then questioning one another:

“Where has our younger mistress gone? This is very strange!”

“Oh well ... she must have gone off for some reason. I’m sure she’s fine.”

Marriage proposals aside, Kaoru’s remarkably splendid, attractive features and figure were enough to make the attendants feel their wrinkles would disappear just by gazing at him. One old woman, a toothless hag given to

making unpleasant remarks, said, “Why must our older mistress be so aloof toward him? Perhaps she’s been possessed by one of those fearsome gods that people always seem to be going on about.”

“Really, now, watch what you say … such inauspicious words! Why would some spirit possess her? She acts like this because she was brought up far removed from people. With no one to advise her on how to behave appropriately, she feels awkward interacting with others. Just wait … once she gets used to having him around, she’ll naturally warm to him soon enough.”

“I just hope that she warms to him soon … I do so wish for her to fulfill her ideal destiny.”

While the attendants were talking, they fell asleep one by one, and soon the discordant sounds of snoring and other noises reverberated.

A poet once claimed that the length of an autumn’s night is “determined by one’s companion.”¹⁷ Though this particular night had been awkward, unlike any other he had experienced, Kaoru still felt that the dawn arrived much too quickly. As he gazed at the younger Princess, who looked so fresh and lustrous that he could no longer decide which of the sisters was more attractive to him, he did not want to leave with his desires unsated. “Think lovingly of me as I think of you … and never emulate the behavior of one who is cold and heartless.” He promised her as he left that they would meet again. It was all like a strange dream to him; while he was composing himself, thinking that he wanted to try again to be with the older Princess who had cruelly rejected him, he returned to his room, just as he had before, and lay down.

Bennokimi entered. “This is most peculiar,” she remarked. “Where has my lady gone?” The younger Princess, mortified and dazed, continued to lie there trying to understand how all of this had come about. Recalling what had been said to her the day before, she was bitterly aggrieved by her sister’s cruel scheming.

With the coming light of day the “cricket” emerged from her hiding place in the wall. She pitied her sister and was all too aware of how she must feel. The two of them could not bring themselves to speak to one another. The older Princess’s thoughts were in chaos. *Now that we’ve both been exposed to his gaze, we’ve lost our air of mystery … what misery! From now on, we will never be able to relax or let down our guard.*

Bennokimi went over to the room where Kaoru was staying and learned about her mistress’s shockingly stubborn rejection. The lady was too particular, given to brooding too deeply over her situation—so much so, indeed, that she made herself hateful. Bennokimi was stunned and most sorry for the Middle Counselor.

“Even when she rejected me before,” Kaoru said, “I took comfort in thinking that there was still some hope that I might somehow persuade her ... but what happened last night was utter humiliation. I ought to throw myself in the river. After observing just how troubled Hachinomiya was by the prospect of abandoning his daughters and leaving them on their own, I decided it wouldn’t do for me to turn my back on this world and abandon them as well. Well, what’s done is done ... I shall never again consider either one of them an object of romantic interest. In return, they must never forget the anguish and bitterness they have caused me to suffer. Prince Niou remains unabashed in his pursuit of the younger sister, and if she were to yield to him I would fully understand her decision—all things being equal, it seems perfectly natural for her to seek out someone of the highest rank. In fact, her attitude is reasonable, which is why I feel ashamed and have no intention of subjecting myself ever again to the unpleasant, mocking gaze of the women here. I must insist, however, that you never divulge to anyone what a fool I’ve been.” He vented his frustrations, then hurried off much earlier than normal.

“How sad for the both of them,” the attendants whispered among themselves.

What happened with him? What if he grows spiteful and turns against my sister as well? The older Princess was brokenhearted, in utter misery. She deplored and resented the meddlesome ways of her women, who always acted against her wishes. While she was turning over these various thoughts in her mind, a letter arrived. She was bemused to find herself so uncharacteristically happy and grateful to receive a message from him. Almost as if he were unaware of the season, he had attached it to a bough covered almost entirely in green leaves, with only a single sprig displaying the crimson foliage of autumn.

*How I long to ask the mountain goddess
Who dyed the same branch different colors
Which one of these two hues is the deeper*

He had controlled the angry resentment that had seemed so evident when he left, concealing it beneath a few words written on a letter wrapped up with an outer sheet of paper. It was obvious that he was prepared to let the incident pass as if nothing had happened, but she felt agitated and uneasy all the same. Her ladies-in-waiting were annoyingly insisting that she must respond, but she was in a quandary and found it difficult to write anything. It was too unpleasant to ask her younger sister to reply, since that would have been a tacit acknowledgment of last night’s tryst with the Middle Counselor. And yet, if she herself wrote back, it would be as good as acknowledging her own affair with him. She finally

managed the following:

*I know not why the mountain goddess dyed this branch
With two colors ... but surely the leaves that have changed
Hold the deeper hue that attracts your changing heart*

Though she had casually scribbled her reply, Kaoru was charmed, and his grudge against her faded away.

She has indicated to me over and over that even though as sisters they are two, at heart they are one, and she wants to yield and have me take the younger Princess in her place. Apparently, she's unhappy that I would not accept such an arrangement, and so she devised the scheme that she carried out last night. If her plans come to naught and I remain indifferent toward her younger sister, she may well come to pity her and think me cruelly insensitive ... if that happens, it will be all the more difficult to win the lady I've truly wanted from the very beginning. Even the old lady-in-waiting who has served as my intermediary will very likely consider me rash and thoughtless. How I regret letting my heart be stained by love's passion ... I resolved to renounce all attachments to this world, yet I was unable to achieve what I most desired.

Kaoru realized how ridiculous he would look to others. No, it was worse than that ... he resembled some common lover who rows his laughable little boat back and forth to see the same woman over and over.¹⁸ He spent the entire night lost in such reflections. The next morning, beneath a delightful dawn sky, he went to call on Niou.

After the Sanjō residence of the Third Princess burned down, Kaoru moved with his mother back to the Rokujō estate; because his quarters there were near the rooms Niou used when not at his Nijō villa, he was able to visit the Prince regularly. This arrangement pleased Niou very much. His residence at Rokujō, which was ideal for living a leisurely life untroubled by distractions, looked out from the veranda onto a front garden unlike any other—the same types of flowers grew there as elsewhere, the trees and grasses swayed in similar fashion, and yet somehow their shapes and elegant movements had a special appeal. Even the reflection of pure, clear moonlight in the garden stream looked like something out of an illustration.

Knowing Niou's fondness for such scenes, Kaoru had assumed that his friend would still be up when he arrived, and sure enough, he was. When Kaoru's distinctive scent came wafting in on the breeze, a startled Niou noted his arrival immediately and, putting on a court cloak, properly arranged himself before stepping out to greet his guest. Kaoru showed his respect by stopping partway up

the front steps. Niou at once leaned against the railing and, without so much as a word inviting his friend to come up to the veranda, began making small talk. As they were chatting, something reminded Niou of the Uji villa, and he complained bitterly about how his proposal was being handled. His reproaches were a bit much for Kaoru, who was finding it so difficult to satisfy his own desires. Then it occurred to him that having Niou get his way might also work to his advantage by removing an obstacle to courting the older Princess, and so he spoke more openly than usual about what needed to be done.

Fog settled at a most inopportune moment in the predawn darkness. The sky took on a chill aspect, misty clouds obscured the moon, and the shadows of the trees presented an elegant gloominess in the faint light. Reminiscing about the poignant beauty of the Uji villa, Niou insisted to his friend, “You must take me there again in the very near future.” Observing the obvious reluctance in Kaoru’s expression, he playfully composed the following:

*Are you so petty that you’d rope off
Those wide fields where maidenflowers bloom
In order to keep others away*

Kaoru replied in kind:

*Maidenflowers blooming in morning fields
Covered in deep mists may only be seen
By those whose hearts are truly drawn to them¹⁹*

“These are no ordinary flowers,” he added, as if intentionally trying to get a rise out of his friend—and, indeed, Niou was thoroughly irritated, exclaiming, “Ahh ... how cheeky you are!”²⁰

Niou had been talking like this about the younger Uji Princess for several years. Until last night Kaoru had been concerned about her looks, but now he considered it unlikely that Niou would be disappointed in her charms. He had also worried that her breeding and character might not meet expectations when seeing her up close, but evidently she had no flaws that might give cause for regret. He felt sorry for the older Princess, since it seemed unkind to undercut the plans that she was secretly making, but, regardless, he felt that he simply could not transfer his feelings from one sister to the other. *If I yield the younger Princess to Niou, neither he nor the woman I love will have any cause to resent me.*

Niou, who had no idea what Kaoru was secretly planning in his heart, was

railing on about how his friend was selfishly intending to keep both Uji Princesses for himself. Kaoru found this amusing and couldn't resist tweaking his friend by assuming the role of father to the sisters. "It would be most unfortunate were you to cause her to suffer on account of your incorrigible tendency to pursue frivolous affairs."

"All right, then ... I'll show you," Niou replied earnestly. "I've never been more devoted to anyone."

"That's all fine and well, but neither princess has shown the slightest indication that she's willing to give herself to you. This will be an excruciatingly difficult task to carry out," Kaoru said, then explained in detail just what needed to be done when they traveled together to Uji.

The twenty-eighth day of the month—the final day of the Equinox Festival—happened to be an auspicious one on the calendar. Kaoru, after privately making arrangements, decided that it would be the perfect time to make a secret excursion with Niou to the Uji villa. Niou's heart was so set on the younger Princess that there would have been no end of trouble had his mother, the Akashi Empress, found out about this adventure, for she certainly would have forbidden it. With that risk in mind, Kaoru went about the tricky task of planning the trip, all the while maintaining a nonchalant air, as if nothing out of the ordinary was afoot. The country estate of Genji's son was in the vicinity of Uji, and they had to be cautious and not attract attention when ferrying across the river. The need for secrecy also prompted Kaoru to forego staying over at some grand residence on the way. He chose instead to take Niou quietly to an inconspicuous residence of one of his retainers at a nearby manor, and then to go on to the Uji villa by himself. It was highly unlikely that anyone would notice them, but Kaoru did not want to give away the slightest hint of what he was up to—not even to that homely watchman who occasionally patrolled the grounds of the Uji villa.

As they always did whenever the arrival of the Middle Counselor was announced, the attendants hustled about preparing themselves to receive him. The princesses considered this something of a nuisance, with the older sister thinking, *I've made it abundantly clear that he should turn his fragrant attentions to my sister ... to the leaf that has changed colors. Will he finally come to understand?* Meanwhile, the younger sister's thoughts were of a different order. *I'm not the one he truly desires, so what does his visit today have to do with me?* Still, she felt that she had to be on her guard, since she could no longer just blithely trust her sister—not after what had happened the night the Middle Counselor stole into her bedchambers. Indeed, her distrust was so great, she no longer spoke directly to the older Princess, but communicated through an intermediary. Her women were upset by this break between siblings, and they

fretted over how it all might end.

Kaoru had Niou ride to the Uji villa on horseback. He then led him inside under cover of a dark, moonless night and summoned Bennokimi. “I must have a word with your older mistress,” he said. “The way she insists on keeping her distance from me is deeply humiliating, but I cannot bring myself to just slink away and leave things between us as they are. I want you to show me to her chambers later this evening, just as you did before.” His words struck Bennokimi as sincere, and he seemed to have no hidden motives. Thus, she agreed to go in and speak with the older Princess—after all, from her perspective it hardly mattered which of her mistresses he chose to take for his wife.

When the older Princess was informed of Kaoru’s request, she was at once pleased and relieved. *Just as I thought ... he now prefers my sister.* She had all of the sliding panel doors between the main chamber and the surrounding aisle rooms securely locked—all of them, that is, except for the ones that led to her younger sister’s quarters. After taking that precaution, she received him.

“I must speak briefly with you,” Kaoru began, “but it’s awkward to have to speak as loudly as this, since others may hear what I have to say. Won’t you open the panels just a bit? This is truly maddening.”

“I can hear you perfectly well,” she replied, leaving the doors locked.

But then she reconsidered. *He must feel that he owes it to me to say something, since he has undergone a change of heart and doesn’t want to offend me. What harm could it do at this point to see him? It’s not like I haven’t met him face-to-face before. It would be unkind of me to let the night pass without responding.* With those thoughts in mind, she moved toward him and opened the panels.

At that moment, he reached through, grasped her sleeve, and while pulling on it to keep her from escaping, gave voice to all his complaints. She was mortified and immediately regretted her decision. *How dreadful! Why did I ever agree to meet him?* Still, she kept her wits and used all of her wiles to try to cajole and convince him to go to her sister instead. “You must not make a distinction, but consider us as one and the same.” Kaoru found her demeanor, so sweet and pitiful as she pleaded earnestly with him, deeply affecting.

Niou, meanwhile, was doing just as he had been instructed. He drew near the door that Kaoru had used that earlier night, and then signaled Bennokimi by opening his fan. She showed him the way in, and as he entered he found it delightfully charming that she should be guiding him along a familiar path that another had obviously taken before him.

The older Princess, of course, knew nothing about Niou’s presence, and so she continued trying to persuade Kaoru to go to her sister. Kaoru was amused but, at

the same time, he felt sorry for her. He also recognized that if he said nothing about what was going on now, she would later come to resent his deception, and he would have no way to absolve himself of blame. He thus concluded that it was best to apprise her of the situation. “Prince Niou followed me tonight, and I was unable to turn him away. Evidently, he was able to enter furtively, without making a sound. That scheming old lady-in-waiting of yours, Bennokimi, has no doubt been speaking with him. Now that I’ve been rejected by both you and your sister, I’m destined to become a laughingstock at court.”

The Princess was blindsided by this appalling turn of events, for it had never crossed her mind that something like this might occur. “I had no idea,” she said, “just how far you were willing to go to carry out such an outrageous scheme. My lack of caution makes it obvious how feckless and naive I truly am, and you must take me for an utter fool.” She was at a loss for words to describe her feelings at that moment.

“Nothing I say would make any difference now,” Kaoru replied. “Even if I offer repeated explanations and apologies, they would not be enough. Go ahead ... pinch and scratch me if you wish. Apparently, you were holding out hopes for a man of more distinguished lineage than I, but, as I know all too well, karmic destiny does not always work out exactly as our hearts might wish. That’s why I sympathize with you now that Prince Niou has bestowed his affections on your sister ... for I too am acquainted with the hopelessness that comes with being rejected and cast adrift with no haven. What is to be will be, and you should resign yourself to your fate. No matter how securely you may fasten these panels, no one believes our relationship is pure and chaste. Do you really imagine that the man who asked me to bring him to your sister is, at this moment, bothered by a conscience as full and troubled as ours?”

She was upset beyond words. Nonetheless, as it appeared that he might force the sliding panels open any moment, she maintained her composure, determined to calm his passions. “This ‘karmic destiny’ you speak of ... it’s not something tangible, not something I can see with my own eyes. I can’t follow what you mean by such words, no matter how much I try. I feel as though a mist arising from tears of uncertainty²¹ obscures and obstructs my path ahead. Trying to fathom your intentions toward me is unpleasant, like a bad dream. If future generations should ever speak of my sister and me, no doubt they will cite our story as an example of the foolishness of those easily deceived women who appear so often in ancient tales. Does Prince Niou possess the same degree of judgment and sincerity as someone who’s capable of scheming the way you have? You’ve caused enough anguish and grief ... don’t confound me further. I don’t expect to live much longer, but if I do, I shall speak to you when I’m

feeling somewhat calmer. For now I must retire, since I'm really quite ill ... it feels as though darkness has swept over me. Let go of my sleeves."

The reasonableness with which she pleaded with him despite being extremely upset made Kaoru feel at once ashamed of himself and protective. "I have gone to extraordinary lengths to respect and obey your wishes, my beloved ... so much so that I've become obsessed, fixated on you. It seems that you find me inexpressibly despicable and unpleasant, and so there's nothing I can say to you. More and more, I've come to feel that I no longer want to live in this world." He paused for a moment, then continued. "Very well, then, since you are ill I shall let go ... but please let me speak with you through your blinds. Do not completely abandon me."

When he released her sleeves, the Princess withdrew toward the interior of the room, but not all the way. Kaoru was moved by her gesture and said, "I shall spend the night here taking consolation from the fact that you have remained this near to me. It is more than I dared dream of, and so I swear I shall do nothing untoward." The roar of the rapids kept him awake, and a storm that raged in the middle of the night made him feel like a pheasant sleeping apart from his mate.²² In that state of mind, he spent the night sleepless till dawn.

As always, the first indication of dawn breaking was the sound of the bell from the temple up the mountain. Kaoru was jealously irritated that Niou was still sleeping and showed no sign of getting up any time soon. He cleared his throat to alert the Prince that it was time to go. Given all that he had done to bring Niou here, Kaoru's attitude was odd, to say the least. He sent a poem in to his beloved:

*Must I who acted as guide be the one
Departing confused, with reluctant heart
Losing his way in the faint light of dawn²³*

"Has there ever been a man as foolish as I?" he added.

The Princess replied in a hushed voice:

*If you wander lost on a path that none but you
Has chosen to follow, think of the heart of one
Who dwells in the darkness cast by her many cares*

"What do you mean?" Kaoru said, frustrated beyond endurance. "This extreme aloofness is absurd ... it's really too much to take!"

As he was venting his resentments, the faint light of dawn gradually

brightened, and the sound of Niou finally emerging, going back the way he had come the night before, could be heard. While he was moving as softly and quietly as he could, his perfumed robes, which he had carefully scented in anticipation of his tryst with the younger Princess, wafted elegantly through the villa. The older attendants, finding the fragrance most peculiar, had a hard time figuring out what, exactly, had happened, but they took some consolation in assuming that, at the very least, Prince Niou's intention was not malicious.

The two men hurried back to the capital while it was still dark. The road back seemed to stretch on forever, and Niou realized to his great dismay that it would be no easy task making the trip to and from the Uji villa. Apparently, he was suffering at the thought of what the poet called "the separation of even a single night."²⁴ They arrived in the early hours of the morning before people were up and bustling, then had their carriages backed up directly to a covered passageway where they could alight and slip in unnoticed. The two of them smiled at one another at having managed to complete their escapade undetected by using the unusual subterfuge of riding in feminine-looking carriages.

"It seems to me that you have performed your duties with admirable zeal," Kaoru said. He avoided any mention, however, of the frustrating, woeful foolishness of the messenger.

Niou was impatient to send off his letter right away. In contrast to his ebullience, the sisters at Uji were in a state of shock and confusion, uncertain as to whether or not the events of the previous night had really happened. The younger Princess was so furious and estranged that she refused to even look at her sister. *So, this is what she had in mind all along ... and she never gave the slightest indication of what she was up to!*

The older Princess, unable to clearly prove that she was innocent and knew nothing of the plot, was also troubled at heart, for she felt that her sister's reaction was completely justified.

The attendants whispered among themselves: "Just what, exactly, took place last night?" They observed the demeanor of their mistresses, searching for answers. The older Princess, who could normally be relied on to handle things, was sitting stunned, with a vacant look on her face. They were unable to glean anything and were left thinking what a strange situation it was.

The Princess opened the letter from Prince Niou and showed it to her younger sister, who refused to get up and look at it. "She's certainly taking her time to reply," the messenger complained. The letter included a poem from Niou:

*How could you possibly think them common
These tender feelings of one who has crossed*

Fields of bamboo grass o'er paths drenched in dew

The brushstrokes and shadings of the ink were the work of a hand accustomed to writing such letters, and normally the older Princess would have admired the polished elegance of the calligraphy. Now, however, the letter brought nothing but anxiety over what the future held in store. As it was no longer her place to intercede and act as proxy for the response, she insisted that her sister compose a proper reply. She rewarded the messenger with a set of long robes in the aster style, light purple lined with blue-green, and a pair of magnificent double-lined trousers. The messenger seemed reluctant to accept these remarkable gifts, and rather than keeping them draped over his shoulders, he had them wrapped up and handed to a member of his escort to take back to the capital. Niou had intentionally avoided choosing anyone of exceptional status to be his messenger, but had turned instead to the page he always relied upon in hopes of keeping the affair as inconspicuous as possible. Thus, he was put out when he saw the dazzling gifts, and assumed that they must have been the handiwork of that meddlesome old lady-in-waiting whom he had met the night before.

Niou asked Kaoru to serve as his guide once more that evening, but Kaoru declined and stayed in the capital, saying, “I must be in service to His Retired Majesty Reizei, and so I cannot go.” Niou found his attitude maddening. *It's always the same with him: treating the world with cold disdain.*

The older Princess had by this time timidly resigned herself to the inevitable. *What can we do about it now? This isn't what I wanted for my sister, but we can't simply dismiss Prince Niou as someone of no consequence.* The rustic villa at Uji did not possess the kinds of furnishings and accessories needed to properly fit out a bridal chamber, but while waiting for his Second Night visit, she had her sister's quarters arranged as charmingly as could be expected for such a place. It struck her as strange that Niou's willingness to hasten back quickly over distant roads should make her feel happy.

The younger Princess was dazed and not feeling at all herself. She passively let her attendants dress her for the night in robes of dark crimson hue. Her sleeves were damp with her tears, and when her older sister observed that, she too broke down. She spoke as she wept, saying, “I feel that I don't have much longer to live, and so all of my thoughts are focused anxiously on you from morning to night. Our women keep assuring me that this is all for the best, going on and on until I can't bear to listen any more ... of course, they have the experience that comes with living through the years, so perhaps they know something of the world. In any case, I'm not strong-willed enough to manage things on my own—at least not as our father wished—and I have worried

constantly about the prospect that you might remain unmarried, alone with no one to support you. Even so, I never imagined that such an outrageous turn of events as this was possible, that you would be made to suffer such shame and distress. Maybe this is the working of that karmic destiny people always seem to be going on about ... but, even if it is, it hurts me to know you think I've been complicit in all this. When you are feeling more calm and composed, I want to explain everything so you will come to understand that I knew nothing about what was being plotted. Do not detest me, for it's a sin to bear a grudge." She stroked and combed her sister's hair while pleading her innocence, but she received not a word in response.

The younger sister was in anguish as she contemplated all that had happened. *What my sister says about her intentions suggests that she is truly concerned about my future and does not want any ill to befall me ... and yet, how terrible it will be when I suffer the ignominy and disgrace of being ridiculed as a result of my marriage to Prince Niou. It will only bring greater anguish and trouble to my sister.*

On the First Night, Niou found the innocent shock and distraught appearance of the younger Princess extremely alluring, but this night she was somewhat more softly yielding, as one would expect of a bride, and he felt even more strongly captivated by her. It broke his heart to think how difficult it was going to be to see her, since he would have to travel to and from this distant place along mountain roads. He made what appeared to be deeply felt promises of devotion and support, but she had no idea what to make of such vows—should she be moved? Delighted? Even a Princess who has been raised with the strictest care and vigilance invariably lives in close proximity to others and has at least some awareness of their daily comings and goings. She is able to observe people—even if it's just her parents or older brothers—and become familiar with the ways in which they live and behave; as a result, she does not grow up to be excessively fearful or reserved. In contrast, while the younger Uji Princess had not been raised in an overly strict or sheltered manner, she had grown up her entire life in a remote mountain villa far away from others and was accustomed to being alone. It was for that reason that Prince Niou's amorous attentions, which had been completely unexpected, made her feel so insecure and embarrassed. *I'm not at all like the women at court ... I'm an eccentric provincial.* Her diffidence left her tongue-tied, unable to give Niou a response to even the most trivial query. Still, it must be acknowledged that when it came to graceful refinement and clever wit, she was far superior to her older sister.

"We must serve rice cakes for the Third Night." When the attendants said this to the older Princess, she realized for the first time that preparing rice cakes was

customary for nuptial rites. She was to have them made in her presence, though she was uncertain how to proceed. She may have been a mature woman, but she had never dealt with such matters before and was loath to expose her inexperience in front of the older attendants. Her cheeks were flushed the whole time as she went about her tasks, and her embarrassment was most charming to behold. Being the older sister, she exhibited a quiet, dignified mien while at the same time showing great affection and care for her younger sibling.

A letter from Kaoru arrived. It was written in a meticulous hand on stiff, formal Michinokuni paper:

I considered calling on you last night, but since my devoted service has been so callously disregarded, my resentment is still too strong. I know that there are many tasks that need to be performed on this special day, but the humiliation I suffered the other night during my ‘guard duty’ for you has so agitated my heart that I am increasingly ill at ease; and since I’m not well and feel dull and depressed, I’m reluctant to go to you.

He had included celebratory gifts with the letter—bolts of cloth in various colors and patterns, which were rolled and stored in several wooden chests. A note on one of the chests read: “To be distributed to the attendants.” From the looks of it, this must have been all that was available to him from his mother, the Third Princess, for he had not managed to pull together all that many items—a few rolls of plain silk and figured fabrics hidden beneath two magnificent sets of women’s robes, which were lying on top for the princesses. A poem was attached to the sleeve of one of the singlets. It was a rather old-fashioned presentation, and the verse itself was threatening:

*Though I cannot claim that we have shared a bed
Nor that these nighttime robes have grown soft from wear
How easy it would be to spread such rumors*

To the Princess’s shame it seemed that she and her younger sister were being exposed more and more, that their air of modest allure was being taken away. As she struggled to come up with a reply, Kaoru’s messenger stole away,²⁵ and she had no choice then but to detain one of his lowly servants and use him as the courier for her reply:

*I would meet you with nothing to keep us apart
Our hearts as one, but I do not wish to share sleeves
That have grown soft from wear, nor have you say we did*

It was a mediocre effort to be sure, since she was flustered and her thoughts in chaos. All the same, she had expressed honestly what was on her mind, and Kaoru, who had been waiting in nervous anticipation, was moved to compassion.

Late on the afternoon of the Third Night, Niou was at the palace. He was inwardly agitated, because he was having trouble finding an excuse to withdraw. His mother, the Akashi Empress, was scolding him for preferring to reside at the Rokujō estate. “Just look at you ... still single and gaining a reputation as a man fond of amorous pursuits. This is absolutely deplorable. You simply cannot go around doing only as you please. I assure you, His Majesty has expressed his concern as well.”

Stung by this criticism, Niou withdrew to his private quarters for the night. After dispatching a letter to Uji, he was lost in pensive reflections and lingering regrets when Kaoru arrived. Niou was happier than usual to see his friend, for here, he thought, was an ally, someone whom he could count on for sympathy.

“What should I do? It will soon be dark, and I’m at a total loss ... I can’t remain here!” He did seem genuinely upset, but Kaoru wanted to test the sincerity of Niou’s intentions all the same.

“You let too many days go by without coming to the palace. If you hurry off this evening without attending to your court duties, Her Majesty will be all the more annoyed with you, will she not? I heard about her sermon from some ladies who were in the waiting room off the Seiryōden, and I blanched at the realization that your parents may unjustly blame me for having performed that troublesome service for you.”

“I can’t stand to hear her preach and scold,” Niou replied. “This has to be the fault of some of those annoying tattletales among her women. Tell me *what*, exactly, have I done to merit the censure of the whole court? I’m burdened by my high position, which constrains me.” There were times when he genuinely detested his status.

Kaoru felt sorry for his friend.

“One way or another, this is going to cause a stir. I’ll take the blame for you this evening, even though it may ruin my reputation at court. I suggest that you cross the Kohata Hills by horse.²⁶ It would be less conspicuous than a carriage ... though now there’s probably no way to prevent gossip from spreading even more than it has already.”

The sun had gone down by this time, and it was growing dark. Niou could no longer bear waiting and, following his friend’s advice, set off on horseback.

“I really can’t go with you, but I’ll cover for you here,” Kaoru said, staying

behind to be in attendance at the palace.

When he went to the Akashi Empress's quarters, she remarked, "I understand that Niou has stolen off again. It's outrageous ... and pathetic-looking as well. What must people at the court be thinking? And when His Majesty hears what happened, he'll blame me, saying that my admonitions don't do a bit of good ... really, it's intolerable!"

Although she had borne His Majesty many children who had all grown to estimable adulthood, she struck Kaoru—at least from what he could gauge of her looks and demeanor through the blinds—as a woman who seemed to grow more youthful and charming over time. *Her oldest daughter, the First Princess, is apparently just as beautiful. Will I ever have an opportunity to be near enough to hear her voice, as I'm hearing her mother's voice now?* Kaoru thought wistfully. *Is it this sort of relationship—the kind where a man can enter and leave a lady's quarters, be close to her yet unable to realize his desires—that drives gentlemen of amorous disposition to become preoccupied with wicked ideas? Is there anyone else in this world whose heart is as oddly detached as my own? Still, even I find it hard to stop thinking about a woman once she succeeds in arousing my passion.*

Without exception, all of the ladies-in-waiting who served Her Majesty had flawless features and personalities, and among the various lovely, charming women in that group were several who were exceptionally refined and attractive. Nevertheless, Kaoru was determined to never let his emotions run wild, and so he always behaved with the utmost seriousness and propriety around them, even those who had gone out of their way to try to tempt him. The Akashi Empress did all she could to maintain a general atmosphere of modesty and quiet dignity around her, and her entourage maintained a pretense of tranquil grace and composure. Nonetheless, every woman in this world is unique in her own way, and there were some who allowed their amorous feelings for him to slip out. He was sometimes delighted, sometimes touched by this sort of behavior, but in the end he took it as nothing more than proof of the capricious nature of the world.

At Uji, the older Princess's heart was breaking, for despite Kaoru's letter reminding her of all the important tasks that had to be performed, the night was growing late and Prince Niou had not arrived. When a letter from Niou came instead, she thought, *So that's how it is ... I should have known.*

Then, as midnight neared, his familiar, radiant fragrance, so refined and noble, wafted in, overcoming the violent gales blowing down the mountain. How could she think ill of him? The bride herself was a little more yielding, having come to realize what her role as a bride required. Niou found her even more ravishingly beautiful than the previous night—her carefully groomed and attired appearance

was absolutely peerless. The more closely and intimately he observed her, starting with her flawless features, the more she seemed perfect even to the eyes of a man of amorous inclinations who had seen many a noble woman at the court. He was so clearly enamored of her that the homely faces of the old attendants broke into smiles. "What a shame it would have been," they remarked to one another, "had such a lovely young lady gone to some man of mediocre status. Her destiny is being realized just as we had hoped." At the same time, they muttered disapprovingly about the stubborn aloofness of their other mistress.

The older Princess observed with merciless gaze the figures of her aging attendants. Although they were well past their prime, here they were, wearing the bright, showy robes of their youth and making themselves up in a manner completely inappropriate for women their age.

I too will soon pass my prime, she reflected. When I look in the mirror, I see myself growing increasingly gaunt and wasted. Are none of these women aware of how bad they really look? They tend only to the locks that frame their foreheads or carefully apply a heavy coat of colorful makeup to their faces, yet they seem oblivious to how unsightly they look from behind. I'm not as bad as they are, but, then again, perhaps I'm deluding myself in thinking my eyes and nose are still passably attractive. Feeling uneasy about her own future, she lay down and, in a pensive mood, gazed outside. As time goes by, it will only get more humiliating to show myself to a man as distinguished as the Middle Counselor ... my decline will only accelerate over the next year or two. Looks are fleeting, uncertain. She pulled her sleeves back and stared at her thin, fragile hands and arms, all the while contemplating the ephemeral nature of this world.

Niou was brooding about how difficult it was for him to act freely or take his leave from the palace, and his heart was full at the realization that he would not be able to come and go to Uji as he wished. He told the younger Princess about his mother's reproachful words.

"While you will be in my heart constantly, there may be periods when I will not be able to come to you, but please do not worry or wonder what is happening. Would I have come here like this tonight if my devotion to you was the slightest bit common? It hurt me to imagine that you might be troubled, that you might doubt the sincerity of my devotion, and so I braved these winds and risked my life on these dangerous roads. I am not normally able to wander about like this. I shall have to find an appropriate residence and move you closer to me."

He spoke with deep conviction, but the moment he informed her that there would be times when he could not come, the younger Princess recalled the

gossip that she'd heard and fretted that his words might be proof of his fickle nature. She sighed, lamenting the various difficulties this unfortunate situation posed for her.

The dawn sky was growing bright when Niou pushed open the hinged doors leading off the aisle room and invited his bride to step outside and view it with him. The mist covering the landscape added to the unique beauty of the place. Being a man of refined sensibility, he was delighted by the whitecaps rising from the wake of fragile, brushwood-laden boats wending their usual course to and fro in the dim light²⁷ and by the elegant wonder of an abode he saw so rarely. The sun's rays were becoming visible over the ridge of the mountains, and the perfect features of the younger sister were now clearly visible. *Not even the most sheltered, cherished of princesses could be as beautiful as she*, he thought. *Of course, the First Princess is extraordinarily lovely ... but she's my sister, so naturally I'm biased.* A feeling of discontent suddenly came over him. *How I long to stay with her in casual intimacy, taking in the depths of her lambent beauty!* Amidst the inhospitable roar of the rapids, he looked over the ancient bridge spanning the Uji River;²⁸ when the mists cleared, they revealed a scene of banks every bit as wild and rough as the sound of the waves. "How have you been able to live in such a place as this all these years?" he asked, tears welling up in his eyes. She was terribly embarrassed.

His youthful masculine figure appeared exceptionally handsome as he swore to her that his love would last not only for this world, but for all worlds to come. While reflecting on what a sudden and unexpected turn her life had taken, she realized that she somehow felt more at ease with Prince Niou than with the man with whom she was more familiar, the Middle Counselor, whose stiffly proper demeanor made her feel humble in his presence. *Of course, he prefers my sister, she thought, and so he's always been extremely quiet and reserved around me, which has made our interactions clumsy and uncomfortable. All this time, I imagined Prince Niou even further above my station in life than the Middle Counselor, and I felt so awed by his status that I couldn't bring myself to write even a single line in reply to his letters. And now look at me ... I'm dismayed at the prospect of not being able to see him for a while.* She was unpleasantly startled by how strangely capricious her own heart could be.

The men of his escort repeatedly coughed to alert him that he must leave. Indeed, he seemed quite restless, eager to get back to the capital before it was light so as to avoid the embarrassment of being discovered. He told her over and over that even though they might have to spend nights apart, she should never think that he wanted it that way.

*My absence means not that our bond will be broken ...
How sad that the divine princess at Uji Bridge
May soak the sleeves of lonely robes spread out at night*²⁹

He seemed reluctant to leave, turning back time and again to linger with her a while longer.

She replied:

*I must trust in your vow to keep our bond
While waiting for visits as far between
As the Uji Bridge is long and distant*

She did not put her true feelings into words, but her sorrowful countenance moved him to pity beyond limits.

The sight of Niou's remarkable figure departing in the morning light made a lasting impression on her youthful heart as she gazed after him, and the lingering fragrance of his perfume called forth secret, sad longings in a heart sensitive enough to appreciate elegance and taste. Everything was clearly visible in the early morning light, and the attendants peeked out to catch a glimpse of him.

"The Middle Counselor is certainly kind," one of them remarked, "but there is also something unapproachable about him that makes you feel small in his presence."

"The Prince, on the other hand, seems truly special ... though I suppose we're inclined to prefer him because he's a man of higher status."

All along the road back, Niou kept recalling the Princess's glum expression, which was so endearing he wanted to return to her. His longings were making him look noticeably unmanly, and try as he might to avoid gossip by returning furtively, it would not be easy for him to escape prying eyes. He sent off letters every day, leading the older Princess to grant that perhaps he was sincere after all. But then, as the number of days without a visit piled up, she came to lament the situation. *This is precisely why I've sought to avoid the grief that comes with such attachments ... and yet now I'm more miserable for her than if I were involved with him myself.* She was careful, however, to maintain her composure and give no indication of her misgivings, since that would only serve to further depress her younger sister. She was now also even more deeply resolved to never allow a fickle man to bring this sort of sorrow into her own life.

Kaoru sympathized with the Uji Princesses, knowing how fretful they must be waiting for a visit from Niou. He was all too aware of the responsibility that he bore for the situation, and while pressuring his friend to do the right thing, he

was constantly observing Niou's demeanor. As the Prince appeared to be despondent, suffering genuine pangs of longing for his bride, Kaoru was at least reassured on that score.

It was now around the tenth day of the ninth month, and Niou's thoughts were drawn to the austere beauty of the moors and hills in late autumn. One evening at dusk, the skies were looking ominous as thick banks of dark cloud gathered and a cold rain threatened. Niou was staring out restlessly at the scene, his heart increasingly adrift, uncertain what to do.³⁰ Kaoru, guessing that his friend might be feeling troubled, came by and strongly encouraged him to make the trip to Uji, adding, "I wonder how they're getting along at that old mountain villa in Furu?"³¹ Thrilled at the prospect, Niou asked Kaoru to accompany him, and so they set off together in the same carriage, just as they had previously.

The sere, desolate landscapes that they passed made Niou increasingly aware that his bride must feel even more despondent than he. All the way to Uji, he could speak of nothing else but how sorry he was that she should be suffering. A chill drizzle was falling in the bleak atmosphere of the twilight hour, and the late autumn vistas presented a fearful, sublime aspect. The lambent scents of Niou and Kaoru possessed an incomparable, otherworldly elegance as they diffused into the damp air around them. How could the hearts of the mountain peasants not have been amazed and confounded when these two noblemen rode by?

The attendants at Uji had been grumbling for days on end. When Prince Niou arrived, however, their complaints ceased and were replaced with smiles as they set about preparing a room for him. Several of the attendants' daughters or nieces who had left to serve in distinguished households in the capital had since been called back into attendance. These shallow young women, who had for years looked down on the Uji villa, were astounded to find such remarkable men calling here. The older Princess was overjoyed at the timing of the visit, though she couldn't help feeling awkward that the Prince was accompanied by that other gentleman who had proven so meddlesome and was sure to trouble her with his unwanted suit. Despite her annoyance, however, she couldn't help comparing Kaoru to Niou; when she did, she had to acknowledge his rare and admirable virtues—the quiet dignity, the profound kindness and consideration. In truth, the Prince was nothing like that at all.

Niou was shown in and received with extraordinary attentiveness and all of the graceful charms that a provincial villa like this could offer. Kaoru, on the other hand, was sent off to a guest room in a distant corner of the residence. He was usually comfortable being treated as a member of the family, but on this night he was genuinely angry at this shockingly callous reception. The older Princess was sensitive to his feelings and was sorry that he had been given cause

for resentment. She spoke with him through her blinds.

"I test myself, but I can no longer bear this foolish game,"³² he complained. "Is this the best I can ever expect—to be treated like a complete stranger?"

The Princess, who had gradually come to understand his longings, had to admit that his outrage was justified. At the same time, she remained terribly concerned about her sister's precarious situation and was now more convinced than ever that relationships between husbands and wives gave rise to deplorable attachments and brought nothing but woe. *If I can somehow manage, I desperately want to avoid any intimacy with a man. Even if I were to give myself to someone as sensitive as the Middle Counselor, a man whose heart is in sympathy with my own, something is bound to happen between us that will make me miserable. No ... I want to live out my life so that neither he nor I give the other cause for unhappiness, so that our hearts never diverge.* So thinking, she deepened her resolve to resist his proposal.

Kaoru asked her about Niou's conduct recently. When she seemed reluctant to answer him directly, implying that the Prince had not appeared at Uji for a long time, he felt bad and tried to ease her worries, assuring her that he was keeping vigilant watch on the Prince's behavior and that Niou seemed truly devoted to his new wife.

She spoke more openly and intimately with him than usual. "Once the newlyweds get through this troublesome time and all is calm and peaceful once more, we shall talk at our leisure."

Well ... she's not treating me with that air of aloofness I detest so much, but she still keeps those sliding panels stoutly latched against me. If I were to break them down by force, she would no doubt be mortified and consider me detestable. No, I must be patient. After all, she does seem to be thinking of our future together once her sister's situation is more secure, and it's not very likely that she would yield easily to the blandishments of some other man. So thinking, Kaoru, who was by nature calm and benevolent, controlled the impulses of his heart.

"It's so awkward for me to have to talk with you through these blinds ... it's frustrating," he said, pressing her further. "Couldn't we speak face-to-face as we did that night?"

"I'm ashamed to show you my face,"³³ she replied. "I'm more gaunt and wasted than usual, and it would be devastating were you to turn away from me in disgust. Though I wonder ... why should I feel that way?"

He caught what he took to be soft laughter, which struck him as both mysterious and warmly appealing. "What would become of me, I wonder, if a woman like you were ever to yield to me?" He sighed repeatedly, but, as they

always did, the two spent the night like pheasants roosting apart on separate peaks.

It never occurred to Niou that Kaoru might have spent the night sleeping alone, and so the next morning he remarked, “I envy the Middle Counselor. He can sleep in at his ease, as if he were master of the household.” The younger Princess thought it a queer thing for him to say, but he was in fact quite distressed. He had taken extreme measures just to come here, and it was frustrating to have to return so soon. She of course had no idea what he was really thinking, and so she anguished over her prospects, worried about becoming an object of ridicule if he abandoned her. She appeared to be faced with a most difficult dilemma, and Niou was troubled. There was no place in the capital where he could move the Princess and keep her in seclusion. His uncle, the Minister,³⁴ occupied one of the halls at the Rokujō estate, and, to make matters worse, he hoped to give Niou his daughter, Roku no kimi—a woman whom the Prince had absolutely no interest in at all. If Niou were to bring his Uji Princess to the Rokujō estate, the Minister could hardly be expected to greet her appearance with anything other than anger and annoyance. He had already castigated Niou for his amorous tendencies—a rebuke the Prince found unforgivable—and he had made his displeasure known even to Their Majesties.

Consequently, Niou had many reasons to be cautious about suddenly installing as his wife a woman about whom people at the court knew nothing. Were she of less distinguished lineage or their relationship nothing more than a passing affair, he could simply bring her to his residence as a lady-in-waiting and carry on their relationship at his ease. But he couldn’t do that because he didn’t consider her ordinary in any sense. Moreover, if all went according to his parents’ plans, he would be named heir apparent after his older brother, the Crown Prince, ascended to the throne; when that happened, he would then be able to raise his Uji Princess to the highest rank. At the moment, however, he was caught in a painful bind, for despite his desire to bestow glory and splendor on her, he had no immediate solution to their present predicament.

While all this was taking place, Kaoru was planning to make appropriate arrangements to move the older Princess to his mother’s Sanjō residence when the reconstruction of the villa was complete. From his perspective, Niou’s complaint was reasonable, for it was easier for a commoner to conduct clandestine affairs. Indeed, he pitied his royal friend, who had to sneak around worrying about being exposed, and found it hard to watch as the Prince and his bride suffered the pains of longing and uncertainty. *Perhaps I should discreetly inform Her Majesty that Niou has been secretly visiting Uji and that the younger Princess there is now his wife. I know that disclosing this will cause a*

tremendous uproar for a while—and I should be sorry for that—but the Princess will surely escape blame, no matter what. It just feels much too cruel to let things stand as they are. Why, they can't even spend an entire night together! If only I could do something significant to help bring her happiness ... He decided that from now on he would not go out of his way to keep the relationship secret.

With the arrival of winter came the seasonal change of wardrobes and furnishings. Kaoru knew that he was the only person whom the Uji sisters could count on to see that this task would be carried out properly, and so he sent them panels for standing curtains, drapes to hang between the main chamber and the aisle rooms, and numerous other items that he had had made for the renovated Sanjō villa in preparation for eventually moving the older Princess there. He explained what he was doing to his mother in the strictest confidence, telling her, “It’s only for the time being, since a need for these items has arisen elsewhere.” He also went to the additional trouble of instructing his nurse and some of his ladies-in-waiting to make robes for the attendants at Uji.

At around the first day of the tenth month, Kaoru encouraged Niou to pay a visit to Uji by remarking how delightful the fishing weir was at this time of year and suggesting that the Prince should go on an excursion to view the autumn foliage. Niou preferred to make the trip as discreetly as possible and wanted to limit his escort to courtiers with whom he was on close terms and guards with whom he was familiar. Nonetheless, he occupied such a magnificent and powerful position that word of the excursion inevitably leaked, and the Minister’s favored son, the Middle Captain who also served as Consultant, joined the party. Apart from this Middle Captain, Kaoru was the only other senior official in attendance. Most of the party was made up of courtiers who were commoners.

Kaoru sent a long, detailed message to Uji: “Prince Niou will of course want to break up his journey and rest at Uji. You must have proper arrangements made for his visit. The men who accompanied him to view the cherry blossoms during the spring of last year will use this excursion to catch a glimpse of you, making the excuse that they have to wait for the autumn rains to clear.” Blinds were changed, rooms swept and cleaned, a few of the fallen leaves were cleared away from the rocks in the garden and grasses choking the stream were weeded out. Kaoru provided pleasing fruits and delicacies and sufficient staff to prepare and serve them. The older Princess was grateful for his assistance, but she was less pleased that he was being presumptuous by going to so much effort. Still, she readied herself for the visit, resigned to the thought that, whatever happened, this too must be the workings of karma.

The delightful sounds of music could be heard from the boats being punted up

and down the river. The younger women came out onto the veranda facing the river, where they could catch indistinct glimpses of the party through the mist. They were unable to spot Prince Niou himself, but they could make out the brocadelike thatch of autumn leaves that decorated the roof of the boat and were surprised by the extravagant, lively sound of musical instruments in concert that came wafting toward them on the wind. Upon observing how lavishly the courtiers accompanying Prince Niou fawned over him, even on a private excursion such as this, the princesses were impressed by his magnificent figure and felt that it would be worth waiting for his radiant figure, so like the star of the Celestial Oxherd,³⁵ even if it meant seeing him only once a year.

Anticipating that the occasion would call for verses in Chinese, learned scholars had been brought along as well. In the twilight hour, Niou's boat drew near the bank, and as music played, the scholars composed their poems. They adorned their caps with leaves of both dark and light hues. As the Chinese-style court song "Immortal of the Sea"³⁶ played on, each man seemed to be enjoying himself, with hearts light and carefree. Niou's thoughts, however, were elsewhere, focused on Lake Ōmi, whose name promises a meeting, but whose waters deny it.³⁷ He was despondent as he imagined how angry and hurt his Princess must be as she waited just across the river. The men in the party, having received from the scholars the seasonal topics for their poems, murmured their compositions in hushed voices.

Kaoru had been thinking that Niou would be able to visit the Uji villa once the revelry had subsided a little. However, just as he was about to urge the Prince to slip away, a Commander of the Gate Guard, the older brother of the Middle Captain who had joined the party from the beginning, suddenly arrived with an imposing escort splendidly arrayed. He had come to deliver a message from the Akashi Empress. Niou had done his best to keep this excursion quiet, but naturally word of it got about. Even though the event would set a precedent for future generations, when the Prince's mother heard that he had suddenly set off with a small retinue inappropriate for a man of his status, she was shocked and ordered the Commander to gather a large number of men, including several senior officials, to go out and escort her son. This was an unwelcome development; Niou and Kaoru were bitterly disappointed and lost all interest in the evening's entertainment. The men, unaware of the turmoil raging in the hearts of their lords, continued their drunken revelry until dawn.

Niou hoped to spend the day at Uji with things just as they were, but then another large party led by the Master of the Empress's Household and other high-ranking officials arrived. Flustered and frustrated, Niou did not want to return to the capital. He sent a letter over to the Uji villa. His message, which

eschewed all elegant flourishes, was extremely earnest and straightforward, and he set down in detail all of the things that were in his heart and mind. However, the younger Princess did not reply; she worried that with so many people around, a message from her might cause a scene. She had grown increasingly aware of her position. *It's no use ... how could someone as insignificant as I ever hope to mingle in the company of a man as resplendent as Prince Niou?*

During the days and months that they remained apart, she had been able to find comfort by telling herself that he had good reason for not visiting, since the capital was so far away. But now here he was, close by, announcing his presence with noisy revelry and fanfare only to cruelly pass by. Her heart was a welter of anger and bitter regret.

With no response from his Princess, Niou felt even more dejected and his despair was beyond endurance. Even the sweetfish seemed somehow drawn to the Prince, for they sported in large numbers at the weir, making for an easy catch. The lower-ranking attendants, among others, found the fish exceptionally appealing, delighting in the way they were wrapped in leaves of varied autumnal hues to be served. Indeed, everyone had found something on the excursion to enjoy and brighten his mood—everyone, that is, except for Niou, who was now heartbroken, gazing vacantly up at the sky. The tops of the trees in the garden of the late Hachinomiya's villa had a special elegance about them, and the color of the ivy vines creeping up the evergreen trees seemed deeply refined and appealing.

Kaoru was also surveying the scene. *Even when viewed from a distance, the place has a sublime, terribly lonely feel*, he thought. *I promised the younger Princess that Niou would come to visit and asked her to be ready ... this will only bring her further misery.*

The men who had accompanied Niou here during the spring of the previous year were reminiscing about the beauty of the cherry blossoms, and they spoke about the loneliness of the two Uji Princesses, who passed their days lost in pensive thought, mourning for their father. Some of the men had surely heard vague reports about Prince Niou's clandestine visits to the Uji villa. Other men, however, knew nothing about what was going on, though naturally they had heard various rumors about two sisters living in seclusion in these mountains and gossiped about them, blithely unaware of their lord's relationship with the younger Princess.

“I hear that they’re really lovely.”

“They’re also skilled on the thirteen-string koto. Evidently their father made them practice constantly.”

The Middle Captain was moved to compose the following:

*When did we glimpse the cherry blossoms in full bloom ...
With the coming of autumn, loneliness settles
Over those who linger beneath that barren tree*

Kaoru felt that he should reply, being close to the Uji household:

*Even a cherry tree teaches the truth
Its bright blossoms and autumn leaves both fall
To show the fleeting nature of the world*

The Commander added this:

*Though reluctant to leave behind the shade
Of crimson leaves at this mountain villa
From where else would the autumn have set off*

The Master of the Empress's Household was an old man, and he burst into tears. Perhaps he was remembering Hachinomiya in his youth, for he composed the following:

*On the stone fence of the mountain villa
Where a man I once knew lived, kudzu vines
Cling and climb, unaware that he is gone³⁸*

Niou, who was on the verge of tears, replied to this:

*Autumn's end intensifies the loneliness
Of those beneath that barren tree ... O pine-winds
Do not sweep cruelly down those mountain peaks*

Those who knew a little of the situation observed the Prince with sympathetic eyes. "He's truly devoted to her," they whispered. "What a shame he can't take advantage of this opportunity to go see her today." Still, it was impossible to visit—his escort was so imposing that not only would it completely expose their secret, but also the princesses would not be able to receive them properly.

The most interesting passages of the poems in Chinese were recited, and there were many poems in Japanese written for the season as well. Since they were composed amidst such drunken revelry and tearful sentimentality, one could hardly expect any of them to be worthwhile. To set down even a small number here would be unseemly.

Across the river at the Uji villa, the princesses were disturbed by indications that Prince Niou's party was withdrawing, for they could hear the shouts of the outrunners fading into the distance. The attendants who had been preparing themselves in anticipation of his visit were also disappointed. The older Princess was even more devastated than her women.

So the rumors about him are true, she concluded. His heart is as inconstant as the dye of the dewflower.³⁹ From what little I've heard, men are creatures much given to plausible-sounding lies. These common women around me are always going on about things that they heard or experienced in the past, talking about how a man will beguile a woman with many a sweet word, pretending to care for her when he really doesn't. It seemed to me only natural that men of dreadful character would mingle with such vulgar women. I always assumed that a nobleman of proper breeding and high rank would be incapable of such outrageous behavior, constrained by a concern for what others might think or say about him ... but it turns out that's not necessarily true. My father heard alarming reports about how flirtatious and unreliable Prince Niou is and refused to consider him as a prospective son-in-law or to allow him to come as close to us as he has. That the Prince should have gone to such unusual lengths, sending all of those letters swearing eternal devotion to my sister, and then unexpectedly stealing into her chambers and taking her as his bride—well, such behavior makes it all the more cruel of him to now add to our woes! What must the Middle Counselor be thinking of this appalling behavior? There is no need for me to feel ashamed before any of the women in this house, but when I think about what must be running through their minds, I feel like a pathetic fool, a laughingstock! Her mood worsened, and her health took a serious turn for the worse.

The younger Princess had been convinced that Prince Niou's feelings would never change. He had always sworn his boundless devotion to her on those few occasions when she was with him, and she took private solace by telling herself that his long absences were the result of the extreme constraints faced by a man of his high rank. It wasn't that she didn't fret about his failure to visit as time went on, but this latest outrage, in which he simply passed them by, left her with bitter regrets. She grew increasingly despondent.

Seeing her sister in such a state was hard to bear for the older Princess, who was torn by extremes of pity and guilt. If only I had been able to help her in a normal way, if only this were a normal household, then he would never have dared treat her like this. She was now sunk in her own dark thoughts. If I live on in this world, it seems certain that I will suffer the same fate. The Middle Counselor has made all sorts of vows to me, but he's not sincere ... he's simply

playing with me, testing my affections. Even though I keep my distance from him, I will eventually run out of excuses to put him off. And these women of mine never learn⁴⁰ ... they're apparently set on somehow arranging a marriage between us and will likely carry it off in the end, despite my objections. This is precisely what my father warned about repeatedly, admonishing us to be vigilant and remain unmarried. It's obvious that we were born unlucky, for death has taken all those we depended upon most. How horrible it would be if I caused the spirits of my parents to suffer by ending up abandoned like my sister and made an object of ridicule. No ... I will not suffer those entanglements. It would be better to die before I am burdened too deeply by sin.

Tormented by these thoughts, she stopped eating and spent every moment day and night meditating on what would become of her after she died. She was so distraught, she couldn't even bring herself to look at her sister any more.

Once I too have left her behind in this world, she is bound to feel utterly helpless, with nothing to bring her comfort. She's so precious and beautiful, it's been my pleasure just to gaze at her mornings and evenings, and I did so want to arrange an appropriate match with a man worthy of her. In my heart, I wanted to create a life worth living—at least for her, if not for myself—and though a man of the highest rank took her as his wife, she finds herself in a cruelly depressing situation. It is rare for women who have suffered such extreme humiliation to be able to show themselves in society afterwards or live a normal life. Obsessing like this over her sister, she came to this forlorn conclusion: It does no good to talk about it ... it seems that we were fated to pass through this world never knowing the slightest comfort.

As soon as Niou returned to the palace, he prepared to go back to Uji, keeping his plans secret as he had in the past. However, the Commander of the Gate Guards had already alerted His Majesty: “The reason that Prince Niou suddenly hit on the idea of going out to Uji is that he has been discreetly conducting an affair with a woman there. People at court are privately criticizing him for behaving frivolously.”

When the Akashi Empress heard about this, she deplored her son’s behavior. His Majesty was not in a forgiving mood either. “This all comes from being too lenient and allowing him to live as he wishes at his own residence,” he said, harshly censuring his son and ordering him to remain in service at the palace. Niou had no desire at all to take Roku no kimi as his wife, but evidently everyone else had decided already that he would have her regardless.

When Kaoru heard what had happened, he was filled with dismay at this unfortunate turn of events. *All of this is the result of my own peculiar nature. I felt sorry for Prince Hachinomiya and could not forget how much it tormented*

him that his daughters might have to remain alone with no one to support them. The princesses are flawless in appearance and conduct, and I felt it would be a waste to simply stand by and watch them come down in the world. It seems odd even to me that I should have been driven by such an overpowering wish to assist them ... and then there was Niou desperately pressing me to help him with the younger Princess, while the older Princess, the one I yearn for, was putting me off, trying to get me to take her sister in her place. So I acted as I did. Thinking about it now, I regret having yielded the younger sister to Niou. I could have taken both princesses and no one would have blamed me for it. He was left alone with his troubled thoughts, reflecting on his own folly.

Niou was even more upset, and not a moment went by when he wasn't fretting about his Uji Princess and longing to be with her. His mother admonished him over and over: "If you're that strongly attached to the woman, then have her brought into my service here. That way, you can look after her without all of this fuss. But keep in mind that His Majesty has special plans for your future, and it would be most unfortunate were you to give people cause to speak of you as frivolous."

On a leisurely winter day, with a steady rain falling, Niou went to the chambers of his sister, the First Princess, just as she and a few of her ladies-in-waiting were quietly looking over some drawings. They talked, sharing stories with only a standing curtain between them, and it seemed to him that with her boundless grace, aristocratic elegance, and gentle, charming manners, the court would not see her equal for a long time. If only there were someone in the world whose looks might compare to hers! He had heard privately that Retired Emperor Reizei's pampered daughter was stunningly attractive, but she was beyond his reach, and he had no means to convey his feelings to her. Then there was his Uji Princess off in her mountain villa—sweetly precious and nobly cultivated, she was inferior to no one. Recalling her like this merely intensified his longing. To console himself, he glanced over the drawings that were scattered about: genre paintings of beautiful women, illustrations depicting the romantic exploits of a man in love, sketches of some charming house in a rustic mountain village. Each of these worldly scenes reflected the taste and interest of the artist, but there were many that reminded him of his own experiences. As he pored over them, it occurred to him that he should ask the First Princess for a few and have them sent on to Uji. One was an illustration of a man teaching his younger sister to play the seven-string koto based on an episode from *Tales of Ise*. On seeing the words "That another man should bind up ..." ⁴¹ in the poem on an illustration, Niou moved closer to the standing curtain. What could he possibly have been thinking?

“People in the old days were not reserved with one another, so long as their relationship permitted them to speak directly. You, on the other hand, are unreasonably distant toward me.” Because he murmured this insinuatingly, the First Princess wondered which painting he meant. He rolled up the illustration and slid it under the curtains for her. As she leaned forward slightly to look at it, her hair gently cascaded down, and he caught the briefest glimpse of her face in profile. Her dazzling looks were perfect, and he couldn’t help wishing that he were not as closely related to her as he was. He could not restrain his emotions.

*The desire to sleep on these young grasses
Is not what I feel ... yet melancholy
Are my yearnings, entangled in their roots⁴²*

The ladies-in-waiting in attendance on the First Princess felt ashamed in Niou’s daunting presence and withdrew, hiding themselves in the interior of the room. Their mistress found his attitude strange and unpleasant and did not respond to him. Niou thought her silence was understandable, since the swift, witty reply of the lady in the illustration—who stated that her feelings were “honest and unreserved”—seemed too worldly to be truly charming.

Murasaki had favored Niou and the First Princess, keeping them always near to her, and they had the closest relationship among all the many royal children. The Akashi Empress raised her oldest daughter with extraordinary care and surrounded her with attendants who, if they had even the slightest flaw in looks or character, would have felt too awkward to continue in service. A great many young ladies, daughters of distinguished nobility, came into service there, and Niou, restless and flirtatious at heart, would often engage in fleeting affairs with those of exceptionally rare beauty. His feelings for the Uji Princess, however, were different, and not a moment went by when she wasn’t in his heart and mind. Still, he did not visit her for a long time.

One day, while the princesses were lost in a lonely, melancholy mood, waiting for Niou to come back, Kaoru arrived. He had heard that his love, the older Princess, was ill and had come to see how she was doing. Her condition didn’t seem seriously debilitating, but she used it as an excuse anyway not to have to meet him.

“I was alarmed when I heard about her illness and have traveled a long way to see how she’s doing. Please allow me to be a little closer to her sickbed.” He repeated his request so often and exhibited so much anxiety that he was finally shown to a seat in front of the blinds that blocked off her private chambers. His visit was most unwelcome to her, but she controlled her feelings and did not

behave curtly with him. Instead, she raised her head and tried to respond.

He told the Princess that it had never been Prince Niou's intention to leave without visiting them when he came to Uji on his excursion. "You must put your mind at ease," he assured her. "You must not be irritated or resentful with him."

"My sister seems to have said nothing in particular to him. Now that I see just what our father was warning us about, I can't help feeling sorry for her, the poor thing." It sounded as though she were weeping.

He felt bad for them and ashamed as well. "The world is like this: it's impossible for things to stay always the same, though we might wish it otherwise. The two of you, having little knowledge or experience in these matters, are inclined to resent him, but you must try to control your emotions. I'm convinced that you have no reason to be anxious." He found it strange that he should be interceding like this on behalf of another man.

The Princess's illness tended to cause her greater discomfort at night. Since it made her sister uncomfortable to have an outsider so close, the women urged him to spend the night in the guest room that he always used. He objected, saying, "I've been all the more worried about her since learning of her illness. I came rushing here, upset at the news, and so it's cruel and unreasonable of you to keep me from her. Who else could you rely on to provide assistance at a time like this, if not me?" He consulted with Bennokimi, telling her to commission healing rites for her mistress.

When the Princess overheard his orders, she was annoyed. *It's intolerable! He's going against my wish to be done with this hateful existence.* Of course, it would have been unpleasant to say such things openly. And in truth, she was touched by the sincerity of his hope that she would live a long life.

The following morning he asked after her health. "Are you feeling a little better? I would like to talk with you, even if only briefly, as we did yesterday."

She replied through an intermediary. "I'm feeling quite sick today ... perhaps because I've been ill for several days. But, if you wish, please be seated where you were yesterday." Kaoru was moved to sorrow as he imagined what would become of her, and he found her unusual display of warmth heartbreaking, since it suggested that she was giving up. He moved closer and began to talk about all sorts of things. "I'm afraid I'm not well enough to answer ... perhaps when I feel a bit better," she replied. The sound of her voice, so small and pitiful, was painful for Kaoru to hear. He sat there, sighing. He felt that he couldn't just remain there doing nothing, and yet, at the same time, he knew he had to return to the capital despite his concern for the Princess's health.

"She'll only get worse living in a place like this," he told her attendants. "Her illness provides a good reason for me to move her to a more appropriate

residence." After giving instructions to the ascetic from the mountain temple to perform heartfelt prayers and rites, he left.

A certain man in Kaoru's escort had grown close to one of the younger attendants at Uji. On one occasion, when the two of them were talking, he told her, "Prince Niou has been confined to the palace and will not be allowed to make any more secret trips. His Majesty is arranging for the Prince to marry the Minister's daughter. Seeing how the Minister has been angling for years to make this happen, he's certainly not going to refuse the proposal now. The marriage is supposed to take place by the end of the year, and Prince Niou isn't pleased about this at all. He's been ardently pursuing all sorts of flings with various women at the palace, and according to rumors, he's apparently showing no sign of heeding his parents' admonitions and behaving himself. On the other hand, my own lord, the Middle Counselor, is rather strange—like no other man I know. He's so excessively earnest that he makes other people feel diffident around him. People say that his dedication in coming here is surprising and that whatever his attachment may be, it must be extraordinary."

"This is what he told me," the woman said, repeating to the other attendants everything that her lover had said.

When the older Princess overheard her women gossiping, she felt her chest tighten in despair. *My sister's bond with Prince Niou is broken for good. So long as he had yet to decide on some distinguished lady to be his principal wife, he was probably content to use my sister as his plaything. He was no doubt mindful of what Kaoru and others might think of him, and so he offered up an endless string of pretty words professing his deep devotion.* She was convinced of Niou's deceitfulness. But that hardly mattered now, for who was she to resent his cruelty, given her own failures? More and more, she felt that there was no haven for her in this world, and she collapsed facedown, weeping.

In her frail condition, the Princess increasingly felt as though she should no longer go on living in this world. Although her attendants were not of such high status that she was ever constrained or awkward in their presence, it would be too painful to bear if they knew that she had overheard their gossip about Prince Niou's marriage. And so she lay down to sleep, pretending that she had heard nothing.

The younger Princess was napping, which apparently is something one does when longing for someone.⁴³ It was adorable the way she slept with her arm as a pillow, her hair gathered at her head. The older Princess continued gazing at her sister's surpassing features; she grieved as her father's words of warning came back repeatedly: *Father, you surely have not sunk to those depths that await the deeply sinful ... but, if you are not in Hell, then just where are you? Please come*

for us, call us to wherever you may be. You left us to our suffering and will not appear even in our dreams.

The chill rain gave a terrifyingly lonely cast to the winter sky at dusk, and the sound of the wind blowing around the base of the trees was ineffable. Reclining on an armrest, pondering the past and the future, she cut an incomparably dignified and graceful figure. Even though her hair had not been properly groomed for a long time, perfect tresses draped down over her white robes.⁴⁴ She had a slight pallor from days of illness, but this merely added an alabaster glow to her complexion. The gentle curve of her eyes and forehead as she gazed pensively outside made one wish to show her to any man sensitive enough to appreciate such sublime beauty.

The younger Princess was startled out of her nap by a violent gust of wind. Her layers of clothing, which included robes in the mountain-rose style of fallen-leaf gold with a pale violet lining, as well as robes of pale blue lined with white, were bright and vibrant. Her face had a special glow as if it had been tinted, and she looked as if she didn't have a care in the world.

"I dreamed of our father just now," she said. "He appeared briefly just over there. He seemed terribly worried."

"After Father died," the older Princess replied, her grief now greater than ever, "I had so hoped that I would see him in my dreams ... but he has never once appeared to me."

They both broke down and wept. The older Princess contemplated the world to come. *Of late Father has been on our minds constantly, and so he was bound to appear in a dream. How I long to go to him ... but as a woman, I'm too deeply sinful.* She desperately wanted to obtain the magical incense from China that, when burned, enabled one to see the spirits of the dead.⁴⁵

A messenger from Niou arrived late that night when it was pitch-black outside. The letter should have been a comfort to them, coming as it did when they were feeling so forlorn, but the younger Princess would not look at it right away.

"You must reply to him in a sweet, gentle manner," her older sister advised. "I am in a fragile condition and may not be around much longer, and so I worry that some someone even more cruel and inconsiderate than Prince Niou may appear and deal with you as he wishes. So long as the Prince thinks of you once in a while, no matter how rarely, I'm sure that no other man would dare have such evil designs on you. I know that it's difficult for you to accept this situation, but at least you can count on him for support and protection."

"Are you planning to abandon me? How horrible of you!" She pulled her sleeves completely over her face.

“The term of life is fixed, and death awaits us all,” the older sister replied. “When Father died, I didn’t want to live on after him for even a few brief moments. Despite my wishes, I lived on anyway. I know not if death will come tomorrow,⁴⁶ but even though I accept that the world is fleeting, I still grieve. After all, for whose sake do I value my life, if not for yours?”⁴⁷

They pulled an oil lamp over and read the letter. As always, it was long and detailed.

*The clouds that we sadly gaze at are the same
As any other clouds ... so why should these rains
Increase my anxious yearning this winter night*

Apparently, he had added conventional phrases such as “sleeves that have never been as drenched in my tears as they are now,”⁴⁸ but they were nothing more than common clichés. With the letter looking as if it been scribbled out like some tiresome chore that Niou had to perform, the older Princess’s resentment grew even greater. Still, his looks and figure were so splendid and his demeanor so elegant that it was natural that the younger Princess was still attracted to him. Indeed, the longer his absences, the more she missed him. In any case, Niou had made so many extravagant vows that she knew in her heart that he would never stop calling on her. For that reason alone her anger waned, and she remained devoted to him.

The messenger remarked, “I must be returning this evening,” and pressed for a reply. The younger Princess gave him a poem and not a single word more.

*The skies that I gaze upon from this village
Pelted by hail, deep in mountain recesses
Are, mornings and nights, ever dark and cloudy*

It was the final day of the tenth month, and Niou was disturbed to realize that yet another month had passed by since he last saw his love. Night after night, he kept telling himself that this was the night to go. However, something always prevented him, and he began to feel like a small boat caught up in countless reeds.⁴⁹ For one thing, the Gosechi Festival would be held early this year,⁵⁰ and as a result there were many stylish diversions throughout the palace that kept him occupied. Even though he did not deliberately neglect his Uji Princess, he allowed more time to slip, and she was left to suffer the unbearable loneliness of waiting for him. Nonetheless, even when he was having a passing affair with one of the ladies at court, she was constantly on his mind.

His mother, the Akashi Empress, brought up the matter of his engagement to the Minister's daughter, Roku no kimi. "If there's someone you love and want to call on, then once you have secured the steady support that a marriage like this promises, bring her in discreetly as one of your ladies and treat her with honor and respect."

"Let's wait awhile. I have things to consider," he replied, cutting her off.

Niou was concerned that his bride might truly end up suffering the indignity of becoming one of his "ladies," as his mother put it, and he wanted to avoid that outcome. But the anxious princesses at Uji did not know what was in his heart. As the days and months passed, they could only languish after him.

Appearances to the contrary, Niou is not the serious, trustworthy man that I took him to be. In his heart, Kaoru was sorry he ever vouched for the Prince, and now he very rarely visited Niou's quarters. He sent message after message to the Uji villa inquiring after the older Princess and learned that her condition had improved a little around the beginning of the eleventh month. Subsequently, during this busy season at the court, his time was entirely taken up with both public and private responsibilities, and he did not dispatch anyone for five or six days. Then, suddenly, he had an alarming premonition about the Princess's health; having no other recourse available to him, Kaoru dropped everything that he was supposed to do and went to Uji.

He had left orders that healing rites were to be conducted thoroughly with no letup, but the Princess had sent the ascetic back to his mountain retreat, insisting that she was feeling much better. There were few people attending her when Kaoru arrived, and so, as always, he summoned Bennokimi and asked about her mistress's condition.

"Her symptoms are vague," the old woman informed him, "and she doesn't seem to be suffering from anything serious ... it's just that she won't eat anything, my lord. She's always been extremely delicate compared to most women, but ever since our young mistress's affair with Prince Niou began, her mood has darkened and she goes on refusing to even glance at the slightest piece of fruit. She's shockingly emaciated, and her condition seems hopeless now. I've experienced so much sorrow in my long life, but to have to witness this horror ... I only hope that I may die first, before my mistress ..." Understandably, words failed her and she broke down in tears.

"This is hard for me to hear. Why didn't you let me know sooner? I've been very busy recently at both the palace and the villa of Retired Emperor Reizei, and I was worried at not being able to ask after her for several days." He went into the Princess's chambers and sat down near her pillow. He tried to speak with her, but she was unable to answer, as if she had lost her voice.

"No one, not one person informed me that you have taken a turn for the worse," he said reprovingly. "It's deplorable! I was so worried, I left specific instructions to look after you, but what good did it do ... it's too late now." He sent for the ascetic again and also summoned a large number of priests and healers who had a good reputation for the efficacy of their prayers. The healing rites and sutra readings were set to begin early the following morning, and so he ordered a great many of his own retainers and staff to come to Uji to assist with preparations. Soon the villa was bustling with people of both high and low station, and the attendants there took heart and felt reassured as all traces of their feeling of isolation faded.

When evening came, Kaoru was offered a simple meal of steamed rice gruel and then asked to retire to the guest rooms that he always used. He protested, insisting, "I want to stay close by to help nurse the Princess." Because the priests were seated in the aisle room to the south, he set up a folding screen in a space on the east side his beloved's bedchamber, very near to her. The younger Princess was troubled by his presence, but her attendants had all concluded that the relationship between their older mistress and the Middle Counselor was far from ordinary; they could not bring themselves to cruelly keep him away from her. After the priests started the early evening services, they began a continuous reading of the *Lotus Sutra*. The twelve priests chanting the sutra all had sonorous voices, and the effect was nobly inspiring.

With lamps lit in the space on the south side, the interior of the Princess's room was dark. Kaoru lifted up one of the panels on her standing curtain and slipped just inside to look at his beloved. When he did so, two or three older attendants shifted closer to her. The younger sister quickly hid herself from his sight and, with so few people about, lay down feeling lonely and helpless.

"Why will you not speak to me?" Kaoru pleaded, taking her hand and startling her awake.

"I would like to talk to you, but it hurts whenever I talk," she said quietly, speaking under her breath. "You didn't come here for so long that I was worried. I would have regretted it had I passed away without being able to see you again."

"That I should have kept you waiting for me this long ..." Kaoru began sobbing. He gently placed his hand on her forehead. She was a little feverish. "What sin did you commit to bring about this illness? It must be retribution for having made someone suffer," he said, speaking softly in her ear. As he went on to tell her all of the things that he felt for her, she began to find his words troublesome and embarrassing and covered her face. He gazed down at her frail, delicate body and felt his chest tighten at the thought of what it would feel like to have to look on her lifeless figure.

"I'm sure that it has been terribly trying for you to have to look after her for so long," he said to the younger sister. "Tonight I shall stand watch, so please try to get some rest."

She was concerned, but withdrew a short distance away on the assumption that the Middle Counselor must have reason to want to speak privately to his beloved.

Kaoru should not have addressed her face-to-face, but when he drew closer to look at her, the Princess, despite her embarrassment and discomfort, accepted that their relationship was destined by a bond they shared in a previous life. She also recognized his noble virtues. After all, compared to Prince Niou, the Middle Counselor was exceptionally kind, gentle and trustworthy. No ... she simply couldn't be so cruel as to send him away now, for she did not want him to remember her after she died as willful or thoughtless.

All through the night, Kaoru ordered her women to prepare medicinal infusions, but she refused to take even a sip. Aghast at the situation, he was desperate beyond words, wondering if there was anything he could do to save her life.

The ascetic, who was napping after having performed services during the night, was startled by the sublime voices of the priests who arrived in the predawn hours and took over the continuous reading of the *Lotus Sutra*. Now awake, he chanted a *dharani* spell in a voice that, despite being hoarse and cracked from age, sounded mature and truly efficacious.

"How did the Princess get along last night?" he asked, and then began to reminisce tearfully about the late Hachinomiya, all the while blowing his nose over and over. "Which realm does he inhabit now? I always imagined that he would end up in paradise, despite the lingering attachment of his concern for his daughters, but recently I saw him in a dream ... he was dressed in earthly robes and spoke quite distinctly to me. 'Because I detested the world and was deeply estranged from it,' he said, 'I had no desire to tarry in it for long. Yet, at the time of my death, some trivial worries distracted me from focusing on my salvation. To my bitter regret, the realm that I had hoped to attain still remains beyond me. Perform memorial rites to hasten my entry into paradise.' I couldn't think of what to do right away, and so I asked five or six of my disciples who happened to be performing services just then to chant the holy name. Then another idea occurred to me, and I sent them out in all directions to perform the Never-Disparaging austerity to teach that all people may attain Buddhahood."⁵¹

Kaoru wept bitterly as the ascetic spoke. The older Princess, who was already troubled, realized that she had committed a grave sin by hindering her father's salvation and wanted more than ever to just disappear completely. As she lay

there listening to the ascetic, she thought, *Somehow I want to find Father's spirit while his destination is still unsettled and go together with him to the same place.*

The ascetic withdrew without saying much more. The priests who had been sent off a few days earlier to perform the Never-Disparaging austerity had gone to villages in the vicinity and even as far as the capital, but after laboring through rough winds at dawn, they sought out the place where the ascetic had summoned them. Kneeling at the center gate, they continued the reading of the *Lotus Sutra* in a most venerable manner. The final lines of the scripture, with their invocation to do good deeds for all sentient beings who are destined to become Buddhas, were especially moving. Kaoru, whose heart had long been drawn toward the path of enlightenment, found the scene unbearably affecting. The rustling of silk told him that the younger Princess, nervous and fretful about her sister's condition, had moved tentatively behind the standing curtain at the back of the room. He straightened himself up and assumed a more formal posture.

"How do those abject voices that never disparage sound to you?" Kaoru asked. "They may not have carried out an abject practice, but their humility is noble and awe-inspiring."

*Plovers cry mournfully at the water's edge
Amidst an icy frost glinting bright and clear
How desolate a sound in predawn twilight*

He did not intone his verse, but spoke it as if he were simply conversing with her.

Something in his manner reminded the younger Princess of her cruel lover, prompting her to compare the two men in her mind. However, she found it difficult to reply directly to Kaoru, and so she gave her reply to Bennokimi to pass to him:

*Plovers calling out in the early dawn
As they brush away the frost from their wings
Do they understand my sad, pensive heart*

The old attendant was hardly an appropriate stand-in for her mistress, but she conveyed the poem with stylish grace. A trivial exchange, to be sure, but her response was warm and sensitive, even if she was retiring by nature. It disturbed him to wonder how he would feel if he had to be separated from her following the death of her sister.

Kaoru contemplated Prince Hachinomiya's appearance in the ascetic's dream, and after imagining what the troubled figures of the princesses must look like from their father's vantage on high, he commissioned sutra readings at the mountain temple above where Hachinomiya used to go into retreat. He also dispatched messengers to various temples here and there with requests for prayers and sent letters requesting leave from all of his public and private affairs. No rite of purification, prayer ceremony, or exorcism was overlooked in his effort to heal the Princess. Nonetheless, because her illness was not the result of some sinful behavior, nothing seemed to work.

If the Princess herself prayed to the Buddha for her recovery, she might have improved, but her thoughts were on different matters. *I must take this infirmity as my opportunity to die. He has now attended to me so closely—seen my face, touched me—that there is no longer any distance between us; now I have no excuse to treat him as anything other than my husband. Of course, even if he were to take me as his wife, the ardor that has driven him to treat me with such kindness would surely cool over time as we both grew familiar with one another, and I would be left in the end with nothing but uncertainty and heartache. No ... if it turns out that I'm forced to live on, then I will use my illness as a pretext to take vows and become a nun. That is the only way to ensure that we stay together to the end, that our hearts remain as one forever.*

She was convinced that she must fulfill her wish one way or another, but she couldn't bring up the matter in such detail that others would catch on to her plans. Thus, she said to her sister, "I feel that my condition is more and more hopeless, but I've heard that taking vows to uphold the Precepts is very effective for healing and may extend my life. Would you please speak to the ascetic? He is a master of esoteric rites."

Her attendants wept and objected vociferously. "It's unthinkable," they told her. "The Middle Counselor is at his wits' end, frantic over your illness. He would be devastated if you did such a thing!" To the Princess's chagrin, they all found the idea outrageous and would not even mention it to the man they relied on for support.

Because Kaoru had withdrawn from the court and gone into seclusion like this, word spread and gentlemen soon arrived from the court to inquire after him. Seeing how concerned he was over the princess's illness, his retainers and those members of his staff who were close to him grieved for their lord, each offering prayers for her recovery.

When he realized that today was *Toyo no Akari*—"the Feast of the Glowing Harvest"—Kaoru's thoughts turned toward the capital. The winds at Uji were frightful, and the snow swirled about madly. The weather in the capital wouldn't

be like this at all, and yet, while he himself had chosen to stay here to be with his beloved, his loneliness was unbearable. He gazed outside, lost in wistful thoughts. *Is she destined to die while the two of us remain strangers, never consummating our relationship? It's hard for me to accept such a fate, but I will not give voice to any bitterness. If only she could recover a little, display once more her sweet and gentle disposition even for a brief time, I would share with her all my thoughts and feelings!*

Evening fell at last on a gloomy, sunless day. He whispered the following to himself:

*Deep in the mountains, beneath cloudy skies
I see no sunlight, no festive headbands
A season indeed to darken my heart*⁵²

The attendants were all encouraged that the Middle Counselor remained with them like this. He was seated as always near her pillow; when the rough winds caused the standing curtains to flutter, the younger Princess withdrew to a room in the interior to avoid being seen. Her unsightly old attendants followed after, their faces flushed in embarrassment as they too scurried to hide themselves. As they did so, Kaoru moved closer and spoke tearfully to his beloved. "How are you feeling? I have prayed for you with all my heart and soul, but none of it seems to be doing any good. It makes me feel desolate, not having heard even a word from you ... I shall suffer terribly if you leave me behind."

Although the Princess was slipping in and out of consciousness, she still made sure that she kept her face hidden. "If I were feeling a little better, there is much I would like to tell you, but I regret for your sake that I must soon pass on."

Her demeanor told of the deep compassion that she felt for him, and he found it harder than ever to hold back his tears. He was reluctant to show any signs of sorrow, knowing that would be inauspicious, but he began sobbing anyway.

He kept watch over her, reflecting on their relationship. *What sort of bond did we share in a previous life? Despite my boundless love, I must be parted from her having tasted only a surfeit of bitter hardships. If she would reveal at least some small imperfection in herself, it might help temper the longings I will feel for her after she's gone.* To his eyes, she seemed more precious than ever, radiant and lovely. Her arms were terribly thin, her body wraithlike, but her complexion was still lustrous, pale, and graceful. In her soft white robes, with her bedcovers pushed to the side, she gave the impression of a court doll, hollow inside its robes, lying asleep. Her hair, which was not excessively thick or long, had been laid out just as it was. It spilled down over her pillow in shimmering

undulations that had a delightfully charming air.

What will become of her in the end? Is there no possibility that she may live on? Must her beauty pass from the world? He would never again experience such profound regrets. She had been ill for so long and had not been properly groomed or dressed all that time, yet her looks were still far superior even to a woman who endlessly fusses over herself and remains unapproachable, lest someone see her unprepared. As he studied his beloved's face, he could not calm his fear that her spirit would soon slip away.

"If you should abandon me after all," he said, "I doubt that I will survive much longer myself. And if by chance I should live on for many years, I shall withdraw from the world and go off somewhere deep in the mountains. The one thing that might hold me back are the hardships your sister would face on her own." He was hoping to get some sort of response by mentioning her sister.

The Princess pulled her sleeves away from her face a little.

"I always knew that my life would be brief, and so I could not accept your proposal. I don't want to die and leave you with memories of me as willful and unkind, but there was nothing else I could do. That's why I suggested that you think of the sister I leave behind in the same way you think of me. If you had not defied my wishes, I might have been at peace now ... it is the one lingering regret that may yet keep me attached to this world and hinder my salvation."

"Am I fated to suffer the extremes of sorrow? I am by nature different from others ... I was never attracted to worldly affairs of any kind. You're the only one that I have ever loved, so I simply could not do as you requested and take your sister instead. I regret that now and feel bad for you, but you need not worry about her."

Kaoru did his best to comfort and reassure her, but when her suffering seemed to grow more intense, he summoned the ascetic and other venerable priests and had them use all of their powers to perform healing rites and prayers. He himself offered heartfelt prayers to the Buddha.

Is it to encourage the rejection of this world that the gods and Buddha expressly allow so much grief and anguish in it? As he sat there gazing at her, she vanished before his eyes, fading like withering grasses in winter. He was mad with grief, frantically stamping his feet in frustration at not being able to call her back, oblivious to how others might view his behavior.

When the younger Princess realized that the end had come, she too was stunned and distraught at being left behind. Her attendants, who as usual were acting wise and in control, could see that their mistress was not in her right mind and escorted her out of the room, saying that it would bring bad luck if she were to remain near a defiling corpse.

This simply can't be happening, Kaoru told himself. *It must be a dream.* He brought the lamp closer to her face, which was still partly hidden by her sleeves. She looked as if she were asleep: nothing about her had changed, and she was lying there as beautiful as in life. He thought wistfully, *If only I could go on like this, looking upon her as I would the empty shell of a cicada!*⁵³

In order to prepare the body for the funeral rites, her women combed and arranged her hair; the air around them was suffused with the warm, rich perfume that had always scented her hair when she was alive. Kaoru prayed to the Buddha. *She was a superior woman, unrivaled in this world. Is there nothing ordinary about her that would make it easier for me to accept her death ... some small flaw at least? If you really are the guide who will show me how to renounce this world, then let me see something other than her beauty —something fearful and offputting about her corpse that will lessen my regrets and assuage my grief.*

His prayer served no purpose, however, for his yearning only grew more intense the more he gazed at her. Knowing that soon her body would have to be consigned to the flames, he set about making the proper arrangements for the services—but it was all much too much for him. He felt unsteady, drifting along as though he was walking through the air. When the last feeble-looking traces of the pyre disappeared, so few plumes of smoke had risen to the sky that he was left feeling defeated and hopeless. He returned to the villa in a daze.

Many attendants secluded themselves at the villa for the period of confinement and mourning. Though their presence helped to relieve the loneliness a little, the younger Princess was so depressed and ashamed at how others viewed her that she herself did not seem to be among the living any more. Niou sent one message after another, but the Princess could not forget that her sister had died never wavering in her attitude that his neglect was unforgivably cruel. It was her woeful lot to be married to such an awful man.

Kaoru now found the world thoroughly wearisome, but though he was inclined finally to fulfill his most cherished wish and follow the path of the Buddha, he couldn't bring himself to take that step just yet. For one thing, he had his mother, the Third Princess, to consider. For another, he was troubled by the heartrending circumstances of the Princess at Uji. He mulled over the situation. *I should have done as the late Princess requested ... I should have taken her sister as my wife and looked on her as a memento. But at the time she asked, I felt in my heart that I could never shift my affections, even though my beloved insisted that her heart was one with her sister's. Had I known that I would cause the younger Princess such misery by bringing Niou here, I would have married her instead. Had I done that, I might have found in my visits here some consolation*

for my unrequited love.

He didn't go back to the capital for even a brief visit. Because he had thoroughly cut himself off and remained inconsolable in his seclusion, people at the court concluded that his affection for the late Princess had been anything but ordinary, and everyone, from the palace on down, sent letters expressing their condolences.

Empty days passed by. Kaoru arranged for the memorial services held every seven days, and he made sure they were each conducted in a most solemn and dignified manner. He showed extraordinary devotion to her memory, but since they had not been married, there were limits on what he could do. Forbidden by custom to change the color of his clothing, he would steal mournful glances at the black robes worn by those women who had been closest to their late mistress.

*It is useless for one not permitted to mourn
To shed these blood-red tears, for they can never dye
My crimson cloak gray in memory of my love*

Kaoru cut a youthful, dashingly handsome figure as he gazed out lost in reverie, soaking his sleeves with his endless tears; the light crimson cloak he was permitted to wear seemed to glisten like melting ice. The attendants, peeking in to observe him, were all in tears.

“What’s done is done, and I suppose it’s useless now to lament the loss of our mistress ... but it’s truly regrettable that the Middle Counselor, who has been so close to this household over the years, will soon become an outsider to us all.”

“What a strange, unexpected destiny has befallen him!”

“That a man as deeply thoughtful and kind as he should have been rejected by both of our ladies ...”

Kaoru spoke to the younger Princess. “I think of you as a memento of the past, and from now on I hope that we might be able to speak freely with one another and that I may still call on you and be of service. Do not be aloof and treat me as a stranger.”

The Princess, however, was still overwhelmed by her misfortunes and was too shy to meet or talk with him. She had always struck him as a little innocent and childlike, more open and noble compared to her sister, and yet to him she lacked the gentle warmth and beauty of spirit of the woman who had so touched his heart.

One day, when the skies were darkened by heavy snowfall, Kaoru passed the time from morning until evening staring blankly outside. That night the clouds

cleared away, and the moon of the twelfth month—the moon that people always invoke as a symbol of chill desolation—shone clear and bright. He rolled up the blinds on the veranda to look up at it. The distant sound of the bell at the mountain temple echoed from high above, and as he strained to listen at his pillow, he heard it tolling out the close of day.⁵⁴

*Not wishing to be left behind, to linger on
I would follow the moon in its course ... for this world
Is not a realm I shall reside in forever*

A stronger wind began to blow. When Kaoru got up to lower the shutters again, he glanced out into the garden. The ice at the water's edge, which was reflecting the image of the snow-covered mountains all around, sparkled brilliantly in the light of the moon. He could refurbish his villa on Sanjō in the capital all he liked, but nothing he could add to it would ever equal the scene before him.

If only she could come back to me, even for a moment, he thought, I would talk with her about this sublime beauty! His obsessive longing was simply too much to keep inside his breast.

*In my anguish over the loss of my beloved
I long to vanish into the Snowy Mountains
Leaving no trace while seeking the potion of death*

*If only there were some demon to teach me the second part of that verse of scripture, then I might well have an excuse to toss myself from some great height like that youth in the Snowy Mountains.*⁵⁵ For someone who supposedly aspired to enlightenment in this way, his motivations were certainly less than pure.

Kaoru would summon the attendants and speak with them. At such times, he struck them as a paragon of noble virtue, gentle and deeply thoughtful. The younger ladies-in-waiting were completely smitten and thought him magnificent. The older women could only look at him and regret all the more what might have been.

“Our late mistress realized that Prince Niou was not trustworthy, and she was distressed at the prospect of being ridiculed. That’s what made her ill.”

“Yes, but she didn’t want to let our young mistress know how worried she was, and so she kept her bitterness locked inside her heart and refused to eat anything—not even the smallest piece of fruit. She just grew weaker and weaker.”

"On the surface she never gave any indication that she was deeply concerned about such things, but deep down she must have brooded endlessly over their situation."

"Her suffering began when all her hopes for her sister's future went awry and she realized that she had failed to live up to her father's admonition."

They went on sharing stories, relating what the late Princess had said on this or that occasion. With each anecdote, they invariably ended up breaking down and weeping.

Kaoru blamed his own folly for these tragedies and wanted to go back to the past and redo it. The world was unbearably trying to him, and he would spend sleepless nights immersing himself in prayer and meditation until dawn. Late one night as a heavy snow was falling, the shouts of men and the neighing of horses broke in on the freezing darkness. The venerable priests who had been commissioned for evening services were startled. Just as they were wondering what sort of men could have made their way here through the snow in the dead of night, Niou arrived, disguised in hunting robes and thoroughly soaked through. Kaoru knew by the impetuous rapping at the gate that it was the Prince, and so he withdrew and hid in a private space in the interior of the villa. The period of mourning and confinement had not yet passed, but Niou had been so fretful and impatient to see his Uji Princess that he had traveled all night long to get to her, struggling to make his way through the blizzard.

His arrival should have provided the Princess with some relief from all the days that he had cruelly neglected her, but she was in no mood to see him. She felt dishonored that Niou had brought so much grief and worry to her sister, and she was bitterly angry with the Prince because it was too late to change his attitude and behavior so that her sister might think better of him. Her attendants desperately tried to reason with her, reminding their mistress of her uxorial duties, of the Prince's exalted status, and the ordeal of his trip. At last, she reluctantly agreed to talk with him—but only through her blinds, as if they were not married. She listened as he apologized profusely for neither writing nor calling on her for so many days. From what he could tell of her movements and demeanor, she seemed so weak and frail that she might soon follow her sister in death. This terrifying thought left him feeling unsettled.

Determined to spend the day at the Uji villa, Niou no longer cared about the censure that he might incur at the court. He pleaded with her to allow him inside her blinds, but she remained coldly indifferent, curtly replying, "Perhaps if I'm around long enough to start feeling a little more myself again ..."

Kaoru could overhear their conversation from his hiding spot. He summoned an attendant of appropriate standing and, ever true to his meddlesome,

patronizing ways, secretly gave her a message to take to the Princess: “The Prince’s careless behavior, an affront to your imperial lineage, has no doubt been troubling to you now and in the past. Though you have good cause to reject him for his sins against you these past few months, it would be best not to rebuke him so severely that you give offense. He has never before encountered such resentment and rejection and will likely be hurt.” Upon reading the message, the Princess grew increasingly diffident and could no longer speak to Niou.

“You’re being unreasonably cold with me! It’s as if you’ve completely forgotten all of the promises I made!” Niou passed the day sighing over his misfortune.

That night, the winds increased in force, and a fierce gale blew down the mountain. Niou was lying down, lamenting that he had only himself to blame for his situation, when the Princess at last relented a little and agreed to speak with him—though again through her blinds. He invoked a myriad of gods in swearing that his devotion to her would last for all eternity. For her part, she was put off by his glib, practiced eloquence, and yet she gradually began to sympathize with him despite all of the unpleasantness caused by his cruel neglect. Besides, who could resist his looks, which were splendid enough to soften any woman’s heart? Wavering, lost in her thoughts, she offered the following:

*When I recall what happened in the past
It all seems vain and futile ... so why then
Should I put my trust in future prospects*

She spoke in a whisper.

Niou was irritated by her vagueness, which offered no encouragement.

*If you’re convinced that the future is short
Then how could you possibly turn your back
On prospects that are right before your eyes*

“Everything in this world is fleeting, including our time together. Do not dwell too deeply on your grievances.”

He exerted all his wiles to persuade her, but she finally told him, “I’m not feeling well,” and retired to her chambers. Niou was aware that he must look a genuine fool in the eyes of her attendants, and he passed the rest of the night sighing, unable to sleep. She was, he acknowledged, perfectly justified to be unhappy with him, but to treat him so mercilessly was going too far. He shed tears of bitter remorse. As a result, he came to understand the sorrows and losses

that she had experienced and was deeply moved by how much greater her suffering was compared to his own.

Niou was both touched and amused as he observed Kaoru lording it over the villa, at ease summoning the servants or commanding the many attendants in service to bring him meals and tend to his every need. It pained Niou to see his friend looking so painfully thin and pale, so lifeless and dejected. He offered his sincere condolences.

Even if it served no purpose now, Kaoru wanted very much to talk about his beloved with Niou. Still, he held back lest he appear weak and sentimental for bringing up his feelings for the late Princess. In the end, he said very little. Kaoru had spent every day since her passing crying, and the change that grief had wrought on his features was not at all unattractive. If anything, he looked more refined and clean-cut, more youthful.

Were I a woman, Niou thought, I would definitely find him attractive. This observation worried him a great deal, for he was now all too conscious of his own disgraceful proclivities, and here was a true rival. *I must find a way to move my Princess to the capital without provoking criticism or resentment.*

Despite the frigid reception he had received from the Princess, Niou had no choice but to return to the capital that day. After all, if word of his trip to Uji got around at the palace, His Majesty would be annoyed at what he would certainly consider an outrage. He had exhausted all of his considerable persuasive powers to make up with her and put her in a better humor, but she refused to open up to him, determined that he should know the same misery that his cruel neglect had brought to her.

As the end of the year approaches, the skies are constantly changing, even in places not as remote as a villa in the mountains. So it was that day after day fierce winds blew and snows piled up at Uji, and Kaoru, who passed the time from morning to evening staring out in pensive sorrow at the winter scene, felt as if he were in an endless dream. In the meantime, Niou sent bountiful offerings to commission sutra readings for the memorial services.

People who were near to Kaoru were worried that he had locked himself away like this, and they wondered if he would continue mourning right through the New Year. Thus, when the forty-nine-day period of mourning came to an end, he decided, with a sense of indescribable sadness, that now was the time he should return to the capital. He had been at Uji so long that the attendants had grown accustomed to his presence, and they felt wretched knowing that soon the villa would no longer be bustling with people coming and going. They feared that the silence about to descend upon them would be far worse than the grief and uproar of that terrible time following their mistress's death.

“Living quietly with him like this over the last few months,” one of the ladies-in-waiting remarked, “we’ve gotten to know him better than we ever did over all those years when, from time to time, he would exchange elegant greetings with our ladies. We’ve seen how gentle and thoughtful he is, how much kindness he’s shown by tending to every little detail for us. And to think ... we shall not see him any more.” At that, all the women broke down and wept.

Niou sent a message to his Uji Princess: “It is still extremely difficult for me to travel to and from Uji. This is quite troubling, and so I am making plans to have you move to a residence closer to me.”

When the Akashi Empress heard about what had transpired at Uji, she felt sorry for her son. *If a man like the Middle Counselor could lose himself so completely to grief over the older Princess, then perhaps what my son says about her younger sister is true, and no one will be able to think of her as an ordinary woman of no consequence.* She privately suggested that Niou install the Princess in the west hall of his Nijō villa, where he would be able to visit her any time he wished.

Niou wondered if his mother wanted to make it look as though she was just bringing another woman into service for the First Princess, but regardless of the pretext, he was overjoyed at no longer having to worry about being able to see his bride. He immediately sent a message to let her know.

So, that’s what he has in mind, Kaoru thought when he heard about Niou’s plans. *I had been hoping to move my Princess to the capital when the reconstruction of the Sanjō villa was complete. Perhaps I should have taken the younger sister in her place ... but what’s done is done.* The memory of his lost love made him isolated and forlorn.

Niou seemed overly suspicious of Kaoru. Such jealousy was unworthy of a Prince and completely misplaced. Kaoru simply wanted to assist the Uji Princess in any way he could. After all, if he didn’t support her, who would?

¹ *Kokinshū* 806 (Anonymous): “No matter how woeful I may find my circumstances, life doesn’t just end, and so I linger on in the world like this, combing through these tangled threads.” The line of this poem cited by the older sister plays on the word *henuru* (“to pass through time” or “to linger” and “to comb” or “to disentangle”).

² *Ise shū* 483: “I would twine my mournful cries together to make a thread on which to string my tears, like jewels.”

³ *Kokinshū* 415 (Ki no Tsurayuki, composed on leaving for the Eastern Provinces): “The slender threads of loneliness I feel setting out on the road of parting are nothing I may twine into a cord.”

⁴ The word for bowknot is *agemaki*, and so Kaoru’s poem gives this chapter its title. *Agemaki* originally referred to a hairstyle worn by young maidens (and boy pages). The hair is parted in the middle and done up

in two loops, one on either side of the head. Because the hairstyle was associated with youth, it was used metonymically to refer to boys or young women (e.g., the boys tending cattle and horses mentioned in passing in the *Yomogiu* chapter). The bowknot Kaoru refers to, which has two lateral loops, resembles this hairstyle. Threading the decorative cord through a hook or an eye and suspending the knot formed a third upper loop. Kaoru's poem also alludes to a *saibara* that is sexually suggestive, which may explain the reaction by the older sister: "See now, my maiden's loops/Though we lay down separately, at two-arms' length/See now, how we've rolled together in our sleep/See now, how our bodies are entwined!"

⁵ *Kokinshū* 483 (Anonymous): "Unless the ends of these strands, yours and mine, are twined together, from what should I fashion the thread of my life-spirit?" The word *tama* ("life-spirit") could be read to mean "jewel."

⁶ *Kokinshū* 875 (Kengei, a monk, on being mocked by some women for his looks): "Yes, I do indeed look like some withered tree hidden deep in mountain recesses, but if my heart could bloom like flowers, I would wish it so." This poem is alluded to earlier in the *Hashihime* chapter.

⁷ Kaoru is ostensibly the younger half brother to both Genji's son and the Akashi Empress, though of course he is not a sibling to any of Genji's three children (including Emperor Reizei, whose solicitous behavior toward Kaoru may be motivated by the misapprehension that they are half-brothers).

⁸ The text here is a little unclear. The person Kaoru speaks about is identified as Kisai (Kisaki) no miya, a title which could also refer to the Akashi Empress. However, he has just mentioned the Akashi Empress above as part of the list of people he feels unable to speak to on intimate terms, and since the Umetsubo Empress raised Kaoru (cf. the *Niou miya* chapter), it seems more likely that he is referring to her in this case.

⁹ This relationship is described in the *Niou miya* chapter as well. It would seem from the earlier chapter that Kaoru was close enough to Reizei's daughter to observe her (or at least he had a closer relationship than he indicates here), but Reizei did strive to keep them apart.

¹⁰ *Wakan rōeishū* 701 (Ōe no Asatsuna): "The winds on the borderland blow / Snapping the thread of her heart in autumn / At night, her tears pour forth / Merging with the river flowing out of Gansu." This poem in Chinese is part of a longer *lü-shih*, a regulated verse form. The verse that follows (702) is alluded to in the *Suma* chapter.

¹¹ This poem alludes to two different verses. *Kokinshū* 535 (Anonymous): "Will she recognize that my devotion to her is as deep as those mountain recesses where not even the cries of flying birds can be heard?" and *Kokinshū* 952 (Anonymous): "Amidst what towering crags would I have to live to no longer hear of this world of woe?" (Both are alluded to earlier in the *Wakana* and *Suma* chapters, respectively.)

¹² *Kokin rokujō* 2595 (Anonymous): "How I yearn for the lingering presence of the maiden with whom I spent the night."

¹³ A reference to the *saibara* noted above in connection with Kaoru's poem and his use of the word *agemaki*.

¹⁴ These decorations would normally be made of copper or silver and tied to the trays, boxes, or packets containing the incense used in the service. However, this line gives the impression that the flower patterns are to be fashioned from the cords the princesses have made by twining threads together.

¹⁵ *Gosenshū* 937 (Ise): "The anguish of being unable to clearly accept or reject you ... it is the way of the world that one cannot do as one's heart desires." Note that the numbering for this poem varies according to text (937 or 938).

¹⁶ *Kokin rokujō* 4268 (Anonymous): "Though you may say the world is a place of woe, just where are you to hide yourself, O flower of the wild pear, since there are no mountains remote enough?" The poem plays on the word *yamanashi*, which can mean either "wild (mountain) pear" or "no mountains."

¹⁷ *Kokinshū* 636 (Ōshikōchi Mitsune): "How long and endless an autumn night feels has since ancient times been determined by one's companion."

¹⁸ *Kokinshū* 732 (Anonymous): "I always yearn to go back to the same person, like a little boat that has made its way through the channel and comes rowing home" (alluded to earlier in the *Wakamurasaki* chapter).

¹⁹ *Kokinshū* 235 (Mibu no Tadamine): “Is it because maidenflowers find it painful to be viewed by men that they bloom hidden in the autumn mists?” Kaoru’s poem mentions the place name Ashitanohara (in modern Nara Prefecture), which I have rendered according to its literal meaning, “morning fields,” in keeping with the setting of this scene as a whole. Ashitanohara was famous for maidenflowers, but it was also associated with morning fog. See *Kokinshū* 252 (Anonymous): “The fog settles, the wild geese cry out, and at Ashitanohara in Kataoka the autumn foliage will have peaked.”

²⁰ *Kokinshū* 1016 (Bishop Henjō): “Ahh, how cheeky you are, you maidenflowers standing in autumn fields flaunting your seductive charms ... but blossoms too will soon fade.”

²¹ *Gosenshū* 1333 (Minamoto no Wataru): “That tears of uncertainty, of not knowing what the future brings, are sorrowful is due simply to the fact that they fall in plain sight” (alluded to earlier in the *Suma* chapter).

²² *Yamadori* (literally, “bird of the mountain”) refers to a species of pheasant. The male and female supposedly roosted on separate slopes at the peak of a mountain, and so they became a poetic symbol of loneliness.

²³ *Shūishū* 736 (Minamoto Shitagō): “In the faint light of the dawn sky, my heart, lost and yearning, hesitates, reluctant to go.”

²⁴ *Kokin rokujō* 2749 [also *Man'yōshū* 2542] (Anonymous): “Now that I’ve begun sharing the nuptial pillow of young grasses with my bride, won’t the separation of even a single night be intolerable?”

²⁵ The text does not explain why the messenger leaves. He may have been ordered to do so by Kaoru either to reinforce the implicit threat of going public with the claim of a liaison with the Princess or simply to spare her the inconvenience of having to reward the messenger. Given Kaoru’s conflicting emotions, it may be that both reasons are at work.

²⁶ *Shūishū* 1243 [based on *Man'yōshū* 2425] (Kakinomoto Hitomaro): “Though I have a horse at the village of Kohata in Yamashina, because I love you I shall come on foot.”

²⁷ *Shūishū* 1327 [*Man'yōshū* 351] (Sami Manzei): “To what should I compare the world? It is like the wake that follows a boat rowing out at the break of dawn.” The boats carrying brushwood that Niou observes are mentioned in the *Hashihime* chapter, when Kaoru is inspired by them to write the poem to the older sister that marks the beginning of his unrequited affair.

²⁸ *Kokinshū* 904 (Anonymous): “As the years pass by, I am deeply moved by your devotion, O guardian of the bridge at mighty, august Uji.” The poem makes use of the *utamakura* (conventional epithet) *chihayaburu*, meaning “mighty” or “powerful,” suggesting the presence of a deity.

²⁹ *Kokinshū* 689 (Anonymous): “Will she wait for me this night as well, my divine princess at Uji Bridge, with her single robe spread out alone on her rush matting?” This poem is alluded to earlier in the *Hashihime* chapter. See also *Kokinshū* 825 (Anonymous): “Our bond, which has been forgotten, is broken like the span of Uji Bridge, for the years pass with no one crossing over.”

³⁰ *Kokinshū* 509 (Anonymous): “Am I a float on the line of the fisherman of Ise that my heart should be so adrift, bobbing on the waves?” (alluded to earlier in the *Aoi* chapter).

³¹ *Shinsenzaishū* 599 (Anonymous): “How do they fare at that old mountain villa in the chill first showers of autumn that fall at Furu? Are the sleeves of the one who lives there soaked through?” The poem plays on the word *furu*, which is not only a place name but also a homonym for “to fall” and “old.”

³² *Kokinshū* 1025 (Anonymous): “When I try to stay away and not meet you, just to see what will happen, my yearning is so great that I can no longer bear this foolish game” (alluded to earlier in the *Akashi*, *Asagao*, and *Umegae* chapters).

³³ *Kokinshū* 681 (Ise): “I do not want you to see my face, not even in a dream, since morning after morning I am embarrassed by the reflection in my mirror.”

³⁴ The text here refers to him as Minister of the Left. As we have seen, there are textual inconsistencies throughout the *Uji* chapters in identifying the position Genji’s son holds. His promotion to Minister of the Left is noted in the *Takekawa* chapter, but to maintain some consistency I have chosen to use just the term “Minister” to identify him here.

³⁵ Another reference to the Tanabata Festival, which celebrates the annual meeting of the young lovers

Orihime (the Celestial Weaver maid, i.e., the star Vega) and Hikoboshi (the Celestial Oxherd, i.e., the star Altair).

36 Some texts have “The Blue Sea” as the title, but that may be a scribal error caused by confusing this song with “Waves of the Blue Sea,” which appears in the *Momiji no ga* chapter.

37 The lake is Lake Biwa, in the ancient province of Ōmi (sometimes called Lake Ōmi). The name Ōmi offers a play on the words *au mi*, which means “to meet/see” or “the person I shall meet,” but because it is a freshwater lake it has no seaweed, no *mirume*, a word that also means “to meet one’s lover.” Thus, the reason Niou is thinking of Ōmi is that it captures his conflicted mood: his hopes for a meeting with his beloved and his despair at its impossibility.

38 *Goshūishū* 1034 (Fujiwara no Yoshichika): “With faithful, unchanging heart, Spring comes round again to the old village where one I used to meet is now completely forgotten.”

39 *Kokinshū* 711 (Anonymous): “Men are all fine-sounding words, are they not ... but their inconstant hearts fade all too soon, like the color of the dye produced from dewflowers.” *Tsukigusa* may be translated as “dayflower,” but the modern name of the plant is *tsuyugusa*, “dewflower,” which provides a more appropriate image in this case. Dewflowers are a kind of dayflower (cf. the *Yokobue* chapter).

40 *Kokinshū* 631 (Anonymous): “Because I live in a world where I cannot hate him, I never learn, and must always keep my notorious reputation.”

41 *Tales of Ise*, section 49 (Long ago, a certain man, observing the extraordinary beauty of his younger sister, composed the following): “What a shame it is that another man should bind up those tender reed-grasses that seem so fresh, so inviting to sleep upon.” (She replied): “Such strange words you use, as rare as reed-grasses in early spring. My longings are honest and unreserved!” There is no mention of the brother teaching the koto to his sister. It may be that Murasaki Shikibu possessed a different version of the text, or (as is most likely) the fictional artist took liberties with the story to give the illustration a more romantic overtone. In either case, the episode depicts incestuous desire, and the allusion makes it very clear to the reader what is on Niou’s mind.

42 Niou’s poem alludes again to the illustration of the scene in *Tales of Ise*, and also plays on the multiple meanings of the words *ne* (“to sleep” and “roots”) and *musubo(h)oru* (“to feel depressed,” “to be entangled with,” and “to be related to”—as in having shared “roots”).

43 *Shūishū* 897 (Anonymous): “It is said that napping, which my parents admonish me for, is something one does when longing for someone.”

44 White robes were worn at times of illness or confinement. An example of this is found in the *Aoi* chapter at the time Genji’s wife gives birth to his son. Page girls and ladies-in-waiting might wear white robes as well if they were in attendance at night.

45 *Hakushi monjū* 160. Bai Juyi’s poem retells the famous story of how, during the early Han dynasty, Emperor Wu, following the death of his imperial wife Li, had a Taoist adept prepare a special magical incense that when burned enabled Wu to see the figure of his beloved Li faintly in the smoke.

46 *Kokinshū* 838 (Ki no Tsurayuki, written on the death of Ki no Tomonori): “Though I may reflect on life, not knowing if death will come on the morrow, I grieve for one who did not live to see the evening of this day.”

47 *Ise shū* 424: “Scooping up water from a mountain spring gushing forth from rocky crags, I realize, for whose sake do I value my life if not for yours?”

48 A poem from which this line is taken is cited in a later commentary, but the source is unknown.

49 *Shūishū* 853 (Kakinomoto Hitomaro): “Unable to meet my love these days, I feel like a small boat trying to make port caught up in countless reeds.”

50 The Gosechi Festival was held during the eleventh month. In most years, it was scheduled around the middle of the month on the second of the three Days of the Ox that occurred during that month (zodiacal days cycled around once every twelve days). However, in some years there were only two Days of the Ox, and, when that occurred, the festival was held on the first of those days. For a note on the festival, cf. the *Otome* chapter above.

51 This extreme religious austerity is called *jōfukyō* (literally, “never treat lightly”). *Jōfukyō* is the Japanese

name of the bodhisattva Sadāparibhūta, who appears in the *Lotus Sutra*. Sadāparibhūta was the name of Sakyamuni in one of his previous lifetimes as a bodhisattva. He recognized the truth that all living beings could attain Buddhahood, and so he practiced humility before all he met (and suffered persecution as a result), saying that he could never disparage them because they possess the Buddha nature. Priests sent out on this austerity would go out and abject themselves before those they met, regardless of the person's status, as a way to teach this truth.

52 The poem plays on the word *hikage*, meaning “sunlight” and “headband” (referring to the headband worn by Gosechi dancers at the Feast of the Glowing Harvest).

53 *Kokinshū* 831 (Bishop Shōen, composed after the burial of the Horikawa chancellor, Fujiwara no Mototsune, at Mount Fukakusa): “One finds comfort in gazing on the body, an empty shell of a cicada ... send up at least a plume of smoke, Mount Fukakusa!” This poem is alluded to in the *Minori* chapter; indeed, the language of the death scene here echoes the language used to describe Murasaki’s death in that chapter.

54 *Hakushi monjū* 978: “Straining to listen at my pillow, I hear the sound of the temple bell. I roll up the blinds and look out at the snow on the peaks.” *Shūishū* 1329 (Anonymous): “In grief and sorrow I listen to the sound of the temple bell as it tolls out the close of day.”

55 In his poem and in this statement, Kaoru alludes to the story of Sessen Dōji (Youth of the Snow Mountains) that appears in the *Mahāparinirvāna Sutra* (the Nirvana sutra). Sessen Dōji, who was Sakyamuni in a previous life, is a young man seeking enlightenment by practicing austerities in the Himalaya Mountains (the Snowy Mountains). He has mastered all non-Buddhist learning, but has yet to learn the truth of the Buddhist Law. The deity Śakra (Indra) decides to test the young man and approaches him disguised as a demon. He gives Sessen Dōji the first half of a Buddhist verse (“All is fleeting, nothing is constant/this is the law of birth and death”) and offers the second half in exchange for his flesh and blood. The young man agrees, carves the verse into the stone wall of the cave that serves as his hermitage, then throws himself from a high place to fulfill the bargain. At that moment, Śakra changes back to his real form and saves Sessen Dōji. This episode is depicted in a corner of the Tamamushi Shrine panel in the Hōryūji Temple.

XLVIII

Sawarabi

Early Fiddlehead Greens

SUNLIGHT SHINES on all alike, even through the densest thickets.¹ The radiance of spring showed itself at the Uji villa as well, though it brought no comfort to the younger Princess, who felt that she was living a nightmare and was astounded to have survived all of these days and months following her sister's death. With every previous change of the seasons, the two had passed the time from morning to evening gazing out with one heart at the color of the flowers, listening to the songs of the birds, diverting themselves by capping the verses² that they composed on some fleeting experience, or conversing about the sorrows and pain of this lonely world. Now, with no one of like mind to share the pleasures of some charming object or some moving occasion, she sank into dark desolation. Her heart was broken, and her loneliness was so great that it exceeded even the grief she experienced at the time of her father's death. Distraught and confused, worried about the future, she could hardly distinguish day from night. But because the course of life is fixed by fate, she could only lament how cruelly tiresome it was that she had to live on by herself.

The ascetic, a master of esoteric Buddhism who had been her father's spiritual guide, sent a letter to the Uji villa from his mountain retreat: "How has your young mistress been faring since the New Year arrived? Now that she's on her own, the situation makes me anxious, and I pray continuously for her with single-minded focus." He had attached the letter to a lovely basket filled with fiddlehead greens and horsetail shoots. "These are the first greens of spring, which our acolytes picked for memorial offerings." He added a line of verse separate from the rest of the letter. It was scrawled in a rough, unsteady hand.

*Such greens and shoots were picked for your father
O'er many a spring ... now they're sent to you*

So this custom may ne'er be forgotten

“Please read this to your mistress,” he added.

The younger Princess could tell that the elderly priest had composed his letter with great care, and the sincerity expressed in his poem was touching—more moving, in fact, than any she had received from Prince Niou, who employed all his wiles to produce florid, bombastic expressions of sentiment that lacked true depth. Tears filled her eyes, and she had one of her attendants write out her reply:

*During this spring of loss, to whom should I show
These fiddlehead greens nestled in a basket
A memento of one no longer with me*

She had the ascetic’s messenger properly rewarded.

The younger Princess, who was in her prime and aglow with youthful beauty, had lost a little weight as a result of the sorrows that she had endured. Her slender figure and pale features made her seem all the more elegant and noble, so that she was now the very image of her late sister. In the past, whenever the two princesses sat side by side, they each displayed a distinctive beauty and did not appear to resemble one another all that closely. Now, however, the likeness was so striking that if one could forget that the older Princess had passed away, it was possible just by looking at her younger sister to imagine that she was still in this world.

Whenever they noted the resemblance, her women would share bitter regrets. “The Middle Counselor mourned our late mistress ceaselessly, mornings and nights, saying how much he longed to keep her, to gaze upon her form even as one might regard a molted shell as a memento. Our young mistress is so like her sister that she would have been a perfect match for him ... but alas, that was not to be her destiny.”

Some of the men who served at Kaoru’s nearby manors or who were part of his escort continued to call on the villa at Uji, and so he took advantage of their comings and goings to use them as messengers and keep up a correspondence with the younger Princess. Through his letters she gleaned that the reports she heard were true, that Kaoru was listless and distracted as a result of his continuing grief and that he was prone to breaking down in tears even after the arrival of the New Year. It was clear that the attachment he felt for her sister had been anything but fleeting or shallow, and she realized how genuine his feelings of loss were.

Niou's behavior was constrained by his position in court society, and because he could not go to Uji as he pleased, he resolved to bring the Princess to the capital.

Kaoru called on Niou soon after the private imperial banquet on the Day of the Rat,³ an event that marked the close of the busy season of New Year celebrations at the court. He had been feeling forlorn, thinking that there was no one else to whom he could speak and lift the burden of grief that filled his heart. He arrived in the early evening to find Niou sitting near the edge of the veranda lost in pensive reverie and gazing out into the still, melancholy twilight. He was tentatively playing his thirteen-string koto, admiring the fragrance of the plum blossoms that he favored. Kaoru broke off a lower branch of the plum tree and presented it to his friend. The scent was gracefully alluring. Niou found it perfectly suited his frame of mind at that moment, and he composed the following:

*Do these blossoms reveal the heart of the man
Who plucked this branch ... they show no outer color
Yet are permeated with a secret scent*

The poem's insinuation that Kaoru might be thinking of taking the younger Princess at Uji for himself prompted this reply:

*Had I known these blossoms whose beauty I admire
Would bring nothing but resentful allegations
I would have taken greater care when plucking them*

"What a nuisance they've become," he playfully teased. His relationship with Niou was warm and cordial.

When their conversation turned to more intimate matters, Niou asked about the situation at the villa in Uji. Kaoru confessed that his grief for the older Princess was still intense, that not a day had gone by since her death when he didn't long for her. Amidst both laughter and tears, he described all of those occasions when he had shared with his lost love experiences of poignant beauty or exquisite delight. Niou, who was passionate by nature and prone to shed tears rather easily, even over someone else's sorrow, was soon wringing out his own sleeves—a show of sympathy from a trusted friend. Just then, the very sky began to cloud over, as if it was equally sensitive to Kaoru's mood.

A violent wind arose that evening, and the chill air made it feel as if winter was still with them. Although the lamps were constantly blowing out and the

darkness made it hard for the two men to see one another, it couldn't obscure their fragrance.⁴ Since neither man had been able to say everything that he felt needed to be said, they could not bring themselves to break off their conversation and leave things unspoken, but continued talking deep into the night.

Niou suspected that Kaoru was not telling him everything about the affair with the older Princess at Uji—a pure relationship that Kaoru had assured him was unlike any other in the world—and so he pressed him for further details.

“Really, now ... do you expect me to believe that that's all there is to your story?” he asked, evidently assuming that every man shared his own amorous proclivities. Yet despite Niou's fickle nature, he *was* sensitive and understanding. His manner of speech was beguiling as he talked about various things, consoling Kaoru one moment, drawing him out another, encouraging his companion to unburden himself little by little of the many unbearable sorrows locked inside his heart. As a result, Kaoru eventually opened up and felt more cheerful, as if the gloom that enshrouded him had cleared.

Niou discussed various matters, including his plans to bring the younger Princess to the capital to be closer to him.

“I'm very pleased to hear that,” Kaoru responded. “Things have not gone for her as I would have wished, and I feel that it's all my fault. I find it impossible to forget her older sister, and she's the only memento I have of my lost love. That's why I consider her—and you must not misinterpret my motives here—someone I must treasure and do all I can to support so long as my help is not objectionable to you.” Kaoru went on to explain briefly how the late Princess had tried to get him to accept her younger sister as a substitute, to think of them as one and the same. Of course, he left out any mention of the night he spent with the younger Princess, when, like cuckoos in Iwase Forest, they spoke directly to one another.⁵ In his heart, however, his sense of regret was gradually accumulating. After all, his beloved, whose death had left him inconsolable, had urged him to take her sister instead, and now he felt that he should have done exactly as he was told. Still, he tried to put such thoughts out of his mind. *It does no good to dwell on it now. If I allow myself to go on brooding this way, my heart will be corrupted and everyone involved will end up feeling miserable and foolish.* Kaoru was convinced that if he did not sincerely look after the younger Princess and help with her move to the capital, no one else would. Thus, he began to make preparations.

Lovely young women and page girls, all of good breeding, were brought in to serve at the Uji villa, and the attendants, looking overjoyed to be leaving this remote locale for the capital, were busily absorbed in their preparations. In

contrast, their mistress was extremely depressed and lonely at the thought of allowing her own personal Fushimi to fall to ruin,⁶ and so she felt no end of sorrow at the impending move. Despite her reservations, it would not do at all for her to stubbornly refuse to go and lock herself away here. Prince Niou sent messages to her, asking how she could even consider remaining at a place that would surely break the deep bond between them. She had to admit that he had a point, since it was hard for him to come to Uji. Still, she had promised her father that she would not abandon the villa, and so her mind was in turmoil as she considered the best course of action.

The move was set to take place early in the second month. As the day drew nearer, she yearned to remain behind and watch as the trees, which were just then in bud, came into full flower, and she spent mornings and nights lost in solitary thoughts, fretting about everything—about giving up views of the mists that covered the mountain peak,⁷ about going to some temporary abode where she would embarrass herself and become a laughingstock. The three-month period of mourning may have been over, but she felt that changing out of her mourning robes and undergoing ritual purification was a betrayal of her late sister, as if her grief was somehow shallow. Because she had never known her mother and had no memory of seeing her face, she never experienced wistful longing for her. In her heart, she had wanted to wear robes dyed a dark gray in memory of her sister, whom she had always considered a substitute for her mother. However, because custom dictated that she wear a lighter shade, her dissatisfaction and sorrow were boundless.

Kaoru dispatched a carriage, an escort, and a yin-yang master to accompany the younger Princess to the river where the lustration rites were performed. He sent a poem as well:

*How fleeting is time ... no sooner did you put on
Those robes of charcoal hue than misty spring arrived
With new robes and cherry buds unloosed to blossom⁸*

Just as his poem suggested, he presented her with many fine, colorful robes as well. The gifts for the women who would accompany their mistress to the capital were in no way extravagant, but they were numerous and chosen with extraordinary thoughtfulness to be perfectly appropriate to the status of each recipient.

“The kindness the Middle Counselor displays, no matter what the occasion, is truly rare in this world,” the attendants remarked to the Princess, “and it shows that he will never forget this place. No one else, not even a brother, would ever

treat you as considerately as he does.” To the older attendants, who were no longer drawn to ostentatious displays, it was the gesture of kindness itself that so profoundly touched their hearts.

The younger attendants were feeling vaguely lonely and dissatisfied, knowing that the Middle Counselor, whom they had grown used to seeing on so many occasions, would now become a stranger to them after their mistress moved. “Oh, how our lady will miss him,” they told each other.

Kaoru himself arrived at Uji in the early morning one day prior to the planned move to the capital and was shown into the same guest room that he always used. Memories of his lost beloved’s appearance and her gentle manner of speaking came flooding back to him. *If she were still alive, she would have gradually grown close to me, and I would have taken her to the capital first, just as Niou is now about to move her younger sister. True ... she kept her distance from me, but she also never acted in a way that would shame or embarrass me. In the end, it was the strange workings of my own heart that kept us apart.* These reflections brought nothing but pain. Recalling the opening in the panel door that he had once used to spy on the sisters, he slid over to it and peered through; but because the blinds to the interior room across the way were lowered, he couldn’t make out anything.

The women inside the blinds were also sharing mournful memories of their late mistress. The younger Princess in particular could not stop her tears, which flowed endlessly like the river that she would have to cross on the morrow, nor could she focus on her pending journey as she lay there staring off with a vacant expression. Just then, a message from Kaoru was brought to her: “I have nothing special to tell you about the feelings of grief and longing that have accumulated inside me over the past few months, but if I could at least unburden myself of a small portion of the melancholy that fills my heart, I might find some comfort. Do not make me feel uncomfortable as you always do by treating me as a stranger. I feel increasingly estranged from this place as it is.”

“I don’t mean to make you feel uncomfortable,” the Princess replied, “but for some reason I’m not feeling like my normal self. I’m confused, and so I want to avoid saying anything offensive or foolish.” Her ladies-in-waiting knew that she was distraught, but they insisted she speak with the Middle Counselor anyway, urging her to take pity on him. He was received just outside the sliding panel doors.

Kaoru exuded such youthful grace and elegance that the Princess felt diffident in his presence. Since she was now seeing him again after a long absence, he seemed to her startled eyes more resplendent than ever, and he looked every bit the part of a magnificent gentleman whose thoughtfulness and self-possession

made him different from every other man. The Princess gazed on him, overwhelmed by a profound sense of sorrow and compassion. His presence stirred remembrances of her sister, whose image was always in her heart and mind.

"I could never exhaust all the things I should like to say about the late Princess," Kaoru began, "but it would be inauspicious to talk of her on a day like today. I too must move in the near future and will be residing close to the villa on Nijō where you'll be staying. It seems common parlance for people who are close to say that they can always call on one another in times of need, whether at morning or late at night, but I hope you understand that if something comes up and you want to have a heart-to-heart talk, I want always to be here for you as long as I live. Of course, in this world people are of different minds when it comes to such matters as this, and since you may find my offer meddlesome, I can't simply take it for granted that you will agree."

"My deepest desire is to never be separated from my home here,"⁹ she replied, "but now that you tell me you will be moving closer to my new home, my heart is in utter chaos, and I don't know how to answer you."

Her voice trailed off at points, making it hard for Kaoru to catch every word she said. Still, he was greatly affected by her sorrowful demeanor, which he could sense through the panel door; and because her behavior put him in mind of her older sister, the thought that she was to go to another man as a result of his own encouragement left him feeling regretful and frustrated. Nothing could be done about it now, however, and so he said nothing about that night that they spent together. He was usually so candid and direct that his silence concerning that incident made it look to the Princess as if he had perhaps forgotten about it.

The scent and color of the red plum close by in the front garden were so warmly inviting that apparently even the warbler singing there was unable to just pass it by. The scene was a poignant reminder that this spring "was not the spring of old,"¹⁰ and, as they shared stories about the past and the one no longer with them, they felt lost and disoriented. It was an affecting moment. The breeze wafted the fragrance of the plum blossoms toward them and it mingled with Kaoru's ethereal scent. Though not the fragrance of orange blossoms,¹¹ the mingled scents were just as effective in calling forth memories of the past. The Princess recalled how that plum tree had captivated her older sister. It had provided so much pleasure, providing a distraction from the tedium of idleness or comfort from the sorrows of the world. The Princess's emotions overwhelmed her, and she composed the following:

Though no one will be left to view the plum in bloom

*At this rustic villa buffeted by rough winds
It will still give off a scent that evokes the past*¹²

Kaoru could just barely make out her words, since her voice was so hushed and halting, and so he replied in kind, murmuring his poem in a warmly familiar voice:

*This plum tree whose blossoms once brushed against my sleeves
Is still fragrant as ever ... is it to be moved
Transplanted to another dwelling not my own*

He tried to hide tears that he could not stop by delicately brushing his eyes with his sleeves. Then, with a few more words, he took his leave. “I hope that we may meet like this again. I feel comfortable speaking with you, no matter what we discuss.”

Before he left, he gave instructions to the staff regarding their preparations for the move the following day. Since it had been decided that the homely bearded watchman would remain behind as caretaker, Kaoru left additional orders for his retainers serving at nearby manors to assist in the upkeep of the villa, and he even went so far as to make arrangements for the practical day-to-day management of the estate.

Bennokimi spoke to her mistress, saying, “It shames me terribly to have lived much longer than I ever expected, and people would think it highly inauspicious for an old woman like me to accompany you to your new residence. Thus, I do not wish to be considered one who still lives in this world.” Although she had changed her appearance, having donned the robes of a nun, Kaoru insisted that she appear before him, and he was greatly affected when he saw her. As always, they talked about old times. “I certainly intend to visit this place from time to time,” Kaoru said, “but it would feel lonely and desolate with no one around I could trust. I am thus moved and grateful knowing that you will remain here for me.” He began to weep and could not continue.

“How cruel it is that the longer I live, the more intense are my feelings of weariness with the world,”¹³ Bennokimi replied. “Wondering what I shall do now that my mistress is abandoning me, I’m sunk in dark thoughts, resentful of the whole world,¹⁴ and the regrets and attachments I feel are a deep sin that will hinder my salvation.” Her senile grumbling, in which she gave vent to all her concerns, seemed a bit self-centered under the circumstances, but Kaoru comforted her.

She was well along in years, but because she had shorn all traces of the

flowing hair that had been her glory in the old days, the area around her forehead looked slightly more youthful, giving her features a rather refined elegance for a nun. Observing her, Kaoru was filled with a sense of powerful regret. *When my lost love was suffering so, why didn't I allow her to become a nun like this old woman? The merit accrued by taking vows would very likely have extended her life ... and if she were still alive, I'd be able to engage her in warm, deeply felt conversations.*

He envied the fact that Bennokimi had been able to take vows, and so he pulled aside the standing curtains that separated them a little and talked with her at his leisure. It was true, she had grown old and feeble, but her demeanor and manner of speech were not at all unpleasant. It was apparent that she retained traces of a woman of graceful dignity and taste.

*Had I cast myself into the river
That first flowed from the tears I shed for her
Would I have been left behind to live on*

She was on the verge of tears as she spoke.

“It would have been a grave sin for you to have taken your life,” Kaoru responded. “How would you have been able to reach the distant shore? Such a terrible deed would surely have condemned you to sink to the depths of the river of the dead. You must always consider the world and everything in it empty and fleeting.”

*Even were you to sink in the river of tears
Where you cast yourself, you would never forget her
But churn constantly in the rapids of longing*

“When will we ever find even a small degree of solace in this world of woe?” Kaoru felt as though his love had no end.¹⁵ Gazing out blankly in melancholy reverie, he didn’t feel up to returning to the capital, but in the end he reluctantly made his way home. The sun had already gone down, but he worried that certain people might censure him for spending the night at the Uji villa without good reason.

Bennokimi told her mistress what the Middle Counselor had said and described his state of mind. The old lady-in-waiting was lost in the darkness of a grief that she found increasingly difficult to assuage. All of the other attendants were happily preparing to leave for the capital. They busily prepared their clothes, oblivious to how old and wizened they looked, and were so preoccupied

with prettying themselves up that they made Bennokimi all the more conscious of her drab robes. She gave voice to her distress:

*On the Strand of Sleeves, where all it seems are busy
Sewing robes, preparing to leave, a lonely nun
Soaks her sleeves in tears that drip like brine from seaweed*

The Princess replied:

*Are my sleeves different from those the nun
Soaks with briny tears ... mine too have been soaked
By the waves on which I've been cast adrift*

"I feel that it will be extremely difficult for me to settle comfortably into my new residence," the Princess added, "and since I do not want this villa to fall apart, I will try to come back here, circumstances permitting. We will surely see one another again. Still, I feel increasingly anxious about leaving you alone and forsaken. Just because you've become a nun, it doesn't mean you have to shut yourself away completely. You must come to see me from time to time, whenever you are moved by more worldly emotions." She spoke with gentle warmth to Bennokimi, then bequeathed to her those items among the personal belongings of the late Princess that were appropriate for use by a nun. "Seeing how much more deeply despondent you are compared to the others, I'm convinced that there must have been a special bond between you and my sister and me. You are now closer and dearer to me than ever."

When Bennokimi heard these words, she broke down and wept uncontrollably, like a little girl yearning for her mother.

After sweeping the villa clean and putting everything away, carriages were pulled around. The escort included many courtiers of the fourth and fifth rank. Prince Niou had desperately wanted to accompany the Princess back to the capital, but his presence would have required a much more ostentatious procession, which would have been inappropriate in this case. Thus, he arranged to have the move handled discreetly, while he himself waited impatiently at the Nijō villa. Niou had assumed responsibility for the overall planning of the move, but Kaoru, who had also provided a large contingent for the escort, was the one who saw to it that all the little details were properly managed.

"The sun will soon be setting." With both the women inside the villa and the men of the escort outside urging their lady to set forth, the Princess was terribly flustered. Unsure of where she was headed, she felt helplessly forlorn. One of

the ladies-in-waiting, a woman named Taifu no kimi, was riding in the Princess's carriage. She smiled at her mistress.

*Because we chose to live on, we have reached
These joyful shallows ... what if we had cast
Ourselves into Uji's doleful waters¹⁶*

The Princess considered her sentiments deplorable: *How different her attitude is from Bennokimi's!*

Another lady-in-waiting replied:

*We shall not forget our lingering grief
For those things that are past and gone ... and yet
Today our hearts go forth in happiness*

Both of these women were among the older attendants, and they had seemed attached to the Princess's older sister. Now, however, their feelings were different, and they were strictly observing the prohibition against dwelling on the past or saying anything inauspicious on a special day like today. *What a dismal world it is*, the Princess reflected. And with that, she no longer felt up to any further conversation.

As they set out on the journey, the Princess soon realized just how arduously steep the mountain road to the far-off capital was. She had been hurt by Niou's infrequent visits to Uji, but now she understood a little better why he had not come more often. The seventh-day moon was shining clear and bright, and while she was looking out on the charming play of lights and shadows in the mist, she felt exhausted by the unaccustomed rigors of her first distant journey and sank into a melancholy reverie.

*Gazing up, I see the moon rising in its course
From the mountains' ridgeline ... it despairs of finding
A home in this world and must come back to these hills*

Preoccupied with doubts about what would become of her after moving to her new residence, she was anxious about her future and wanted to go back to a time when her troubles were nothing compared to the uncertainties that she was about to face.

The night was well advanced by the time she arrived at the Nijō villa. When she entered the magnificent estate constructed amidst the three-leaf and four-leaf

*sakigusa*¹⁷—a villa that dazzled her eyes with a brilliant splendor that she had never seen before—an impatient Prince Niou emerged and went over to the carriage to personally help her down. It was immediately apparent that Niou himself had lavished attention on her quarters, including the rooms for her ladies-in-waiting, making sure that all of the furnishings and accessories were absolutely perfect. The place was more than she had dared hope for—it was ideal. Some people at court, uncertain as to how Prince Niou would treat her in the end, had expressed skepticism about the Princess's status as a wife. Now that that status was suddenly secured, they were surprised and looked at her in a new light, curious to know the special qualities that made her so attractive to their fickle lord.

Kaoru had been planning to move to his residence on Sanjō after the twentieth, and so for the past several days he had been dropping by to see how preparations were progressing. Because the place was close to the Nijō villa, he decided to pay yet another visit there late on the night of the Princess's move to ask how things had gone. The men he had dispatched to serve as her escort returned and reported to him what they had observed. When he learned that Niou was smitten with the Princess, he was of course happy to hear it, but at the same time, foolish though it was, his heart was assailed by feelings of regret and discontent. He whispered over and over to himself, "If only I could go back and make her mine ..."¹⁸

*Although the boat that plies the lake of faithful grebes
Never set full sail nor reached its destination
It did come within sight of those glimmering shores*¹⁹

His poem suggested that, despite his wishes of good fortune for Niou and the Princess, he also wanted to say something inauspicious.

Genji's son had been planning to give his daughter, Roku no kimi, to Niou this very month. Niou, however, disrupted those plans by receiving this strange and unexpected woman at Nijō. After showing such care and consideration in taking the Uji Princess as his wife, Niou avoided the Rokujō estate for a while. The Minister was terribly displeased, and when Niou learned of his uncle's reaction, he felt bad and would from time to time send a letter to Roku no kimi. As part of his plans, the Minister had been busily preparing for his daughter's coming-of-age ceremony, at which she would don her first train. He would have been subjected to ridicule at the court had he postponed the event, and so he went ahead with it later that month after the twentieth.

Genji's son would regret allowing Kaoru to go to another household, and even

though marriages within a family had nothing special to recommend them, he wanted the Middle Counselor as a son-in-law. *If only I could arrange for him to marry my daughter. He seems so lonely and distraught over having lost the woman with whom he had been secretly in love all these years.* With these thoughts in mind, he dispatched a suitable intermediary to gauge Kaoru's interest. Kaoru, however, was coldly indifferent and dismissed the idea, saying, "I've witnessed the vanity of this world with my own eyes, and find it cruelly tiresome. Since I am cursed, doomed to misfortune, I'm unwilling to consider such a proposal under any circumstances."

Genji's son resented this rejection. *Kaoru too? How could he treat so cavalierly a proposal made in good faith?* The two of them may have been half brothers, but Kaoru was a man of surpassingly admirable character who made others feel diffident in his presence, and so the Minister could not bring himself to press the matter any further.

The season when cherry trees were in full bloom arrived. Kaoru gazed across from his new residence on Sanjō toward the blossoms at the Nijō villa and was reminded of the cherry blossoms at that rustic abode in Uji, now deserted with no master to watch over it. "Do they scatter with thoughtless ease?"²⁰ Kaoru murmured a snatch of verse to himself and then, his heart still unsettled, headed off to the Nijō villa. Recently Niou preferred to spend most of his time at his villa and was growing more familiar and contented living with the Uji Princess. Kaoru was gratified to see that Niou was being a faithful husband, but that feeling was, as usual, accompanied by a strange sense of unease; he continued to regret not taking the Princess for himself. Still, he was genuinely touched and relieved.

Kaoru and Niou talked about various things, and when evening came, Niou announced that he must set off for the palace. With his carriage readied and a large escort gathered, Kaoru retired from the chambers where he had been received and went over to the hall where the Princess was residing. The appearance of her quarters was a far cry from the austere villa at Uji. She lived in a richly elegant style behind her blinds. Kaoru glimpsed the shadow of an attractive page girl silhouetted against the blinds and summoned her to give a message to the Princess. A mat was brought out for him to sit on, and then an attendant came out—evidently a woman who was familiar with him from the old days—to convey her mistress's reply.

"I reside so near that I assumed there would never be any distance between us, that I would always be able to visit, day or night," he began, "but I was afraid to do so, mindful that if I called on you without a proper reason, tongues would begin to wag, criticizing me for being overly familiar. And all the while that I

refrained from coming here, I couldn't help but feel just how much the world has changed. Seeing the tops of the cherry trees here blooming in the spring haze, my heart was filled with poignant memories."

It hurt the Princess to see how despondent Kaoru looked, and she was moved to pity. *Truly, if my older sister were still alive, she and I would have been able to see each other, coming and going at our ease ... together we certainly would have spent our days with carefree hearts, enjoying the colors of the flowers, the singing of the birds in each respective season.* As these thoughts and memories came to her, the weariness and sad regrets she felt in her present circumstances were even greater than the loneliness she had experienced when completely shut away from the world at Uji.

Her ladies-in-waiting gently prodded her.

"You must not be aloof with him nor treat him as you would an ordinary guest. You must show him now that you fully understand and appreciate the boundless consideration and generosity that he has shown you."

Despite the urgings of her attendants, the Princess found it hard to speak to him at her ease, without an intermediary; while she was hesitating, Niou appeared to take his leave. Dressed in his finest court robes, he cut a magnificent figure. When he caught sight of Kaoru, he remarked, "Why are you treating the Middle Counselor this way, making him sit outside the blinds? Really, my dear, you must acknowledge the consideration that he has shown in looking after you ... indeed, his attentiveness has been most extraordinary. It may be foolish of me, since I'm the one who ought to be concerned about his intentions, and yet here I am pointing out that you may come to regret the sin of treating him coldly. You should have him seated closer to you so that you may share stories about the old days."

He paused, then added, "Of course, who knows what might happen if you become too familiar with him. After all, he does seem to have ulterior motives." Because he had given her contradictory advice, she was troubled, torn in her heart between her duties to her husband and to the man who had helped her. *I cannot now disregard the feelings of one whose kindness has touched me so deeply. After all, the Middle Counselor might serve as a stand-in for my late sister. Apparently, he expressed a wish to do just that. If only I could show him that I fully appreciate all that he has done for me.* Yet, despite these thoughts, she remained tentative, since her jealous husband had expressed ambivalence about her relationship with Kaoru.

¹ *Kokinshū* 870 (Furu no Imamichi, sent to Nanmatsu, who was in retreat in Isonokami, to congratulate him on his promotion to the fifth rank): “Because the sunlight shines on all alike, even through the densest thickets, I hear the flowers have bloomed at the rustic villa in Furu Isonokami as well.”

² Capping a verse generally refers to the poetic practice in which one person composes the first seventeen syllables of a *tanka*, and another person completes or “caps” the poem by composing the final fourteen syllables. The order of composition could be reversed, with the final fourteen syllables composed first; the practice of capping, along with the usual demands of call and response, eventually paved the way for the formal development of linked verse.

³ Usually held on either the twenty-first or twenty-third day of the first month.

⁴ *Kokinshū* 41 (Ōshikōchi no Mitsune): “The darkness of a spring night tries in vain to obscure things ... for while we may not see the color of the plum blossoms, can their fragrance be hidden?” (alluded to earlier in the *Wakana* chapter, Part 1).

⁵ This poetic allusion is cited in later annotations, but the source of the poem is uncertain. “If you yearn for me, then do not send an intermediary, but come yourself and call to me directly, as the cuckoos of Iwase Forest call to one another.”

⁶ *Kokinshū* 981 (Anonymous): “Let me say, I would live my life out here, for I would regret it were my villa at Fushimi in Sugawara to fall to ruins.” Fushimi is near the ancient capital of Nara.

⁷ *Kokinshū* 31 (Ise): “Is it because the wild geese dwell in a place with no blossoms that they fly away, abandoning the spring mists that rise up?”

⁸ The poem plays on the word *kasumi*, which means both “mist” and, when used in the phrase *kasumi no koromo*, “mourning robes” (*sumi* means “charcoal”). The poem also turns on the word *himotoku*, which means “untie” or “unloose,” but which, when used in connection with flowers, can also mean “burst open” into bloom. The image of cherry blossoms being untied like clothing implies that with the coming of the season of cherry blossoms, the younger Princess will put away her mourning clothes. This implication is made clear in the line that follows the poem.

⁹ *Kokinshū* 969 (Ariwara Narihira): “Now that I understand just how painful it is to wait for someone, I shall not be separated from the home of one who may await me, but will visit without fail.”

¹⁰ *Tales of Ise*, section 4 [also *Kokinshū* 747] (Ariwara Narihira): “Are not the moon and the spring the moon and spring of old? Only I myself am unchanged, am as I was before.”

¹¹ *Kokinshū* 139 (Anonymous): “The fragrance of the orange blossoms awaiting the fifth month brings to mind the perfumed sleeves of a lover from long ago” (also alluded to in the *Hanachirusato* chapter).

¹² Because of the orthographic practices of mid-Heian writing, the word for “storm,” *arashi*, could have been read as *araji*, a wordplay that would give the phrase *miru hito mo araji* the meaning of “there is no one here to view (the blossoms).” If that wordplay is disregarded, as some commentators suggest it should be, the emphasis of the poem shifts to the turmoil the Princess is suffering: “Like the blossoms I view I too am buffeted/By storms at my rustic villa where the plum tree/Gives off a fragrance that reminds me of the past.”

¹³ *Gosenshū* 608 (Anonymous): “How strange that my feeling of weariness with this world should grow more intense. How should I put it out of my thoughts?”

¹⁴ *Shūishū* 953 (Ki no Tsurayuki): “It is because I alone suffer a surfeit of indignities that I have grown resentful of the whole world.”

¹⁵ *Kokinshū* 611 (Ōshikōchi no Mitsune): “Whither will it go, this love of mine that has no end ... the only destination I desire is meeting you.”

¹⁶ The poem plays on the double sense of the word *uji/ushi* (meaning “Uji River” or “river of sorrow”), which orthographic conventions made possible. This double meaning occurs throughout the last few chapters of the narrative, but it had poetic antecedents (e.g., *Kujō Udaijinshū* 58).

¹⁷ This is a reference to lines from the *saibara* “This Magnificent Estate” alluded to in the *Hatsune* chapter.

¹⁸ This appears to be a poetic allusion, but the source is not certain.

¹⁹ The lake of grebes, a bird known for being a faithful mate, is Lake Biwa. The poem uses a conventional epithet (a pillow word, *makura kotoba*) for Lake Biwa, *shinateruya*. The meaning of this epithet has not

been established with absolute certainty, but seems to imply something like “shining slopes” (i.e., “shining-sloped Lake Biwa”). I have rendered it here as “glimmering shores” to suggest the shining of the waves on the slopes of the shores.

20 *Shūishū* 62 (Priest Egyō): “Cherry blossoms at an abandoned hut amidst a field of sparse reeds ... with no master to watch over them, do they scatter in the wind with thoughtless ease?”

XLIX

Yadoriki

Trees Encoiled in Vines of Ivy

AMONG THE imperial wives in those days was the daughter of a former Minister of the Left.¹ She had gone to the palace when His Majesty was still Crown Prince and resided initially in the Reikeiden before being installed in the chambers of the wisteria courtyard as the Fujitsubo Consort. Being the first of His Majesty's wives, she was deeply cherished by him. She was not, however, first in his affections and, as a result, did not enjoy the same degree of good fortune as the Akashi Empress, whose many fine children had all grown to splendid adulthood. Indeed, she had but one child, who was known as the Fujitsubo Princess.² Having been thus fated to suffer the bitter disappointment of losing His Majesty's attentions to a rival, the Consort sought consolation by raising her daughter with the greatest care in hopes of securing a glorious future for her descendants.

The Fujitsubo Princess was exceptionally lovely, and His Majesty doted on the girl. While it was true that she did not receive as much public acclaim or attention as the First Princess—who, of course, was without equal at the court—her private circumstances in no way paled by comparison. The family fortune and reputation her late grandfather had left as his legacy had not declined in the least, and so her status was secure. Moreover, no detail had been overlooked in the effort to ensure that everything around her, beginning with the attire and grooming of her ladies-in-waiting, was absolutely flawless. At every event in every season, she displayed a modish taste that was strikingly chic.

Plans were made to stage the Fujitsubo Princess's coming-of-age ceremony and the donning of her first train in the early spring of her fourteenth year. Her mother did all she could to make sure the event would be extraordinary, overseeing every last detail and bringing out all the ancient treasures handed

down through her father's household—items that had been collected expressly for just this sort of occasion. Then, suddenly, during the summer prior to the ceremony—just as preparations were at their most hectic—a malevolent spirit possessed the Fujitsubo Consort, who fell ill and passed away.

His Majesty was devastated by this indescribable loss. Senior nobles and officials remarked that they too would miss the Consort terribly, for she had always been kind and gentle. Even the lower-ranking women who served at the palace mourned her death.

The Fujitsubo Princess naturally grieved more than anyone else, her childish heart overwhelmed by loneliness and sorrow. When His Majesty heard how forlorn his daughter was, he took pity and had her moved back to the Fujitsubo immediately after the customary memorial services and forty-nine-day period of confinement were complete. He called on her every day after she returned to the palace; the air of dignity her gray mourning robes imparted endeared her to him. He also noticed how self-possessed she was, exhibiting a calm, quiet poise that was, if anything, superior to her late mother's demeanor. Her appearance reassured him a little about her future prospects, yet he remained worried about her circumstances. She was on her own now, with no one—not even an uncle—to look after her interests and protect her. She did have two half brothers—one an official in the Treasury, the other a Master in the Bureau of Palace Repairs—but they were men with little standing or influence at the court. Thus, His Majesty could not stop fretting, for he was aware that any noblewoman, but most especially a Princess, would experience nothing but difficulties and misfortune if she had to rely on people of undistinguished lineage for support.

The chrysanthemums in the garden in front of the Seiryōden were now in full bloom and gorgeously tinted by autumn frosts. A chill rain that day gave the sky an achingly sad appearance. His Majesty went to call on the Fujitsubo Princess the first thing in the morning and, as they were talking about her late mother, he found himself charmed by her responses, which were guileless without being immature.

Is there no one who would cherish and keep her, he asked himself, some man capable of appreciating her beauty and virtue? He recalled the time when his own father, Emperor Suzaku, decided to send the Third Princess to Genji. At the time I couldn't accept the arrangement and told my father that it was best for a Princess to remain unmarried. But as things turned out, my sister bore an eminent son, a man superior to others who has looked after her very well. She has suffered no loss of the honor and prestige that was her birthright, and she seems to be living a dignified life. If it weren't for Kaoru, something untoward might have happened, and she might well have become an object of ridicule.

After mulling over the situation, His Majesty concluded that he had to secure the future of the Fujitsubo Princess while he was still on the throne, and that he would follow the precedent set by his father. In his mind, there was no better man to be her groom than the Minamoto Middle Counselor. *No one will look unfavorably upon such a match. After all, Kaoru is certainly distinguished enough to stand alongside a Princess. I understand he once had a woman he loved dearly, but I'm sure he wouldn't do anything to dishonor my daughter. Besides, he won't remain single his whole life, and so I had best give him some subtle indications of my interest in this match before it's too late and he arranges a marriage to someone else.*

Father and daughter passed the time in a game of Go, and as daylight waned and a pleasant misty rain fell, His Majesty gazed out at the garden, admiring the way the colors of the chrysanthemums took the twilight glow. He summoned an attendant and asked, "Who will be in service tonight?"

"Two princes, Your Highness: the Treasury Minister and the Governor General of Kōzuke. Oh yes ... the Minamoto Middle Counselor will also be in attendance."

"Inform the Middle Counselor that he is to see me."

Kaoru arrived soon after. Just as His Majesty expected, summoning this young man turned out to be a pleasure, for everything about Kaoru, especially his otherworldly fragrance, which could be detected from a distance, sharply distinguished him from ordinary men.

"The showers today seem gentler than usual, don't you think?" His Majesty began. "With musical entertainments out of place during a period of mourning, the idle time becomes quite tedious, wouldn't you agree? Shall we find some diversion to pass the time?³ How would this be?" With a gesture, Go boards were brought out, and he challenged Kaoru to a match.

Kaoru was always being asked to play Go, and so he was used to sitting in close proximity to the imperial presence. He assumed that this night would be like any other, but then His Majesty remarked, "I have something of great value I'd like to wager on our match, but it's not the sort of thing I can part with lightly. What should I do? I wonder."

Kaoru sensed that these remarks hinted at something significant, and so he became increasingly circumspect and focused. He eventually won the match two games to one.

"How disappointing," His Majesty said. "Well, then ... I suppose you should be allowed to pick a stalk of these flowers here."⁴

Kaoru did not reply, but went down into the garden, broke off a stem, and then stepped back up. He offered this verse:

*If this were a fragrant flower abloom
In some common hedgerow, I would pluck it
At my will, view it to my heart's content*

He spoke in a solemn manner, choosing his words carefully.

His Majesty replied:

*Alas, the chrysanthemums in this garden
Have all withered beneath the frost, save for one ...
How vibrant its lingering colors appear*

Kaoru continued to receive subtle hints like this from time to time, but because it was not his nature to be impulsive, he did not rush into a proposal. *No ... this is not what I really want*, he reflected. *Over the years I've passed up the opportunity to make attractive matches with women of fine sensibility like Roku no kimi or the younger Uji Princess. But now, following the death of my beloved, I feel like a holy man who has to return suddenly to life in the mundane world.*

Such considerations made him conscious yet again of his own peculiar propensities. *After all*, he thought, *there are men who would give anything to be able to marry an imperial princess*. In his heart he knew he would have willingly offered a proposal if the Princess in question was a daughter of the Akashi Empress—but such lofty expectations were presumptuous of him.

Genji's son, the Minister, very much wanted Roku no kimi to go to the Middle Counselor. *Even if Kaoru is reluctant to take her*, he calculated, *I'll plead my case so persuasively that he won't be able to refuse*. By harboring such lofty expectations for his daughter, he was caught off guard and extremely put out when he learned about His Majesty's interest in having Kaoru as a son-in-law. He thus fixed his hopes once again on Prince Niou. Niou was not seriously attracted to Roku no kimi, but at least he had not broken off his occasional exchange of letters with her. *So what if he has a fickle heart*, the Minister told himself. *Who's to say that it's not meant for him to fall in love with her? And even if their bond should prove less than watertight⁵, it would be disappointing and embarrassing if she were to marry a man of mediocre status.*

The discontent harbored by Genji's son was evident when he spoke with the Akashi Empress about his hopes for Roku no kimi. "In this degenerate period of the last stages of the Law, when one must be especially careful looking out for a daughter, even the Emperor himself has to go searching for a son-in-law! It's gotten so bad that even a woman of commoner status must pass through her prime unmarried." He complained so often and with such genuine bitterness that

she grew troubled and finally brought the matter to Niou's attention.

"I feel sorry for the Minister," she said. "For a year now he's been dropping hints, indicating his sincere hopes for his daughter, and you come across as thoughtless by always evading him. The fortunes of a Prince rise and fall depending upon the strength of his alliances at court. Your father has indicated he plans to abdicate soon, and so it behooves you to take this arrangement seriously. Because it is normal for men of commoner status to have only one principal wife, they run the risk of creating difficulties for themselves if they divide their affections by taking another. Yet wouldn't you agree that the Minister, who is a sober and upright gentleman, has managed his relationships with Kumoinokari and the Second Princess well, giving neither side cause for rancor? If things go as planned and you're named Crown Prince, what's to stop you from managing your affairs just as skillfully as my brother and taking as many wives as may please you?"

It was unusual for his mother to speak at length like this, and since Niou had no compelling cause to reject Roku no kimi, her admonition struck him as perfectly reasonable. Still, he had grown accustomed to living entirely as he pleased, and the painful prospect of being shut away in the Minister's excessively prim and proper household was too depressing to bear. At the same time, what his mother had said was true. It would be most unfortunate if he were to give the Minister reason to hold a grudge, and so in the end he had no choice but to give in and agree to the arrangement. Nonetheless, his wayward heart was incapable of settling on one woman. He was reportedly intrigued by Roku no kimi, but he could not stop yearning as well for the middle daughter of the Azechi Major Counselor⁶—his lady of the red plum blossoms—and continued to communicate with her. While all of this was taking place, the New Year arrived.

With the period of mourning over and the Fujitsubo Princess no longer wearing her gray robes, there were fewer reasons than ever for Kaoru to balk at the match. Several people informed him that His Majesty appeared to be waiting for a proposal, and so Kaoru, worried that if he feigned ignorance he would be considered eccentric and discourteous, hinted on several occasions that he was interested. His Majesty of course did not dismiss his suit, and Kaoru eventually learned through intermediaries that a date for the marriage had been set.

He had personally observed the fretful hopes His Majesty harbored for the Fujitsubo Princess, and yet deep inside Kaoru knew he would never get over the grief he had suffered as a result of the death of the lady he had loved so dearly. Thinking back on their relationship, he found it hard to fathom that a woman with whom he shared such a deep bond should have been taken from him so cruelly—fated to die before the two of them had ever experienced genuine

intimacy.

*If only I could find someone who had a passing resemblance to my lost beloved, even a woman of low birth, I would give my heart to her. How I wish I could obtain that magic incense from ancient times! Then I might once more glimpse her image in its smoke!*⁷ Preoccupied by these memories, he was not eagerly anticipating the date of his marriage, even though his bride-to-be was a woman of distinguished lineage.

The Minister now felt it was a matter of some urgency for his own daughter, Roku no kimi, to be married soon, and so he announced that the nuptials would take place in the eighth month. The Uji Princess, who was now settled in the west hall of the Nijō villa, was upset when she heard the news.

So it's come to this, she thought. How will we ever stay together? I've spent my days worrying, knowing that I'm a woman of no importance destined for ridicule. Niou's reputation for fickleness is widely acknowledged, so I never believed his claims of devotion. Then again, whenever we meet, he never treats me callously, and his vows of love seem truly heartfelt and moving. But now, with this turn of events, how will I ever know peace of mind again? Our bond will certainly not be shattered, as it might have been were we commoners, but from now on I will have just cause to feel apprehensive. Since I was born to know misfortune, it seems best to return to my villa.

Of course, if she were to just fade away from the capital without a trace, she knew the rustics in the mountain would wonder what had happened and mock her. To her shame and misery, she realized the folly she had committed by ignoring her father's repeated admonitions to never marry, to never leave her little "grass hut."

Whenever my late sister gave voice to her thoughts, she seemed frail and uncertain on the surface. But what powerful resolve she possessed in her heart! The Middle Counselor is apparently still in mourning, as though he will never forget her, but had she lived she would no doubt have faced the same kind of concerns that trouble me now. She understood very well the woe that is in marriage and wanted to avoid that fate. That's why she did everything she could to keep her distance from the Middle Counselor, even if it meant becoming a nun. I have no doubt that had she lived, she would have taken vows. When I think about her now, how thoughtful and dignified she was! She and Father must be looking down on me, wondering if there's ever been a greater fool than me. She was filled with remorse and sorrow, but since it would serve no purpose to betray her emotions to Niou, she chose to keep them hidden and tried to bear up, pretending all the while that she had heard nothing about his impending marriage.

Niou treated her with greater warmth and sensitivity than usual, constantly swearing to her that their love would last and that she could rely on his devotion not only during this life, but also for all lives to come. Then, starting from around the fifth month, she began to feel sick and wasn't her normal self. She didn't suffer terribly, but she ate less than usual and had to spend more time lying down and resting. Niou, who had never seen anyone in her condition before, merely attributed her malaise to the heat.

Still, he was worried, unsure what was happening. "Is it possible?" he would ask her. "How are you feeling? I'm told pregnant women suffer these symptoms." She blushed and tried to act as if it were nothing. Since there were no officious attendants around to tell him for sure, he remained in the dark.

When the eighth month arrived, the Uji Princess learned from gossip that was making the rounds the exact dates of the nuptials between Niou and Roku no kimi. Niou never intended to keep the matter from her, but whenever he tried to bring the subject up, he was always overcome by feelings of guilt and pity that rendered him speechless. She found his silence just as cruel as his betrayal. And how could she not have resented him? *It's not as if the marriage is a secret. The whole court knows about it, so why can't he at least have the decency to tell me about it himself?*

Following her move to the capital, nothing serious had come between them until now. On those days when he had to serve at the palace, he rarely stayed on there, preferring instead to return devotedly to Nijō and spend his nights with her. Not once during that period did he indulge his amorous inclinations by seeing another woman. Considering the nature of their relationship to this point, Niou was genuinely worried about how she might react to the sudden change in their lives once he took Roku no kimi as a second wife, and so—perhaps to assuage his own feelings of guilt and pity—he began spending the occasional night at the palace so that his Uji Princess would grow accustomed to not having him with her every night. Not surprisingly, what he intended as an act of kindness, she regarded as another cruel outrage.

When Kaoru heard what was going on, he sympathized entirely with the Uji Princess. *Niou is by nature prone to scatter the showy blossoms of his heart*,⁸ he mused, *and even though he may feel sorry, he will always shift his allegiance to whomever or whatever he deems new and stylish. Roku no kimi comes from a very distinguished house, and they won't let their guard down. They'll keep him under close watch, claiming to be looking after him, and the Uji Princess will have to spend night after night waiting, experiencing loneliness she hasn't known all these months. How sad for her! And how foolish of me to be so conscientious! Why did I yield to Niou? Once I fell in love with the older sister,*

my mind was fixated and my heart, which had once been pure and clear in its commitment to abandon this world, grew turbid and sullied. Yet I remained reluctant to consummate our relationship, for if I had forced myself on her without first winning her heart, that would have violated my true intentions. And so my hopes rested on an ideal imagined future in which she would somehow come to feel a little compassion and be more open and intimate with me. Yet she remained aloof to the end. Of course, she must have felt it was wrong to just send me away. Why else would she have tried to console me by suggesting that I take her sister instead? She claimed that the two of them were as one, but I could not help detesting her proposal. It wasn't what I really desired, and in my resentment I rushed to thwart her plans.

Thinking back on the madness of his unmanly plotting to bring Niou to Uji, Kaoru realized how contemptible he had been. He was overwhelmed with remorse. At the same time, he wanted Niou to be more considerate and mindful of how the events at Uji had actually unfolded. Above all, he felt that Niou ought to show more sensitivity and behave so as not to give rise to the kind of gossip that was now reaching Kaoru's ears. *Ahh, well ... he won't say a word about what happened at that time. He'll never appreciate the help I gave him, or even acknowledge my personal feelings. A man that fickle and selfish will always behave frivolously, and, in the end, he'll lose not just the trust of his women, but of all who know him.* These harsh, unpleasant thoughts arose out of an earnest, single-minded temperament that made Kaoru impatient and irritated with the faults and transgressions of others.

Having lost the woman he loved, Kaoru took no special joy in taking a wife now, even though she was an imperial daughter. *If only I had agreed to marry the Uji Princess!* Recalling the special bond she had shared with her late sister, he found it hard to put her out of his thoughts; with each passing day and month his yearning grew worse. It wasn't just that the two women were sisters, but that they were as close as any siblings could ever be—so close that before the older Princess passed away she had asked Kaoru to think of her and her sister as one and the same. “I would have no regrets,” she told him at the end, “if you had not dashed my hopes by rejecting her. My resentment and disappointment will linger on, binding my spirit to this world.”

Because of Niou's betrayal, Kaoru brooded, she must now be looking down on her sister and suffering greater anguish than ever.

Night after night he would go off to sleep alone—a situation for which he had no one but himself to blame—only to be awakened by the rustling of a faint breeze. He would lie there reflecting on the past and the future and turning over in his mind the Uji Princess's misery.

Kaoru was able to comfort himself on occasion by exchanging playful words or indulging in intimate dalliances with various ladies he was used to having near. Naturally he was fond of them all, but they were merely passing diversions, unable ever to truly capture his heart. The status of a number of these women was not at all inferior to the two Uji Princesses, but they had seen their fortunes decline with the change in government at the time His Majesty's reign began. Many of them were living in rather desperate circumstances when Kaoru rescued them from their genteel poverty and brought them to the Sanjō villa to serve as ladies-in-waiting for his mother. Still, such women did not interest him, for he was committed to living in such a way that when the time came for him to flee this world and take vows, he would not be fettered by any other romantic attachments except for his love of the late Princess.⁹

"My obsession has so twisted and distorted my heart that I find myself in this sorry state," he muttered as he passed an unusually restless night, unable to sleep, tormented over how his attachment to a lost love and his impending marriage to the Fujitsubo Princess would keep him from the religious path he aspired to follow. He looked out at the garden, fascinated by the colors of the flowers twining over the fog-shrouded wattle fence. His eyes were drawn especially to the morning glories, which had a delicate, ephemeral air about them.¹⁰ "They bloom only for the morn,"¹¹ as the poet noted, to teach the truth that all things of this world are ephemeral. Kaoru was inspired by a sense of pity for them. While the shutters were being raised, he continued to lie there alone, dozing for few moments until the dawn broke, watching the morning glories open up to the predawn twilight.

He summoned one of his men. "I shall be going over to the Nijō villa, so quietly bring a carriage round."

"But Prince Niou left for the palace yesterday, my lord, and is still there. His carriage was brought back without him last night."

"That's neither here nor there. The lady in the west hall is not feeling well and I want to see how she's doing and pay my respects. I'm planning to go to the palace myself today, and so I must leave before the sun is up."

He finished grooming and dressing himself, and then went outside and descended the steps into the garden. As he wandered among the flowers, his robes did not look especially voluptuous or showy, but he cut a remarkable figure, with a fresh, casual refinement that would have made anyone who saw him, even at a glance, feel humbled in his presence. His elegant charm was incomparable, a unique quality that even those amorous gallants who strut about putting on grand airs could not match. He pulled a tendril of the morning glory toward him, causing a cascade of dew to fall.

*Why cherish hues seen during this brief morning bloom
Knowing that these flowers I gaze upon will last
Only until the dew upon them disappears*

“They pass so quickly,” he added, whispering to himself. He broke off a stem of morning glory and took it with him, leaving without so much as a glance at the maidenhairs.¹²

As the dawn broke, the mist-veiled sky was a delight to behold. *The women are probably still sleeping and not properly dressed. If I go about rapping on the shutters or doors and clearing my throat to let them know I’m here, I’ll end up looking like some callow young lover. I’ve arrived too early, much too early.* So thinking, Kaoru summoned one of his men and ordered him to peek through the open central gate.

The man returned presently with his report: “The lattice shutters have been raised,” he said, “and the attendants seem to be up and about.”

Kaoru alighted from his horse and strode through the garden, making his way in the mist. The women assumed it was their lord, Prince Niou, returned from a secret rendezvous somewhere, but then that distinctive fragrance, made even more penetrating by the dew dampening Kaoru’s robes, came wafting toward them.

“What an amazingly splendid man,” the younger attendants remarked with saucy casualness.

“Yes, but what a shame he’s such a staid and serious gentleman!”

The women’s calm expressions showed they were not ruffled by this sudden visit, and the soft swishing of their silk robes as they quickly set out a cushion for him created a pleasant effect.

“By permitting me to take a seat here and treating me like any ordinary visitor,” Kaoru said, “you make me feel like a respectable gentleman. However, the sorrow I feel at being kept at a distance outside your blinds will keep me from calling on you very often.”

“If that’s how you feel,” one of the attendants asked, “then what would you have us do?”

“Isn’t there a private room on the north side? A place the older women here use to rest when they’re not in service? I suppose it depends on your mistress’s preference—after all, I have no real cause to complain.”

He leaned against the frame of the doorway, and the attendants, as they always did, encouraged their lady to move closer, saying, “You really should go out to receive him.”

He was by nature quiet and reserved—he had never exhibited the impetuous

behavior typical of young men—and because he had grown increasingly withdrawn of late, the Uji Princess felt less awkward around him, gradually shedding her reticence to the point that she was able to speak directly with him.

“I’ve been worried you aren’t feeling well,” he said. “How are you doing?”

She was embarrassed and did not answer. He was touched and distressed that she should be more subdued and downhearted than normal, and he offered words of advice and comfort, as if he were her older brother, reminding her that she must be prepared for and ready to accept the vicissitudes of marriage.

Her voice and her sister’s had never sounded all that much alike to him before, but now, for some strange reason, they seemed identical. Curious to see how her sickness was affecting her appearance, he wanted to lift a panel of the blind and speak with the Princess face-to-face. However, he checked his impulse, for it would have made him look bad in front of the attendants. He realized once again that in this world no one is without cares.

“It has never been my desire to seek dazzling glory as a way to stand apart from ordinary men,” he said. “My true wish was to pass through this world without experiencing the attachment of love, or the pain of loss. Yet here I am, suffering from a grief that is the consequence of my own heart’s desire and regretting the folly of my actions. I’m so deeply troubled that I no longer have a moment’s peace. When I think about it, I’m convinced my sins of attachment are deeper than those of a man who frets about rank and position. He, at least, has some reason to be troubled, since worldly society values the things he desires.”

As he was talking, he took out the morning glory he had brought with him, placed it on a fan, and presented it to her. The flowers had wilted and taken on a reddish tint, but their coloration was enchanting. He slipped them beneath the blinds.

*I ought to have seen the resemblance and recognized
That she was meant for me ... this bloom of morning glory
Covered with the pearly dew that once vouchsafed our bond*

He had made no special effort to preserve the dew on the flower, but the droplets still clinging to the petals were captivating.

Because the flower would wilt before the dew evaporated, she replied:

*Ephemeral, the flower that faded
Ere the dew disappeared, yet the droplets
That once clung to it are more fleeting still¹³*

“To whom shall *I* cling?” Her voice was hushed, and she could not continue. She had a shy, reserved air about her as her words trailed off, and it made him sad to realize just how closely she resembled his lost love.

“These melancholy autumn skies make one more pensive,”¹⁴ he continued. “Recently I visited the Uji villa, thinking I might divert my thoughts from the tedium of this idle time, but when I arrived I found the garden and enclosure in complete ruins, desolate and bleak.¹⁵ It was really too much to bear. It reminded me of what happened to the Rokujō estate when my father went into retreat at his temple in Sagano during the last two or three years of his life. After he died, anyone who peeked in on the deserted grounds found it hard to control their emotions, and they all returned home weeping at the wretched state of the grasses and trees. None of the people my father kept around him, whether high or low status, was of shallow sensibility, and yet all who had once gathered at the four residences of the estate gradually withdrew, apparently scattering to various places, each living separately and apart from the world. Those of his lower-ranking women who had no one to turn to for support found it harder to control their grief, and in their madness went off to the mountains or forests and eventually became provincial rustics.

“After the Rokujō estate became a tangle of weeds, overgrown with grasses of forgetfulness, my half brother, the current Minister, moved there, as did several of the Akashi Empress’s children, and the grounds were restored to their former glory. At the time, my father’s death seemed the greatest sorrow I could ever suffer, but with the passage of time, my grief slackened, and I realized that everything has a limit. I can say such a thing now because I was a child at the time, and perhaps that old sorrow did not affect me as strongly as my more recent loss. Both deaths equally reveal the tragic impermanence of this world, but I feel as though I’ll never awaken from the nightmare of your sister’s death. I’m troubled that my longing for her is a deeply sinful attachment that may hinder my salvation.”

His tears gave him an air of kindness and sincerity. Anyone who observed his grieving figure at that moment would have been moved, even a person who had no close relationship with his beloved, the late Princess. It is hardly surprising then that her forlorn younger sister, whose heart was in turmoil because of her own troubles, was the most profoundly touched of all. Her anguish and longing seemingly more powerful than ever, she choked up a little and found it difficult to reply. She shared with Kaoru a mutual sympathy for each other’s unbearable sorrows.

After collecting herself, the Princess spoke up at last. “A poet once claimed it is better to live in a mountain hut than in this world of woe,¹⁶ but because I spent

so many years at Uji, I didn't know enough of the world to be able to compare it to my mountain home, and so I couldn't judge whether or not the verse was true. I'd like to go back somehow and live that quiet, peaceful life again, but I cannot do as I wish any more, no matter how strong the desire. That's why I envy Bennokimi's decision to become a nun. I'd love to hear the bell from the temple on the mountain tolling this month in memory of my father. I've been thinking of asking you to take me to Uji on a secret visit."

"I know that you don't want the villa to go to ruin," Kaoru replied, "but what can I do about it? Besides, the mountain path leading there is rough, steep, and difficult to travel even for a man who is free to come and go as he pleases. Though I'm worried about the villa myself, I haven't been able to visit it for a long time. I've relayed to the ascetic all that he is to do to make proper arrangements for your father's memorial services, and I suggest you donate your old home to his temple. Whenever I *did* go to check about it, I couldn't help but be upset at how quickly the residence and grounds had fallen into disrepair, and so I think that giving it to the temple would go some way toward expiating the sin of attachment we hold for the estate. What would you think of such an arrangement? Of course, I will comply with your wishes, whatever you may decide. Just tell me what needs to be done. My deepest hopes would be realized if only you would take me into your confidence and discuss everything without reserve."

He talked with her about various other matters of a more practical nature. Apparently, it was the Uji Princess's intention to join Kaoru in donating copies of sutras and dedicating images of the Buddha for the memorial services. However, when she indicated that she wanted to use those services as a pretext to make a journey to the Uji villa and quietly go into retreat there, Kaoru gently admonished her: "That will not do at all. You must remain serene and noble of spirit in all situations."

Because the sun was up and her attendants were gathering nearby, Kaoru began preparing to leave, knowing that too long a stay might arouse suspicions of an affair. "I can't help feeling awkward, since nowhere else am I required to stay outside the blinds. Still, I shall remain your servant and come again ... even if it means I must meet you like this." He stood up and took his leave.

Niou would surely wonder why Kaoru had come to Nijō in his absence. Mindful of the complications that the Prince's suspicious nature would create, Kaoru summoned the Master in the Offices of the Right Capital, a man who also served Niou as Superintendent in the Chamberlain's office. "I was told—erroneously it appears—that your lord had withdrawn from the palace last night. So I came by this morning, only to find out that he has not returned. Would he

still be at the palace?"

"He'll be withdrawing from service there today."

"I see. Well, in that case, I shall call again this evening." And with that, Kaoru departed.

Every time he heard the Uji Princess's voice, the rustle of her robes or the sound of her movements, he would think of her grace and beauty and ask himself, with increasingly intense feelings of regret, why he had so foolishly gone against the wishes of her older sister. The torment he caused his own heart was a terrible burden, and as he dwelled obsessively on the past and his reasons for yielding to Niou, he couldn't escape the fact that he had no one but himself to blame for the anguish he was suffering.

Kaoru had begun fasting after the death of his beloved. He continued that austerity and practiced his religious devotions day and night with greater zeal than ever. His mother, the Third Princess, had remained childish and thoughtless and naive, and yet even she was worried about his appearance, which she considered frighteningly inauspicious.

"My life will not last for generations,"¹⁷ the Third Princess said, "but for as long as I may see you, please take care of yourself. Since I have taken on the guise of a nun, I would not impede you in any way should you decide to take vows and turn your back on the world. However, if you were to take such a step, I would then feel that my life had been meaningless, and my regrets would be an additional sin, a burden hindering my salvation." Feeling ashamed and sorry, Kaoru decided to be strong and to put all sad thoughts out of his mind so that he might appear carefree when he was with his mother.

The Minister had the northeast residence at Rokujō refurbished for his daughter, Roku no kimi, sparing no expense to have it lavishly decorated and fitted out in expectation of the arrival of Prince Niou. On the sixteenth day of the eighth month, as the moon gradually rose in the sky, the Minister remained on edge, anxiously waiting for the groom. Concerned about how things might turn out—after all, Niou had not been all that keen on the match—he sent a messenger to inquire after his prospective son-in-law.

When the messenger returned, he gave the following report: "It seems that his lordship left the palace earlier this evening and went to his villa on Nijō."

This news caused considerable consternation. *No doubt*, the Minister told himself, *he's gone off to see that woman he's so fond of!* Fully aware of the ridicule his family would face if the evening passed and Niou did not show up at Roku no kimi's quarters, he dispatched one of his sons, a Middle Captain in the Chamberlain's office, with this poem:

*Even the moon in the vast heavens finds shelter
At my abode, but as the evening passes
And we wait, you, my lord, are nowhere to be seen¹⁸*

When Niou had set off for the palace earlier in the day, he was feeling guilty. He knew how upset his Uji Princess would be, and he did not want her to find out that his marriage to Roku no kimi was set to take place that night. He sent her a letter from the palace, and whatever it was she wrote in reply, it obviously touched him deeply, for he secretly made his way back to the Nijō villa the same day. She looked so adorable that he couldn't bring himself to abandon her; because she was so pitiable, he tried to comfort her with every assurance that his affections had not shifted. As he repeated his vows of eternal devotion, the two of them gazed up together at the rising moon. Although the Princess had spent many days worrying about her future, she was determined, come what may, not to let her fears and unhappiness show. Instead, she assumed an aloof, nonchalant mien, and even pretended not to hear the arrival of the Minister's son. Niou was deeply affected by her meek, gentle demeanor.

As soon as Niou heard the Middle Captain arrive, he realized how unhappy the young lady at Rokujō must also be. As he prepared to leave, he told his Uji Princess, "I promise I shall return as quickly as possible. Do not gaze up at the moon alone.¹⁹ I feel as if my own heart is wandering off to the heavens, and it is very painful for me to leave you."

Niou felt so ashamed that he took a less conspicuous passageway back to the main hall. The Princess watched his retreating figure as he left, thinking nothing in particular, but feeling as if her pillow must float away.²⁰

She now recognized the truth that the human heart is all wretchedness and cruelty. *My sister and I were born into sad and desolate circumstances, and from the time we were small children our sole support was our father, who himself had grown discouraged and disappointed with life. We spent many years in that mountain villa of his, and though we found the place tedious and lonely, never once did I consider the world as dreary as I find it now. Whenever I thought of my father and sister, who were taken from me in succession, I felt as though I myself would not live much longer, convinced that no one had ever suffered as much grief as I. Yet I survived after all. My circumstances now seem normal—better in fact than people ever expected for me. Though I never thought my relationship with Prince Niou would last very long, I find it impossible to hate him when he's with me. His kind and gentle behavior always allays my fears. That's why I can't express in words the distress caused by his impending marriage to the Minister's daughter, even though I'm convinced that it will*

destroy the bond between us. Death may have taken my father and sister away from me, but I thought that at least I would be able to see Niou every now and then while we're both alive. The unbearable cruelty with which he abandoned me this evening has left me despondent, confused about my past and future, and unable to suppress the anguish in my heart. Naturally, were I to live long enough, there might be some hope, but ...

She grasped at anything that might bring comfort, but as the clear, brilliant moon rose—so like the pure moon that shines on Mount Obasute²¹—she passed the night tormented by chaotic thoughts. She had always found the soughing of the wind in the pines here warmer and gentler than those violent gusts that blew down the mountain at Uji, but tonight that was not the case, for she thought the sound inferior to the rustling leaves of the oak tree at her old home.

*Never was an autumn wind as piercing
As tonight ... not even in the shadow
Of the pine trees at that mountain villa*

Is it possible she had forgotten the misery she suffered there in the past?

“You must come inside now,” the older attendants insisted. “It’s bad luck to be viewing the moon on your own. And your refusal to taste or even look at the smallest piece of fruit is truly deplorable. What will become of you? It’s difficult to watch, since it brings back such awful memories. It’s too much for us.”

Privately, the attendants lamented the situation:

“Really now ... it’s his marriage to the Minister’s daughter that’s upsetting her.”

“You’re right, but still, I can’t believe he’d abandon our mistress altogether. No matter what you say, a relationship like theirs, which began with such deep love and sincere devotion, would hardly fade away without a trace.”

The Uji Princess found it hard to listen to them prattling on about her affairs, and she wanted nothing more than for them to immediately stop talking. *I shall observe him*, she thought, *and try to learn where his heart truly lies*. Of course, her annoyance at her women may have stemmed from her desire to avoid speaking of this to anyone so that she might nurse her resentment all by herself.

Those women who had been with the Princess from the beginning and knew all that had taken place at Uji continued their conversation.

“The Middle Counselor has always been so kind and considerate to her ... it’s touching to behold.”

“Yes, but their destiny has certainly proved strange.”

Niou felt sorry for his Uji Princess, but he was vivacious by nature, a man

who lived for the present moment. Eager to meet the expectations of the Minister's family, who were waiting for the arrival of a magnificent groom, he put great effort into his appearance, scenting his robes with an ineffable fragrance. When he finally arrived at the Rokujō estate, he found the chambers prepared for him spectacular and his bride—who was neither too small of frame nor too frail—a lady who had grown to perfectly proportioned womanhood.

So far so good, Niou thought, but what of her personality? Is her disposition stern and high-strung? Is her demeanor unyielding and prideful? If she's like that, this is going to be most unpleasant. For all his fevered imaginings, she must not have been all that repulsive, for the affection he bestowed on her could not be considered common in any way. Although it was an autumn night, the dawn seemed to come all too quickly—perhaps because he had arrived so late in the evening.

When he returned to the Nijō villa, he did not go to the west hall to see his Uji Princess straightaway, but withdrew to the main hall to rest for a while. As soon as he got up, he sent the customary morning-after letter to Roku no kimi.

"Well ... he certainly seems to be in a fine mood," whispered one of the ladies-in-waiting in his service that morning.

"Our poor lady in the west hall must be miserable," remarked another. "Even if he holds both wives in equal regard, the lady here will naturally be eclipsed by the splendor of the Minister's household."

This new marriage had unsettled the attendants, and since they were all familiar with the Uji Princess, they spoke anxiously about it, giving vent to their bitter resentment.

Niou would have preferred reading Roku no kimi's reply in the privacy of his own rooms, but he was concerned about his Uji Princess and hurried over to see her, aware of the pain his absence last night must have caused her—especially since the reason they had spent the night apart this time was so unsettling. Though he had just arisen, he was radiantly handsome. His clothes and hair were appealingly disheveled, and because she had been lying down when he entered her chambers, she sat up a little, not wanting him to think she was jealous or upset. The glow of her blushing face seemed lovelier than usual to him this particular morning, and tears immediately welled up in his eyes. He looked at her for a while until she, feeling shy under his gaze, lay down. The lovely lines of the hairstyle that framed her face and the elegant tresses cascading down her back held a special allure for him. Niou found the silence between them awkward, and so instead of offering affectionate words of reassurance, he talked of more mundane matters.

"Why is it that you're always feeling ill like this of late? You kept telling me

it was due to the heat, so I waited for the cooler weather to set in, expecting your condition to improve. But your malady shows no sign of easing. This looks very bad for my reputation, you know. I've tried all sorts of things to help you, but nothing seems to work. It's very strange. I suppose it's best to have the priests continue the healing rites, but what I really want is a priest whose prayers are truly effective. There's a certain bishop ... his name slips my mind right now ... but I must summon him to perform healing services for you during the night."

The Princess found his smooth-talking focus on practical concerns disagreeable, but since there had never been an instance when she refused to answer him, she replied, "I've had this sort of illness in the past, but my constitution is different from other women. This will clear up by itself."

"My, my ... you seem remarkably unconcerned," Niou laughed. *What other woman*, he wondered, *could match her gentle, seductive allure?* Even as that thought was passing through his mind, however, he was feeling irritated and impatient to return to Roku no kimi. His eagerness to see his new bride suggested that his affection for her was just as great as his attachment to the Uji Princess.

Still, he continued to make vows to her, swearing that his devotion would last for all worlds to come. Did Niou do this because he always found his Uji Princess irresistibly attractive whenever he was with her? As she was listening to him, she thought, *It's true ... while I wait for my brief life to run its course,²² his cruel heart will undoubtedly display itself again in this world. Does that mean he will at least keep his promise of devotion to me in future worlds? By holding out such hope it's obvious I will never learn,²³ that I will continue to trust him come what may.*

She seemed to be straining to control her conflicting emotions, but she was unable to endure the hurt any longer, and this day she finally broke down and wept. She did not want to let Niou see the resentments she had been harboring for so long, and she had been careful to hide her true feelings from him, but perhaps because too many sorrows had accumulated in her heart, she could no longer keep them bottled up inside. And once her tears began to flow, she found it impossible to stop them. Ashamed and vexed by her own loss of control, she petulantly turned her back on him.

Niou forcibly pulled her around to face him again and said, "How sweetly adorable I found you, convinced as I was that you believed my vows of devotion. Now I find that you've been estranged from me all along. If that's not the case, then is it possible your affections could have changed in a single night?" He wiped away her tears with his own sleeve.

She smiled faintly. "Just imagine ... you, of all people, wondering if affections

might change in a single night.”

“Come, now, my dear, you’re being childish. I’ve nothing to hide from you, and my conscience is perfectly clear. Besides, if my affections had really shifted, then no matter what excuses I might make, the truth would out. That you know absolutely nothing of the world is at once endearing and frustrating. I suppose it can’t be helped, but you should try looking at things from my perspective for once. A man in my position simply cannot do as his heart desires.²⁴ If my hopes are realized and I am named to the line of succession, then at that point you shall know for certain that I hold you in higher esteem than any other woman. This is not something I could speak about lightly, and so as long as we survive ...”²⁵

Just as Niou was speaking these words, the messenger he had sent with his morning-after letter returned from the Rokujō estate. Because the man was inebriated, he completely ignored protocol and came stumbling loudly up the steps on the south side of the west hall. He had been rewarded with so many robes, which had all been draped over his shoulders, that to the attendants there he looked as though he had dived into the sea like some fisherman and come up with lustrous tangles of marvelous seaweed.²⁶ His appearance made the Princess’s women anxious, as they wondered when their lord could possibly have had the time to send a letter off to Roku no kimi. Niou did not feel he had to go out of his way to conceal the letter the messenger had brought with him, but the reply arrived so promptly that he felt sorry for his Uji Princess all the same. He felt awkward at the tactless display, but it would do little good to reprimand the messenger at this point. Niou had one of the attendants fetch the letter, which he then opened in the presence of the Princess. Seeing that it appeared to be written in the hand of Roku no kimi’s stepmother, the Second Princess,²⁷ he was somewhat relieved and put it down—a rather daring gesture, even for a letter written by proxy.

The calligraphy was dignified and graceful: “I’m embarrassed to be writing this, lest I come off as forward, but no matter how much I urged your bride to respond, she was not feeling up to it.”

*Our maidenflower languishes all the more
On this morn ... is it some lingering effect
Of the dewfall disappearing too early²⁸*

“They’re always complaining. What a nuisance!” Niou said. “All I really want is to enjoy a few relaxing moments with you, but something unexpected always turns up!” If theirs had been a relationship between commoners, who are taught that it’s proper for a man to have no more than one spouse, then anyone who

observed this arrangement would naturally sympathize with the wife. However, the situation is a lot more complicated for a man like Niou, whose position is so exalted. Inevitably, as an heir to the throne, he would have to take more than one wife. Niou was but one of many princes of the blood, but the courtiers recognized that his was a special destiny, and therefore they never criticized him, no matter how many affairs he pursued. Few were inclined to feel sorry for the Uji Princess. If anything, people seemed to be gossiping about how fortunate she was to have the Prince lavish her with attention and treasure her so passionately.

Perhaps this sudden, awkward change is hard for me to deal with, she told herself, because I've grown too accustomed to being the center of his attention. Whenever I heard about someone else's circumstances or read one of those old romances, I could never understand why women would suffer so deeply when their husband takes another wife. But in truth, it's nothing to dismiss lightly. Now that she was experiencing this kind of suffering herself, she understood everything much better.

Niou was even more sensitive than usual and treated her with gentleness and warmth. "I've heard that you aren't eating much ... that won't do at all," he said. He had the choicest fruits and delicacies brought in to her and ordered a master cook to prepare foods to whet her appetite, all the while urging her to eat. But her thoughts were far away, and she touched nothing.

"It's hard for me to see you like this," he sighed.

The sun was setting. When evening arrived, he went back to the main hall. A chill breeze was blowing, and at that moment the autumn sky looked especially enchanting. Because Niou was drawn to the vibrant beauty of the here and now, his mood grew all the more cheerful, and he was aglow with energy. In contrast, his Uji Princess, lost in her sad thoughts, found everything most trying. The voices of the evening cicadas made her yearn for the shadow of the mountain.²⁹

*At Uji the cries of evening cicadas
Might have moved me to melancholy thoughts, but here
In autumn darkness, they arouse bitter regrets*

This time Niou set out before the night grew late. The Uji Princess was lying down, listening as the voices of the outrunners faded in the distance and berating herself for her own detestable feelings of jealousy, which brought so many tears that a fisherman might well have been able to cast his lines at her pillow.³⁰ Recalling how much grief and worry he had brought her from the very beginning, she felt as though she wanted nothing more to do with him. *How will my pregnancy turn out? All the people in my family lived very short lives. I*

suppose that my life will be fleeting as well, that I'll die in childbirth. I don't really regret that, but it makes me sad all the same. And it's a great sin to leave behind an orphaned child. She was awake all night, tormenting herself with such thoughts until dawn broke.

On the following day, word came down that the Akashi Empress was not feeling well, and so everyone gathered at the court. However, the illness turned out to be nothing more than a mild cold. Since there was no cause for serious concern, Genji's son, who was preoccupied with preparations for the Third Night ceremonies that evening, decided to withdraw from the palace around noon. He invited Kaoru to accompany him, and the two men left in the same carriage. The Minister was doing everything he could to make the event a spectacular one, and he fretted over how it would turn out. Of course, he was limited by his status as a commoner, and nothing he could plan would be as magnificent as what might be held at the palace. That is why he wanted Kaoru's participation that night.

Because the Minister considered Kaoru a close relative, he personally extended the invitation to him. Although he always felt humble and constrained around the younger man, he knew that no other courtier could bring quite the same aura of prestige and glory to the occasion as the Middle Counselor. Still, Genji's son couldn't help being annoyed at the unusual alacrity with which Kaoru had accepted and offered to assist with preparations. Such behavior suggested not only that Kaoru considered Roku no kimi something of an outsider, but also that he felt no regrets about losing her to Niou.

The evening was already well advanced by the time Niou arrived at his bride's quarters. The banquet seat reserved for him was in the southeastern corner of the aisle room in the main residence. Lovely silver dishes, which are customary on such occasions, had been arranged immaculately on eight tall stands. Two smaller stands held the rice cakes, which were served on stylish silver trays fashioned with legs decorated in floral shapes. I suppose I could describe other details, but the trappings of Third Night celebrations are so familiar to everyone that it would be tedious to do so.

As soon as the Minister arrived at the main hall, he sent one of the attendants to Roku no kimi's chambers to inform Niou that it was getting very late and that he should join the banquet. Among those in attendance that evening were a Commander of the Left Gate Guards and the Fujiwara Consultant, both of whom were brothers of the Minister's wife, Kumoinokari. Niou, however, was playfully relaxing with his bride and her ladies-in-waiting and was reluctant to leave them so soon.

When the groom finally made his appearance, all those who viewed his

magnificent figure felt that it had been worth the wait. One of the Minister's sons—the Middle Captain in the Chamberlain's office who earlier had served his father as a messenger to Prince Niou—offered the guest of honor a winecup and one of the stands holding rice cakes. In succession the other guests also offered the groom a cup, and he drank several times.

When the Middle Counselor repeatedly pressed the winecup on him, Niou flashed a brief smile. Kaoru apparently wanted to ensure that the banquet was a lively affair, perhaps because he remembered that Niou had once expressed distaste for the Rokujō estate, complaining that it was “a stuffy, uncomfortable old place.” All the same, eager to please though he was, Kaoru kept his poise and remained perfectly solemn, as if he knew nothing of the groom’s true feelings.

After serving wine to the guest of honor, Kaoru went over to the east hall to entertain the men serving in Niou’s escort. The group included a large number of influential courtiers. The six gentlemen of the fourth rank received a set of women’s robes, to which a long robe was added, while the ten men of the fifth rank received double-lined Chinese robes with trains dyed in hues appropriate to each man’s station. The four men at the sixth rank were rewarded with long robes and trousers of damask. The Minister was dissatisfied that the constraints of his commoner status did not permit him to be more lavish with his gifts, and so he went out of his way to make sure that the dyeing and tailoring of these items were of the highest quality. The rewards he gave to the lower-ranking members of the staff and the servants were so magnificent as to be on the extravagant side.

Is it because lively, cheerful events like this are truly pleasing to behold that the old romances always gave them privilege of place? Even in those accounts, however, the narrator always notes how impossible it is to describe everything in detail.

One of Kaoru’s outrunners was disgruntled that he had not been shown all that much hospitality when the wine and delicacies were passed around—overlooked perhaps because he had been standing in a spot obscured by shadows. Later that night, as Kaoru was passing through the central gate of his own residence on Sanjō, he overheard this man grumble, “Why didn’t our lord yield to the proposal and marry the Minister’s daughter himself? This solitary life he’s leading is really a bore for all of us!” Kaoru was amused. Apparently his men, tired and sleepy from being up so late at night, were envious of Niou’s escort, who had been properly fêted and were now sprawled out somewhere, pleasantly drunk and sleeping off the effects of the wine and food.

Kaoru went in and lay down. *What an uncomfortable affair that must have*

been for Niou! The father of the bride makes his appearance with an air of pomp and splendor, and even though he's the uncle of the groom, he had all those people running around keeping the lamps bright and making sure the wine flowed freely. Still, I must admit, it was an impressive occasion.

Kaoru recalled how splendid Niou looked. He had to agree with the general consensus at court: if he had a daughter who was considered worthy, he would much rather marry her to Niou than send her into service at the palace. This train of thought called something else to mind: *I've heard that every courtier who has a daughter they'd like to give to Niou is always mentioning me as well, saying they'd like to have me for a son-in-law. Obviously my reputation must not be all that ignominious! Yet I'm so different from the others ... so otherworldly and old-fashioned.*

His heart was now swelling with pride and self-satisfaction. His Majesty seems inclined to accept my proposal for the Fujitsubo Princess, but if he really does accept it, what will happen if I remain hesitant and unenthusiastic? It would be a great honor for me, no doubt, but will it turn out well? How happy I would be if she resembled my lost beloved!

Judging from his thoughts on the matter, it seems he was not altogether disinterested in the Fujitsubo Princess.

Struggling as always with his insomnia and bored by idleness, Kaoru went to the sleeping quarters of Azechi, one of his mother's closest ladies-in-waiting.³¹ He favored her a little over the other women, and spent the rest of the night with her. Under the circumstances, no one would have censured him for sleeping in late the following morning, but to the dismay of Azechi, who was acutely sensitive to how his behavior might be interpreted by others, he arose early and hurried off. She must have found his actions outrageous, for she sent him the following:

*Crossing the barrier stream at Ōsaka
For a secret tryst the world will never sanction
I now regret the scandal our affair will cause*

Kaoru felt sorry for her.

*Though it may look shallow on the surface
Hidden currents of the barrier stream
Are deep and flow on and on endlessly³²*

His trite claims of hidden depths did not seem all that trustworthy, and the

phrase “may look shallow on the surface” made Azechi feel all the more anxious about him.

He pushed open the hinged double doors in the corner of the aisle room and said to her, “Really, now, you should come look at the sky with me. How can you think of sleeping the whole night away, pretending not to notice this? I’m not trying to imitate some elegant lover, it’s just that lately I’ve found it more and more difficult to sleep, and as I lie awake night after night my thoughts run to things of this world and the next, and I find myself deeply moved.”

He tried diverting her attention to other things, and then took his leave. He was not particularly inclined to use an abundance of charmingly eloquent words, but women did not think of him as unfeeling as a result—was that perhaps because he looked so radiantly youthful and refined? Women with whom he had exchanged even a passing flirtatious comment eagerly sought out a connection with his mother, who had turned her back on the world, and gathered at the Sanjō residence to serve her. Were they motivated, perhaps, by a desire to see him on closer, more intimate terms? As a result, many of them, each according to her rank and status, experienced to some degree the sorrow and disappointment of unrequited feelings.

That same morning Niou was seeing his bride in the daylight for the first time, and he was increasingly smitten with her. She was the perfect height, her figure was exquisitely proportioned, and the extraordinary cut and flow of her hair and shape of her head were glorious. Her complexion had a startlingly lambent glow, her face was noble and refined, and the expression around her eyes was so dignified and charming that it almost made him feel diffident in her presence. Because she had no flaws, he was thoroughly satisfied that she was a woman of ideal beauty. She was probably twenty-one or twenty-two and, having fully matured, exhibited no childish tendencies—indeed, she seemed like a fresh flower in full bloom. She had been nurtured with boundless attention, and her breeding was faultless. No doubt the Minister in his devotion had fussed and worried over her obsessively.

When it came to the quality of gentle, yielding grace, Niou preferred his Uji Princess at Nijō. True, Roku no kimi displayed an appealing shyness whenever she replied to him, but she wasn’t overly vague or retiring. Still, his bride had many virtues and appeared to be quick and clever. She had thirty young, attractive attendants and six page girls, all of them perfect in looks and bearing. Because the Minister was aware that his son-in-law favored things that were new and unique, he had gone out of his way to make sure the robes of his daughter’s retinue were designed in a style so original it was hard to know what to make of them. Apparently, the Minister looked on Niou’s personality and future

prospects with great favor, for he had given much greater consideration to the marriage of Roku no kimi than he had to that of his oldest daughter—born of Kumoinokari—who had been sent to serve as a Consort to the Crown Prince.

Niou did not feel comfortable going back to his Nijō villa after such an elaborate celebration, and because his exalted status prevented him from going out in the daytime, as he might have wanted, he decided to stay in the southeastern residence where Murasaki had raised him all those years. When evening came on, however, he found it impossible to slip away to Nijō.

This happened time after time, and the Uji Princess was kept waiting impatiently.

I always expected this sort of misfortune, she told herself, but when it finally struck, I never imagined I would feel so utterly abandoned. My sister was right, she reflected, the court is not a place where a woman of sensitivity may mingle in heedless disregard of her own insignificance.

Over and over she sadly recalled that day when she came over those mountain paths and arrived here. It seemed the height of madness to her now. *If possible, I'd like to secretly visit Uji again. It's not that I want to completely reject Niou and turn my back on the world. I just want to rest for a while and find solace for my troubled heart. How unpleasant it would be if people took such a retreat as proof of my jealousy and detested me as a result.*

She was so fixated on the idea of a clandestine visit to the old Uji villa that, despite her embarrassment, she sent a letter to the Middle Counselor requesting his help:

The ascetic described in great detail the memorial services held the other day, and I want to express my deep gratitude to you. I would have felt sorry for the spirit of my late father had it not been for the kindness of your lingering remembrances. If possible, I should like to convey my appreciation to you in person.

She had written in a sincere, unassuming style on plain Michinokuni paper. Kaoru was charmed by it all the same. She was pleased that he had seen to it that the services on the important third anniversary of her father's passing were conducted in a noble and dignified manner. While she was not overly effusive, she certainly seemed to want him to know she was aware of all that he had done. Her note had an air of diffidence about it—the same as all her previous correspondence with him—and she had not written explicitly about her feelings. However, her use of the phrase “in person” was highly unusual, and his heart beat faster in joyful excitement. Niou, who had a taste for indulging in the novel

pleasures of the present moment, was so preoccupied with Roku no kimi that he was neglecting his Uji Princess. Kaoru imagined how painful this must be for her. He was profoundly touched and could not put her artless letter down, but read it over and over again. He replied as follows:

I received your letter. I felt a bit like a holy man myself as I was participating in the memorial services the other day, but I took special precautions to travel there discreetly without informing you, since you might have insisted on going with me. In any case, given the occasion, I thought going alone the most appropriate thing to do. I must say, however, I resent the words “lingering remembrances,” which seem to imply that my feelings have grown shallow over time. If I may, I shall call on you and we’ll discuss all these things. I remain your devoted servant.

He set this earnest message down on prim, stiff white paper.

He went to her the following evening. Secretly in love with the Princess, he took extreme care in grooming and dressing himself. The perfume of his robes mingled with his own ethereal scent to create an overwhelmingly dignified effect. Even the fragrance that wafted gently off his clove-dyed fan was incomparable.

The Uji Princess had never forgotten that peculiar night they spent together; having observed the workings of Kaoru’s sincere, sensitive character—so unlike other men—did she wistfully imagine what might have been? A woman her age was no longer an inexperienced young girl, and when she compared the Middle Counselor to the man who had given her cause for resentment, she realized that Kaoru was far superior in all respects. Was that why, on this particular night, she took pity on him for having always kept her distance and, perhaps worried that she might come across as cold and inconsiderate, allowed him to be seated in the aisle room inside the veranda blinds? A standing curtain was set up inside the blinds of the main chambers, and she received him after withdrawing to the interior of the room.

“Although I did not receive an explicit invitation, I’m very happy to have been granted this rare permission to call on you,” Kaoru began. “I wanted to come right away, but then I learned that the Prince might be returning and worried that it might prove awkward if I were here. So I decided to come today instead. Is it possible that, after all these years, you’re showing some inclination to at last reward my earnest devotion to you? You’ve taken the remarkable step of relaxing your guard a little and allowing me inside your blinds.”

The Princess still seemed reserved toward him and had difficulty finding words

to express what she wanted to say, but she finally replied with an air of modesty:

"It made me glad to hear about the memorial services the other day, and I would have regretted it if, as I always do, I simply kept my feelings to myself and let the occasion pass without somehow letting you know how much I appreciate all you've done." Because she had withdrawn so far back in her room, he could only catch faint snatches of her soft voice.

Feeling impatient and dissatisfied, he said, "You sound so distant. I should like permission to speak seriously with you about a certain worldly matter."

She thought his request reasonable, and his heart suddenly raced again at the sound of her moving closer toward him. He nonetheless exerted great self-control and maintained a nonchalant attitude. His manner of speech made it clear that he considered Niou's behavior inconsiderate. He criticized Niou and offered her words of comfort, talking to her soothingly on all sorts of subjects.

The Uji Princess could not openly voice her discontent with her marriage. Instead, she hinted indirectly, with few words, that she did not blame her misfortune on Niou so much as on her own karmic destiny.³³ She also expressed her heartfelt desire to go to the Uji villa for a brief visit.

"I'm afraid I can't decide on my own to help you," Kaoru replied. "It would be best to approach Prince Niou honestly and modestly with your request, and then do as he wishes. If you don't do that, he might misinterpret your motives a little, and it would be most unfortunate if he were then to consider you frivolous and untrustworthy. Once it's clear to him that he has nothing to be concerned about, then nothing will prevent me from accompanying you to Uji, and I will do all I can to be of service. The Prince knows full well that I am not like other men and that he can trust me completely."

While he was speaking with her, however, Kaoru did not for a moment forget his regrets, and he mentioned that he would like to go back to the past: "If only I could do it all over again."

It was growing dark, and the Princess was troubled that Kaoru showed no inclination to leave. "I'm not feeling all that well," she told him, "and so perhaps we might talk again some other time when I'm better."

He could tell from her movements that she was preparing to withdraw; because he desperately wanted her to stay, he said, as if to mollify her, "So tell me, then ... when were you thinking of going to Uji? The paths must be terribly overgrown, and I shall have to have them cleared before then."

She stopped and paused for a moment. "This month will soon be over, so I was thinking perhaps the first of next month. But still, it seems best to keep the trip secret. If I were to ask Prince Niou for permission, it might lead to all sorts of troublesome complications."

Her voice was sweet and soft—so like her older sister's! He was assailed by memories and longings and could no longer restrain himself. He quietly stretched his arm through the blinds hanging next to the pillar he was leaning against and gently took hold of her sleeves.

Was this his intention all along? Ahh ... how horrid he is! Not knowing what to say, she did not reply. Instead, she tried to move further back into the interior of the room. When she did so, he slipped further through the blinds—as if he had the run of the place!—and lay down beside her. “You have me all wrong, do you not?” he complained. “I was delighted when you said that you thought it best to travel to Uji secretly, and I entered because I wanted to ask if perhaps I hadn’t misheard you. How unpleasant you are! You have no reason to be so cold and aloof.”

She did not feel up to replying to him. Shocked by his behavior, she now detested him, though she remained sufficiently in control of her emotions to admonish his actions: “I never expected this sort of thing from you. What will my attendants think? Your behavior is atrocious!”

She was on the verge of tears—and with just cause. But though he felt sorry for her, he continued to plead his case: “Am I so outrageous that people would censure me? Meeting you face-to-face like this brings back memories of that night we spent together. A meeting your late sister approved, I might add. You think me shocking and atrocious, but your reaction is deeply offensive to me. You may rest assured that my intentions are in no way lascivious.” He was very calm and gentle, but he talked on and on, telling her how keenly he felt the pain caused by the feelings of remorse he had kept inside himself for so many months.

She did not know what to do, since there was no indication that he was going to let go of her sleeves. It is difficult for me to convey just how frightened and disturbed she was. She felt more awkward and disgusted with him than she would have with a man who was a total stranger. When, at last, she began to cry, Kaoru said, “Why are you carrying on so? You’re being childish, you know.” She was adorable beyond words, and he felt bad for her, but at the same time her demeanor was so deeply thoughtful and prudent that it made him feel ashamed. He could see that she was even more mature and lovely than in the old days at Uji.

The yearnings that unsettle my heart this way are all the result of having given her up of my own volition to another man. Overwhelmed by self-reproach, he broke down in tears, sobbing.

Only two ladies-in-waiting were in close attendance that evening. Still, they would have been vigilant and would have been suspicious had a man with no

relationship to the Princess—and thus no reason to be there—entered the main chamber. They would have drawn nearer, wondering what was happening. The Middle Counselor, however, had been a confidant of their mistress for a long time, and if he was on familiar enough terms to be allowed to speak directly and intimately with her, then the situation seemed perfectly acceptable. Indeed, given the circumstances at that moment, they felt uncomfortable being so near and pretended not to notice anything. They quietly withdrew, which made the Princess feel even more wretched. As for Kaoru, he was finding it extremely difficult to suppress the overpowering regrets he harbored for all that had happened in the past. Nonetheless, his matchless prudence, a virtue he had possessed since his youth, kept his passions in check, and he did not do as he wished with the Uji Princess. It wouldn't do to describe this scene in any greater detail. For Kaoru, the visit had proven completely pointless; because he was reluctant to be seen by others he withdrew, reflecting remorsefully on all he had done.

Kaoru had been under the impression that it was still early evening, but in fact dawn was approaching. He grew anxious that censorious eyes might see him leaving at this hour, worried not for his own reputation, but for that of the Uji Princess. *I'd heard rumors of late that she hasn't been feeling well, and now I understand why. She was extremely embarrassed that I saw her pregnancy belt,³⁴ and her reaction made me feel so bad that I did not take her. What a fool I am ... as usual.*

Other thoughts, however, tempered these reflections. *And yet I never intended to do anything cruel. If, in a moment of weakness, I had given in to my baser instincts and forced myself on her, I'd never be able to feel at ease meeting her after that. Even if we carried on an affair, it would take tremendous effort on my part to arrange our secret trysts, and that would cause her to suffer the torment of constant dread.*

Despite these seemingly wise rationalizations, he could not completely repress his desires, and his unbearable yearnings for her in the present moment³⁵ left him feeling utterly helpless. Come what may, he had to see her again, and yet his was a desire that would never be truly sated. He could not get the image of her out of his mind—the elegantly refined, enchanting figure that was even more willowy than in the old days at Uji. As a result, he had the sensation that she was always with him, and he could think of nothing else.

She very much wants to go back to Uji, and I would like to escort her there, but Niou would never permit such a thing. And if we went in secret against his wishes, it might well end in calamity. Is there any way I can get what I want without destroying our reputations? He lay there staring out blankly, lost in

these pensive thoughts.

His letter to the Uji Princess arrived early in the morning in the predawn darkness. Just like his previous letters, it was folded so as to resemble a formal missive rather than a love note.

*All for naught did I travel o'er
That dew-drenched path, the autumn sky
Stirring memories of the past*

"Not understanding the reasons for your cruelty only makes it all the more intolerable. There are no words to describe how I feel."

Since she always replied to his letters, her women would surely take notice and think something amiss if she did not do so this time. However, it was too arduous a task for her to write a letter, and so she simply scribbled a note: "I received your letter. I am much too ill right now and cannot reply." When Kaoru read it, he was let down by its brevity. He longingly recalled her alluring air.

Now a little wiser in the ways of men and women, the Uji Princess did not consider Kaoru's behavior entirely shocking or despicable. For his part, when he recalled her demeanor at the moment she saw him off—her gentle kindness and humility, her complete lack of coldness, the warm familiarity with which she spoke—envy and sadness assailed his heart and he was disconsolate, tormented by conflicting emotions. He thought her far superior in every way from the young woman she was when he first saw her at Uji.

If, for some reason, Niou should ever be estranged from her, he fantasized, I would likely be the only person she could turn to for support. Yet even if that happened, it would not be easy for me to visit her openly. Instead, I would have to meet her in secret, and she would be my haven, the lasting object of my heart's desire, the woman I would love above all others.

How truly despicable that his heart should have been so fixated on her! Men may exude an air of kindness and sagacity, but they are cruelly fickle. Kaoru was sure that the sorrow over his lost love could never be assuaged, and yet here he was, suffering much worse over his love for her younger sister. Her attractiveness was all he could think about; when he heard someone mention that Niou would be returning to the Nijō villa that day, all his altruistic impulses to act as her support disappeared as his chest burned with jealous rancor.

Niou himself privately considered it lamentable that he had stayed away from the Nijō villa for so many days, and he suddenly decided to go back.

What bad timing, the Uji Princess thought. Well, no matter what, I won't be aloof with him, since that would make me look jealous. Here I was, longing to go

off to Uji, but now I detest the only person who could help me make the trip.

All too aware of her predicament, she felt trapped, as if she had been cast adrift with no safe harbor for her. *Yes, it's true ... I was destined to suffer misfortune*, she concluded, resigning herself meekly to a fate that she would have to deal with for the rest of her life.

Because his Uji Princess's response was so gently appealing, Niou's happiness and affection were greater than ever; he apologized profusely for having neglected her for so many days. She was just beginning to show, her belly slightly distended, and he was touched to see the pregnancy belt that had caused her such embarrassment with Kaoru. Niou had never seen a pregnant woman up close before, and so he found her condition a wonder. Having just arrived from the reserved, formal atmosphere of the Rokujō estate, everything here struck him as warmly relaxed and familiar.

As the Uji Princess listened to him swearing his devotion and making extravagant promises, she couldn't help wondering if all men were this glib and eloquent. That thought brought to mind Kaoru's presumptuous attitude. For years she had thought of him as sensitive and kind, but now that he had revealed his true colors, she was appalled. As for Niou's promises for the future, she put no trust in them at all. She still found his appeals seductive, to be sure, but she couldn't help thinking: *They are what they are.*

In any case, she told herself, the Middle Counselor lulled me into a sense of complacency, then barged right inside my blinds! He told me that he and my late sister had never been intimate, and I thought he was a man of truly admirable character. As things turned out, I should never have been so open and familiar with him!

She would have to be increasingly on her guard, and because she was terrified at the prospect of what might happen if Niou were to stop calling on her for a long period of time, she did not bring the matter up, but instead fawningly clung to him more than she had in the past in hopes that he would come to see her more often.

Niou found his Uji Princess utterly captivating and lovable, but just then he noticed that a distinctive scent had deeply permeated her robes—a scent not at all like the everyday fragrances used to perfume clothing. Being a connoisseur, he recognized it as Kaoru's. His suspicions aroused, he pressed her about it.

"What's the meaning of this?" he asked, trying to gauge the truth by studying the Princess's reaction.

She had been aware of the lingering scent and had changed her robes accordingly, but to her surprise, the scent had mysteriously suffused her whole body. Unable to deny the obvious, and at a complete loss as to what she should

say, she mustered not a single word in reply.

Niou took this very hard, and his heart was staggered. *So that's how it is*, he thought, leaping to conclusions. *This was bound to happen! I've known for a long time that Kaoru would never simply give her up.*

"If his scent is this strong, then you must have yielded completely to him," he said, repeating over and over his hurtful accusation, which upset her and made her feel yet again that she had been cast adrift.

"The vows we made were special," he continued, "yet you were the first to forget them.³⁶ Such betrayal is not worthy of a lady of high status. Was I really away so long that your heart could have grown apart from me? I never expected such cruelty from you!"

I could not possibly record all his complaints here, for they were too extreme and distressing. Indeed, the Princess could not bring herself to respond to them at all—a silence Niou found insufferable, prompting him to compose the following:

*How hateful are the mingled scents that linger
On sleeves now intimate with another man
Its tainting fragrance permeates my body*

His complaints were so relentless and harsh that the Uji Princess had been unable to find words to respond—until, that is, she heard his poem. Whereupon she asked herself: *How can I remain silent?*

*I trusted that the bonds between husband and wife
Would remain as intimate as these middle robes ...
Will they be cast off for a mere lingering scent³⁷*

She burst into tears.

Niou was moved to compassion by her weeping figure, but at the same time he was extremely irritated and jealous. *She's so sweetly appealing*, he thought. *No wonder this happened!*

Despite his vexation, he was a sensitive man—a trait that, no doubt, reflected his voluptuary nature—and tears were soon streaming down his cheeks as well. In truth, she was simply too dear, too precious for him ever to abandon completely. He simply couldn't go on resenting her, and so he ceased his complaints and cooed loving words to soothe her feelings.

Niou spent a leisurely, restful night with the Uji Princess. The following morning, he washed up and enjoyed a simple breakfast. The furnishings and

accessories of her residence did not seem to his eyes to have the same blinding brilliance as Roku no kimi's chambers, where layers upon layers of sumptuous silks and brocades from Korea and China were on display, but rather exuded a familiar, intimate atmosphere. The figures of her women mingling there in soft robes that had lost their starched crispness imparted a sense of calm and quiet. His Princess wore a soft outer robe in the pinks style—purple lined with blue—over layered long robes of mauve. Niou compared the two women in his mind's eye: though every detail of Roku no kimi's showy, gorgeous attire was done up to an almost excessive degree, the Uji Princess's casual, slightly rumpled appearance was just as lovely. His extraordinary attachment to her was, no doubt, the reason he found her so charming—and so what if he was inclined to favor her? It seemed to him that she had no reason to feel ashamed or inferior to Roku no kimi.

His Uji Princess, once round and adorably plump, was now slightly thinner and paler than ever before—a transformation that imparted an air of delicate beauty. Long before Kaoru's distinctive scent provided indisputable evidence of her alluring appeal, Niou found the enchanting grace of the Princess, which was superior in so many ways to that of other women, a cause for concern.

How could any man other than a brother draw near her chambers to speak with her and not, as a matter of course, be roused to passion by the sound of her voice or by intimations of her looks? It's precisely because she's so attractive that Kaoru feels the way he does.

Given his own amorous proclivities, Niou was acutely aware of how a man may be driven to do everything in his power to win the object of his desire. With that thought in mind, he searched through the Princess's cabinets and chests, pretending with a practiced nonchalance that he was looking for some item or other when all the while he was hoping to discover a letter or keepsake that would confirm his suspicions. Still, he could find nothing incriminating, only some everyday notes, succinctly written and proper in tone, that the Princess evidently did not consider all that important, since she had carelessly stashed them away with commonplace items.

Most suspicious! This cannot be all there is. Niou was wracked by doubts, and he had good reason to feel increasingly uneasy this day.

Kaoru's splendid looks would surely appeal to any woman of fine sensibility, and if my Uji Princess were drawn to him, how could he possibly reject her feelings out of hand, as if they were something unexpected? They are perfectly suited for one another, so they must share some mutual affection.

Such musings made Niou miserable, angry and resentful. In fact, he was so uneasy that he could not bring himself to go out that day. He sent to Roku no

kimi's residence at the Rokujō estate two or three letters that set the older folks there muttering amongst themselves:

"It took no time at all for his excuses to start piling up like autumn leaves!"

Although Kaoru was disturbed and restless when he heard that Niou had apparently settled in for a long stay at the Nijō villa, he told himself that he had to get his emotions under control: *I'm acting irrationally. It's all the fault of my own foolish, corrupted heart. Is it proper for me to have these longings for her when, at the beginning, all I wanted was to look after her so that she might be free of cares?*

The thought that Niou seemed incapable of completely abandoning the Princess made Kaoru happy, despite the concerns he had expressed earlier. Accordingly, he was determined to assist the Uji Princess. Recalling the appearance of her ladies-in-waiting in their softly worn, comfortable robes, he called on his mother and asked her, "Would you have any proper sets of women's robe at hand? I have need of them."

"Let's see ... ,” the Third Princess replied, “there are some white robes that I've had prepared for the usual memorial services and scripture readings coming up in the ninth month. It wouldn't take much effort to have them dyed at this point. Shall I have them made up for you?"

"No, no, that won't be necessary," Kaoru assured her. "I don't need them for some grand occasion. Whatever you have available now will be perfectly adequate."

He asked the attendants serving in his mother's wardrobe to collect a large number of women's robes, including long outer robes, as well as several bolts of plain silk and damask—whatever they happened to have ready. Thinking about what would be the most appropriate outfit for the Uji Princess herself, Kaoru selected from his personal wardrobe lengths of various types of cloth, including white damask and the finest crimson silk, which had been beaten on fulling blocks until it had acquired an incomparable sheen. There were, of course, no matching crimson trousers, since he had only men's clothing, but for reasons of his own he included a set of broad ribbons of the kind used to affix trains to trousers. He attached a poem to them:

*What good does it do to go on resenting
The tie that now binds you to another man
As surely as these ribbons secure a train*

He had the poem and clothing delivered to Taifu no kimi, a mature lady-in-waiting who seemed to be a close confidante of the Uji Princess.

"I know these items aren't much to look at," he added in his message, "since I had to select them rather quickly from items I had on hand, but please distribute them among your women as you think fit."

Although he was discreet about the presentation of these gifts, he nonetheless had the robes for the Princess placed in a box and specially wrapped. When Taifu no kimi received the robes, she didn't bother showing them to her mistress, who was, in any case, accustomed to Kaoru's constant displays of kindness. Thus, she felt no need to stand on ceremony or to huffily return the items as inappropriate; without giving the matter a second thought, she distributed the cloth among the female attendants, and they all set about the task of tailoring robes for themselves. The younger attendants, who served in closest proximity to the Uji Princess, naturally received the choicest items.³⁸ As for the menial servants, who normally went about in worn, shabby clothing, they now looked quite presentable in the understated elegance of their new white robes.

Who else but the Middle Counselor would have seen to the Uji Princess's every need? Prince Niou, motivated by his extraordinary affection for her, made sure that she was well provided for, but how could he be expected to give any consideration to all the little details? Given the unlimited indulgence with which he had been raised, he had suffered no disappointments or loneliness, and thus had no understanding of ordinary vicissitudes. He thought of life in this world as something to be spent in elegant diversions, which meant that the only chill he had ever known was the frisson he experienced when touching dew upon a flower. To that extent, there were times when, motivated by impulsive feelings of love rather than practical considerations, Niou would occasionally provide the Uji Princess with everyday necessities that were, of course, perfectly in keeping with a particular season or event. However, because these welcome acts of largesse on his part were so rare and unusual, some of the women—even including his own irascible nurse—were provoked to sarcastic comments: "My, how *thoughtful* of him!"

The Uji Princess had always suffered in private, acutely embarrassed that her page girls and attendants would from time to time have to mingle together in their drab outfits, which were out of place in a residence as magnificent as the Nijō villa. To make matters worse, Niou's recent marriage to Roku no kimi, whose dazzling lifestyle was the talk of court society, added to her inner turmoil. *Compared to the Rokujō estate, she lamented to herself, this place must strike Niou's men as pathetically drab.*

Because Kaoru could see what was happening and was sympathetic to her plight, the Uji Princess did not look down on his show of kindness, which would certainly have been considered tactless and meddlesome had he sent those items

of clothing to someone who was not as close to him. Nonetheless, she was concerned: *What if he were to send gifts that were more extravagant. Wouldn't people look askance at us and assume something was going on?*

Shortly thereafter, Kaoru sent a number of beautiful gifts, just as he had before—only this time he had not simply gathered what was on hand but had had many items prepared expressly for the women at Nijō, including a long outer robe for the Princess and fine thread with which to weave damask. Kaoru's upbringing had been no less privileged than Niou's, and as a result, he was distinguished by an excessively refined sensibility that made him self-conceited and dismissive of the vulgar world. Yet, for all that, after he had begun visiting the late Prince Hachinomiya's villa at Uji, he was affected by the poignant beauty and sorrow of life lived in solitude. The experience opened his eyes, and, as he reflected on the world in general, he developed a profound sense of compassion.

How touching it is to realize the effect Hachinomiya had on him!

Having developed this sense of compassion, Kaoru wished to be a constant source of comfort and support for the Princess. However, the suffering brought on by his all-consuming passion made it impossible to achieve this aspiration. Instead, he sent her letters that were more detailed and intimate than ever, expressing emotions too powerful to be concealed.

Distressed by his attentions, the Uji Princess lamented that trouble and misery always seemed to follow her. *If he were a total stranger, she told herself, it would be easy to rebuke his irrational behavior and keep my distance. In this case, however, I've considered him a special patron for years, and it would look suspicious to others if I were to suddenly break off our relationship now. It's not that I don't appreciate his kind intentions, which are no doubt sincere. It's just that I must avoid any interaction with him that would create the impression that we have feelings for one another. Ahh ... what am I to do?* She was tormented by all of the factors she had to consider.

The younger attendants might have been expected to lend the Princess a sympathetic ear, but they were new to her service, while those with whom she was familiar were the older women who had come with her from the Uji villa. With no like-minded companion to whom she could turn for sympathy and advice, the Princess was constantly thinking back on her late sister. *If she were still alive, she grieved, the Middle Counselor would never have been drawn to me this way.* She was more troubled by Kaoru's obsessive attachment than she was by the worrisome possibility that Niou might cruelly abandon her.

One evening, when things were quiet and back to normal, Kaoru's feelings were too much to bear, and he ventured to call on the Princess. Presently, she

had a cushion set out on the veranda for him. She then sent out an attendant to convey this message: “I’m in considerable distress and will not be able to speak with you.”

Her words were so hurtful that he would surely have broken down and wept had it not been for his reluctance to expose his feelings, which he struggled to keep to himself.

“Whenever you’re ill,” he complained, “you allow priests you’ve never seen before to be near you, and you even do the same for physicians. So why is it that I’m not permitted inside your blinds? What’s the point in coming here, if I can speak with you only through a messenger?”

He appeared to be extremely annoyed. Her attendants, who had seen the Uji Princess permit the Middle Counselor inside her blinds that previous night, apparently concluded that their mistress’s behavior was unacceptable. They lowered the blinds of the main chamber and ushered him in to the place where the priest on night duty would usually sit.

The Princess felt truly abashed, but given the way her women were talking, she was careful not to make an open display of her displeasure, lest people think something was amiss. Thus, reluctant though she was to speak with Kaoru, she moved a little closer to the blinds and received him.

The Princess’s hushed tones and faltering words reminded him of the way her late sister’s voice sounded when his beloved first fell ill all those years ago. The memory was so ominous and heartbreaking that he felt as if the world was going dark around him. Unable to find his voice right away, he finally replied only after managing to calm himself. Terribly hurt that she would draw away from him, he reached under the blind, pushed aside her standing curtains a little, and, as he had that previous night, slipped inside unceremoniously and moved close to her.

The Uji Princess was distressed by this outrage. With no other recourse available to her, she called out to one of her attendants, a woman named Shōshō. “My chest is hurting,” she said. “I’d like a brief massage.”

When he heard what she said, Kaoru let out a sigh and complained, “Putting pressure on your chest will just make it hurt all the more.” He shifted back to his seat outside the curtains as Shōshō approached, but his heart remained restless.

“Why are you in constant pain like this? I asked about your condition, and was told that it’s normal for a woman to feel ill in the early stages of a pregnancy, but that things usually improve over time. Really now ... don’t you think you’re being rather childish?”

Embarrassed that Kaoru was talking about her pregnancy, the Uji Princess replied, “My chest often hurts like this. My older sister suffered from the same

condition, did she not? They say it's an indication that a person is not destined to live long."

*No lovers live as long as a thousand-year-old pine.*³⁹ Kaoru recalled this line, his heart breaking. In his sorrow he no longer cared if Shōshō heard what he had to say; he unburdened himself of all that he had been feeling since the old days at Uji. He was careful not to divulge anything that might be compromising, speaking eloquently in such a way that his words, which were meant for the Princess's ears only, would not be understood by anyone else.

Shōshō was moved as she listened to him: *Such a compassionate gentleman!*

No matter what happened or what he was doing, he could never get over his mournful yearning for the late Princess.

"Ever since I was a child," he explained, "my heart and mind have been focused on a single wish: to retreat from this vulgar world and live a life of solitude. Alas, it has been my destiny to fall short of achieving what I most desired. I must admit that there were times when, in order to seek some consolation for my loss, I would call on various ladies, hoping that I might distract myself by meeting them and seeing what they were like. However, I could never feel for them what I felt for your sister."

"With so many things troubling me, I find it impossible to devote myself to another woman. At the same time, it shamed me to think that you might interpret my actions as lascivious. Of course, you would be justifiably shocked if I were to behave improperly toward you, but who would have cause to censure us if you were to continue our relationship as it is, talking intimately with me from time to time and listening to what's on my mind? Insofar as my sensibilities are not like those of ordinary men, no one has any reason to criticize me. I know you have doubts," he implored tearfully, "but I beg you to trust me and put your mind at ease."

"If I truly doubted you," the Princess replied, "then why would I speak with you like this, risking the suspicions of anyone who might see us? For years I've been aware of your feelings, having observed your thoughtfulness on various occasions, and I've come to know you well. So why wouldn't I continue to think of you as someone I can rely upon for support?"

"I don't remember ever doing anything of significance for you," Kaoru protested. "You're simply exaggerating to be kind to me, are you not? Or are you asking me to do something meaningful for you by assisting in your preparations to visit the Uji villa? If that's the case, it makes me very happy, for it suggests that at last you understand me a little. I'm not completely foolish to believe that, am I?"

The tone of his voice carried a lingering resentment, but Kaoru said nothing

more about his desires, concerned that someone might overhear him. He stared out at the garden. Crickets chirruped in the fading twilight, and the landscaped hillock was gradually obscured from view by the descending darkness. He leaned against a pillar, looking extremely relaxed. His attitude caused the Uji Princess to worry about a repeat of the awkward, troubling night she had recently experienced with him.

“If this were a world in which there was an end ...”⁴⁰ Kaoru whispered. “I suffer such burdensome emotions that I long to seek out a silent village⁴¹ somewhere! It doesn’t matter if there is no temple nearby. For I would make an effigy of my lost love, paint her portrait and honor her memory there by devoutly worshipping those images.”

“Your sentiments are deeply moving, and I’m grateful,” the Princess acknowledged. “But I must say that the way you hope to show your devotion makes me feel sorry for my sister. An effigy of her seems too much like those dolls that people set adrift on a stream at a shrine.⁴² Even your desire for a portrait of her bothers me, since it calls to mind the story of Wang Zhaojun and Emperor Yüan.⁴³ After all, the skill some artists put into their paintings depends entirely on how much you pay them.”

“You have a point,” Kaoru admitted. “What’s more, how could any artist possibly fashion an effigy or portrait that would satisfy my heart? I once heard about a sculptor in recent times who created a work so magnificent that it caused flower petals to fall from the sky.⁴⁴ I would need a divinely inspired artist like that.”

The depth of his feelings, which was evident from his mournful sighs, suggested that he would never be able to forget his beloved. The Uji Princess took pity on him and moved a little closer.

“When you spoke of making a doll in her likeness,” she said, “I was reminded of something that happened recently—something truly strange and unexpected.”

“What do you want to tell me?” He reached under her standing curtain as he spoke and took her by the hand.

She was extremely put out by his persistence. Despite feelings of revulsion, however, she kept her wits. Seeking to cool Kaoru’s passion and calm him down—and mindful that Shōshō was seated close by—she reacted nonchalantly to his gesture.

“This past summer,” the Princess began, “a young woman from a remote province contacted me. I didn’t want to behave coldly toward her, but at the time, I felt that it would be inappropriate to suddenly act as though we were on familiar terms with one another. After all, I’ve lived all these years completely

unaware that such a person even existed in this world. She visited me recently, and I was so astonished to see how closely she resembles my late sister that I've gradually come to feel a sympathetic connection with her. I've heard that you continue to think of *me* as a living memento of your lost love, but everyone who ever saw the two of us together insists that we look nothing alike. It strikes me as strange, then, that this young woman should be the very image of my sister. After all, you wouldn't expect someone who was born of a different mother to bear an even greater resemblance to her than I."

As Kaoru listened, he wondered if this wasn't some sort of dream-tale.

"Apparently, this young woman must have thought she had good reason to call on you," he said. "Why else would she be seeking out a closer relationship? And why didn't you at least mention her to me earlier?"

"Really, now ... how would I have known anything about her reasons for coming here, let alone the circumstances behind her connection to me? Father was always fretting about my sister and me, afraid that with no one to support us we would come down in the world and be cast adrift. As things turned out, I alone have experienced all the tribulations that worried him so much. And now suddenly, on top of everything else, comes this troubling revelation. It makes me sad to think that my father's reputation as a pious man will be sullied once word of his illicit affair gets out."

Judging from the tenor of the Princess's words, Kaoru inferred that the young woman in question was an unacknowledged daughter—a keepsake from a secret affair who could be likened to "grasses of remembrance"⁴⁵ that had been picked by Hachinomiya. What most caught his attention, however, was this young woman's reported resemblance to his lost beloved.

"Is that all you have to say? Come, come ... what difference can it make now? Tell me the whole story."

He was eager to hear more, but the subject was awkward for her, and she refused to go into any more detail.

"If you're really that intrigued, then I suggest you call on her yourself," the Uji Princess replied. "I can tell you where she is, but don't know much more about her ... and if I did tell you what I know, you'd likely lose interest in her."

Since the young lady's pedigree was apparently undistinguished, Kaoru had to admit that he would probably not seek her out with the same enthusiasm he might feel if he were searching for the spirit of his lost love. For *that* he would have shown the single-minded dedication of Emperor Xuanzong, who dispatched summoners to find the ghost of Yang Guifei, sending them across the seas, even to far-off Mount Hōrai on the Isle of the Immortals. Still, despite harboring doubts about the young lady, he pressed the Uji Princess for more

information.

"I was already thinking of making an effigy of your late sister, so why wouldn't I want to enshrine a living doll at the Uji villa and worship her instead? Anything would be preferable to living on like this, with nothing to console my heart."

"Oh, my ... I'm not sure what else to say. By divulging my father's refusal to recognize the young woman as his daughter, I've already told you far too much. That was careless of me, but I couldn't help myself. When you said you wished for a divinely inspired artist, I felt sorry for you."

She paused for a moment before continuing. "As for the young lady, she lived for many years in a remote province. Her mother was so concerned about her wretched circumstances that she took the extraordinary step of contacting me and asking for permission to meet. I couldn't bring myself to dismiss the request out of hand, and so they called on me recently. I received them only briefly, with a curtain between us, and caught only a brief glimpse of my half sister. Still, her looks and manners were much more appealing than I had expected. After hearing the mother lament her daughter's bleak prospects, I now think that perhaps it *would* be for the best if you could take the young lady off to Uji and make her your personal object of worship—though I wonder if you'll ever really be able to grant her such solicitude."

It was painfully obvious to Kaoru that the Princess was feigning a casual demeanor as a way to ward off his troublesome advances. He was irritated by her pose, but also intrigued by the story of the previously unknown half sister.

Kaoru's forward behavior caused the Princess much anxiety, but she wanted to avoid any overt expression of displeasure that might make him feel awkward. He interpreted her refusal to embarrass him as a sign that she at least acknowledged his feelings for her, and that exhilarating thought caused his heart to beat faster.

The night was growing late, and the Princess was troubled. What were her women thinking? Surely they must be shocked that Kaoru was still with her at this hour. She therefore took advantage of a lull in their conversation to withdraw to the interior of her chambers.

Kaoru tried to convince himself that her behavior was perfectly reasonable, but he couldn't help feeling bitterly disappointed. Having no outlet for his emotions, no way to calm his heart, he knew that he would look bad if he were to break down and weep in the presence of her attendants. Yet, despite the chaos in his heart, he also knew that any outrageous display on his part would be terribly unpleasant for the Princess and damaging to his own reputation. Accordingly, he repressed his emotions and took his leave, sighing more than

usual.

What will become of me if I continue to let my feelings for the Princess dominate my heart? Am I destined to suffer no matter what I do? If I behave outrageously toward her, I'll be rebuked by the world at large. But if I do nothing, I'll never possess what I most want.

He spent a restless night obsessing till dawn over the possibility that his own inexperience in matters of love would keep him and the Princess from ever knowing peace of mind. *She claims that the young lady who visited her recently looks exactly like my late beloved*, he reflected, *but I'll need to confirm that. Of course, if this half sister is as lowborn as the Princess insinuates, then it will be no problem getting close enough to her to see for myself. Even so, it would be an annoyance if I were to find out that she doesn't live up to expectations.* Mulling over these considerations, Kaoru did not feel especially drawn to the young lady.

The longer Kaoru went without seeing Hachinomiya's old villa, the more he felt as though the past was receding into the distance. Feeling vaguely restless and lonely as a result, he set out for Uji soon after the twentieth day of the ninth month. The windswept villa looked more desolate than ever, the roar of the rapids nearby was heartrending, and there was no sign of any human presence. The sight put him in a dark, agitated mood, and his sorrow was limitless. He summoned Bennokimi, and the old nun came out and took a seat behind a standing curtain with bluish-gray panels that had been set up in front of the sliding doors of her chambers.

"I am deeply humbled by your visit, but you're now such an imposing figure that I feel unworthy to be in your presence," she said, apologizing for remaining behind the curtain instead of receiving him directly.

"Imagining how you must spend your days lost in sad thought," Kaoru replied, "I thought I should like to come and share stories of the past with you—especially now that you're the only one left who can understand my feelings for your late mistress. How many months and years have gone by since her death!"

Seeing the tears well up in his eyes, the old woman could no longer hold back her own.

"Gazing up at these skies," she said, "I'm reminded that this was the season when the Princess always seemed most despondent about her younger sister's unhappy circumstances. Not a moment goes by that I do not suffer the pain of grief over her passing, yet I feel it most keenly when the cold autumn winds cut through my body.⁴⁶ And now it seems that my late mistress's apprehension was justified, for I've heard vague rumors that the marriage between her sister and Prince Niou is not going well. Will my troubles never cease?"

"I suppose that if one lives long enough, all troubles are eventually resolved.

Even so, it bothers me to think that I made a terrible mistake in bringing Prince Niou here, for that proved to be a source of constant worry for my beloved, tormenting her to the very end of her life. That being said, I want to reassure you about your younger mistress's situation of late, which is perfectly normal. Despite Prince Niou's recent marriage to the Minister's daughter, he has done nothing that would give her cause for alarm. In any case, none of that really matters in the end. Some may linger while others pass quickly,⁴⁷ but everyone in this world will eventually perish as my beloved did, drifting up to the vacant skies like smoke from a pyre. Of course, acknowledging that truth brings no comfort." He began to weep again.

Kaoru summoned the ascetic from the mountain temple and, as he had in the past, discussed with him details of the memorial services for the late Princess, including the preparation of the scrolls and images of the Buddha that were to be dedicated.

"With every visit," he remarked, "I realize how vain it is to torment myself with grief over things I cannot change. I'm giving serious consideration to dismantling the main hall here and using the materials to construct a temple further up the mountain near your own. If you're agreeable, then I'd like to begin right away." Kaoru went on to describe his idea, sketching out the meditation hall and all the passageways and chambers that would be needed.

"A truly noble plan," the ascetic assured him.

"It may seem heartless of me to dismantle the place that Hachinomiya built as a refuge from the world," Kaoru continued, "but his mind was always focused on making progress along the path to enlightenment—though naturally he was constrained by his compassion for the daughters he would leave behind and could not pursue his devotions as fully as he might have wished. Since this villa belongs to his surviving daughter, it is now also the property of her husband, the Minister of War, and I have no standing to do with it as my heart desires. Thus, it would be improper for me to simply convert it to a temple. Besides, the location is not really suitable. It is much too close to the roar of the rapids to permit quiet meditation, and it is too exposed to the view of passersby. That's why I prefer to take down the main hall and rebuild it in a different form somewhere else."

"Your plans are thoughtful and honorable in all respects," the ascetic said. "In ancient times there was a man who, grieving over the death of his child, had the ashes and bones placed in a pouch, which he then wore around his neck for many years. It was only after this man heard a parable that illustrated the true teachings of the Buddha that he discarded the pouch and finally set out on the path of a holy man.⁴⁸ If you leave the main hall of the villa just as it is, then

every time you see it you will be moved by sad memories that, like that man's pouch, will be an attachment hindering you on the way to enlightenment. By converting the building into a temple, you will be performing a good work that will assure your salvation in worlds to come. I shall attend to your plans right away. I'll consult a master at the Bureau of Divination to determine an auspicious date to begin construction, then engage two or three carpenters who are experienced in this sort of work. Once they get started, I'll have them complete all the details in accordance with Buddha's teachings."

After Kaoru finished discussing his plans with the ascetic, he decided to proceed with the project. Calling up retainers from his nearby manors, he ordered them to do exactly as the ascetic instructed. By this time, the sun had already set, and so he decided to spend the night at Uji.

This may well be the last time I see this place, he thought. As he wandered about, he noticed that the statues and images of the Buddha had already been moved up to the temple on the mountain. All that remained were a few implements that Bennokimi used for her religious practices. He was touched that she should continue to reside in a hall that emanated such an atmosphere of insubstantial fragility.

"Apparently, the main hall has to be renovated," he informed Bennokimi. "I'm not sure why, but while the construction is being completed, you will have to reside in this aisle room. If there are any items that need to be sent to your young mistress in the capital, let me know and I'll have my men deliver them to her."

Kaoru went on to discuss with her several other matters of a more practical nature. Had he been anywhere else, he would never have permitted a woman as old as Bennokimi to be in his presence like this. This particular evening, however, he had her stay close by so that he might talk with her about the old days and about his true father.

With no one there to overhear them, Bennokimi spoke at her ease and at length about Kashiwagi, the late Acting Major Counselor. "At the hour of your father's death, it was obvious how much he wanted to see you, having heard how precious you looked when you were just born. I never thought that I would live to be this old, but when I recall that moment, I take our meeting like this after all these years as a sign of the close bond between us—recompense, perhaps, for my having served your father so closely while he was alive. It makes me both sad and joyful. At the same time, I feel shamefully wretched to have witnessed and experienced so much during a long life filled with sorrow. From time to time my young mistress will send me a message encouraging me to come to the capital to visit her once in a while. She complains that I seem to have cut myself

off from the world and become a complete stranger to her. But my station is too humble and inauspicious to visit her. Besides, there is no one other than Amida Buddha that I want to see."

Bennokimi talked on and on about her late mistress: the way the Princess looked and behaved over the years, the things she had said on this or that occasion, the poems she had composed on the spur of the moment when viewing cherry blossoms or autumn foliage. The old nun's trembling voice was, in this case, perfect, since it helped create a nostalgic mood.

As Kaoru listened to her reminisce, he was left with a single, warm memory: *My beloved may have been childlike, quiet and reserved, but she was a lady of grace and elegant sensibility.*

This memory in turn prompted him to privately compare the sisters. *The younger Princess is somewhat more modern in outlook, and thus less reserved, but she is also capable of being excessively curt—to the point of shaming anyone who makes her feel awkward or wary. All the same, she seems to be warmhearted and kindly disposed toward me, which suggests that she would prefer to continue our relationship.*

With these thoughts in mind, Kaoru took advantage of his conversation with Bennokimi to broach the subject of the young lady who evidently bore a striking resemblance to his beloved.

"I have no way of knowing if she's been in the capital recently," Bennokimi told him. "I've only heard reports about her from others. Right after the Princesses' mother died, but before they moved here, Hachinomiya had a brief affair with one of his ladies-in-waiting—a woman named Chūjō no kimi. She was a lady of good breeding, with nothing odd or outlandish about her character. Nonetheless, the Prince was extremely discreet and managed to keep their affair a secret until Chūjō no kimi gave birth to a girl. I heard that Hachinomiya acknowledged that the child was his, but apparently he found the situation distasteful and troublesome. Chastened by the consequences of his own behavior, he resolved never again to see Chūjō no kimi and the child. He started down the path of religious devotion, more or less devoting himself to the life of a holy man. As for Chūjō no kimi, she was so ashamed that she was no longer able to serve in the Prince's household. She left and eventually became the wife of the Governor of Michinokuni. During the year following her marriage, she traveled back up to the capital and quietly sent word to the attendants at Uji that the little girl was doing very well. However, when Hachinomiya heard the report, he dismissed it out of hand, saying that such matters were of no concern to him any more. Needless to say, Chūjō no kimi was disappointed, and she lamented that her efforts on behalf of her daughter had proven futile.

"I found out that she later went down from the capital again when her husband was appointed Vice Governor of Hitachi, but then several years passed and I had no word of her. I heard a few scant rumors that she had returned to the capital this past spring and called on my young mistress at Prince Niou's villa.⁴⁹ Her daughter must be about twenty years old by now. Just before they arrived back in the capital, Chūjō no kimi apparently sent a long letter to my young mistress expressing sad regrets about her child's circumstances—especially since the young lady is reportedly very beautiful."

Hearing these details stirred Kaoru's affections: *If what Bennokimi says is really true, then I very much want to see this young lady for myself.*

"I'd eagerly travel to the remotest province to search out a woman who has even a slight resemblance to my beloved," he said. "Hachinomiya may have refused to recognize this young lady as one of his daughters, but she is closely related to the Princesses. If she should ever visit you here, please convey my desire to meet with her. Of course, don't make too much of a fuss about what I've told you just now."

Kaoru intended to return to the capital at the break of dawn, and so he presented the ascetic with gifts of silk and cotton cloth that he had ordered his retainers to bring to him the previous evening. He gave similar gifts to Bennokimi as well, and he had cloth of lesser value—goods woven of hemp or flax—distributed among the lower-ranking priests and the menials who served the old nun. The villa was a lonely, desolate abode, but thanks to Kaoru's unstinting kindness, Bennokimi was able to maintain an attractive lifestyle appropriate to her status and to carry on her religious devotions in quiet ease.

Just as he stepped out and was about to depart, Kaoru hesitated, wishing to tarry a while longer. Glancing around, he observed the fallen leaves blanketing the grounds, scattered by autumn winds so fierce that they had stripped bare even the topmost branches of the withered trees. Sadly, there was no indication of any visitor having cut a path through those leaves.⁵⁰ The colors of the ivy⁵¹ vines twining around the ancient mountain trees were still vibrant and made for a delightful scene. Knowing how much the Uji Princess yearned to come back here, Kaoru had his men pluck some tendrils from several varieties of ivy, including one called *kodani*,⁵² to take back with them. He then quietly intoned the following, as if he were speaking to himself:

*Had I not warmly recalled that I once stayed here
How lonely would it have been for this wayfarer
To sleep under trees encoiled in vines of ivy*

Overhearing his verse, Bennokimi replied:

*How sad that your sojourn beneath this withered tree⁵³
Should call forth memories of when you once stayed here
Lodging under trees encoiled in vines of ivy*

Her response poem was thoroughly old-fashioned in tone, but it was not inelegant, and as such, it brought him a measure of comfort.

Prince Niou happened to be at the Nijō villa when the tendrils of autumn ivy were presented to his Uji Princess. When the messenger nonchalantly announced that the ivy was a gift from “my lord at the Sanjō villa,” she felt painfully awkward: *It’s more of the same annoying attention.*

Niou merely remarked, “My ... what charming vines of ivy!” His tone of voice, however, was insinuatingly caustic.

A letter from Kaoru was attached to the ivy. Part of it read as follows:

How have you been these past few days? I would like to meet with you in person to tell you about my trip to Uji. My thoughts and feelings became ever more disordered as I lost myself in the morning mists on the mountain peaks there. I spoke with the ascetic about turning the main hall into a temple. Of course, I need your permission to proceed with this plan, but if you agree to it, then I shall have the building dismantled and moved to a different location. Please inform the old nun residing at the villa what you wish to have done.

“A most proper, dispassionate letter,” Niou observed. “He must have known that I’d be in residence here today.”

There was a large measure of truth in his statement, and the Princess was relieved that Kaoru’s letter was so innocuous. Still, she was also irritated that her husband had openly expressed his baseless suspicions.

Niou thought her indignant expression utterly adorable and, as a result, he found it impossible to hold a grudge against her transgressions.

“Go ahead and write your reply,” he told her, turning away. “Don’t mind me. I won’t peek.”

Had she acted diffident or ashamed in his presence and refused to write, it would have only invited greater suspicion. She set down the following message:

How I envy you, going off to that villa in the hills. I am in complete agreement with your plans to move the main hall and turn it into a temple.

Rather than seek out some other retreat amidst towering crags,⁵⁴ I would much prefer that the old retreat not be allowed to fall to ruin. Do whatever you think is most appropriate. If you can take care of this matter, I would be most grateful for your kind assistance.

The interactions between the Uji Princess and Kaoru appeared to be beyond reproach, and yet Niou, who was himself promiscuous and fickle by nature, assumed the worst in others and couldn't help being unsettled by his belief that something must be amiss.

Of all the plants in the increasingly sere, blasted garden, only the plumes of the pampas grass retained their allure as they seemed to beckon enticingly, like waving sleeves.⁵⁵ Pliant stalks whose plumes had not yet filled out were swaying delicately, pearls of dew strung along their stems. All in all, a rather commonplace autumn scene, but in the evening breeze blowing at that moment, it moved Niou.

*The stalk of grass not yet come into plume
Seems to be yearning, drawn to another
Whose dew-drenched plume, waving sleeve-like, beckons⁵⁶*

He had not bothered with formal trousers, but was dressed in soft, well-worn robes, over which he had slipped on a cloak. He took up a *biwa* lute, tuned it to the *ōshiki* mode, and strummed a plaintive air for his Princess.

She knew a great deal about the instrument and was fond of it. When Niou began to play, therefore, she was so touched that her anger and resentment melted away. She drew nearer and, leaning on an armrest, peeked out from behind her short standing curtain to observe him. Catching a glimpse of her charming face, he longed to gaze more fully on it.

The Princess replied:

*Just as the breeze rustling the plumed grasses
Tells these withered fields that autumn has passed
So it hints that you have wearied of me*

"I alone suffer . . ." ⁵⁷ she added. Embarrassed that tears would give away her jealous resentment, she hid her face behind a fan.

Given his doting affection for the Princess, Niou was naturally moved to sympathize. But at the same time, he realized that Kaoru was finding it impossible to give her up precisely because she was so adorable. Tormented by

such suspicions, his affection for her was tempered by his resentment.

Most of the chrysanthemums in the garden had yet to take on their full autumn colors—indeed, they were so carefully cultivated at this villa that they changed later than usual. One cluster, however, had turned a gorgeous hue. Niou had a stem of it broken off; he then quietly intoned, “It’s not that I’m partial only to chrysanthemums ...”⁵⁸

“Many years ago,” he continued, “an imperial prince was admiring chrysanthemums when a heavenly spirit descended and taught him the secret techniques of the lute.⁵⁹ How depressing it is to live in a world where the understanding and appreciation of things is now so shallow!” Niou sighed in lament and set the *biwa* aside.

The Princess was overcome by wistful longing, for she did not want him to stop playing.

“As you say, people’s hearts may have grown shallow in the present age, but that doesn’t necessarily mean that techniques handed down from antiquity are played with any less depth of feeling, does it?”

Niou was struck by how eager she seemed to learn songs that she did not know or skills she had not yet mastered. He ordered an attendant to bring out a thirteen-string koto and encouraged his Princess to take up the instrument.

“Let’s play together. Something seems to be lacking when one has to perform alone.”

“Someone tried to teach me many years ago, but I was, I’m afraid, a rather poor pupil and don’t remember very much.” She spoke with a modest, diffident air and made no effort to even touch the koto.

Niou was now genuinely irritated. “It hurts me that you should treat me differently, remaining coldly aloof and refusing even this trivial request. The *other* lady I’ve been seeing recently never goes out of her way to conceal those things she has just learned or knows only imperfectly—and *she* doesn’t even know me all that intimately yet. From what I’ve heard, the Middle Counselor swears that it’s best for a woman to be meek and yielding. I imagine you’re never *this* demure around him. Obviously you two must share a special relationship.”

Sighing, the Princess prepared to play a little for him. She loosened the strings in order to shift to the *banshiki* mode, and then performed a short prelude to adjust her tuning. Her style of pizzicato produced enchanting overtones, and Niou accompanied her on “The Sea of Ise”⁶⁰ by singing the lyrics. His voice was so noble and appealing that the older attendants drew closer to their blinds, their faces beaming with pride at their lord and lady.

“It’s a shame that his affections are now divided,” one of them remarked, “but

given his exalted status, I suppose it's to be expected. On the other hand, if you look at the situation objectively, it has to be said that our mistress is still blessed."

"It's depressing to hear her going on about how she wants to return to that desolate villa," said another. "If she did that, how could we reasonably expect our lord to regularly visit such an out-of-the-way place?"

The older women chattered on like this until, finally, they were restrained by some of the younger attendants, who told them to be quiet.

Niou spent the next three or four days in seclusion, instructing his Uji Princess on the koto. He made a pretense of observing a prohibition in order to give himself an excuse for staying so long at Nijō. Needless to say, those at the Rokujō estate were annoyed by his absence. Thus, on the day when the Minister was scheduled to withdraw from the palace, he decided to go straight to Nijō before returning to his own residence.

"Why does he have to make such a show of everything?" Niou complained as he set off for the main hall to receive the Minister.

"It's been a long time since I visited this place," the Minister remarked. "Once my father, Lord Genji, passed away, there was no reason for me to come here."

The two men shared stories about events that had taken place many years ago at the villa. Eventually, the Minister set off for the Rokujō estate with Niou in tow. They were accompanied by a magnificent escort that included not only the Minister's many sons but also other high-ranking officials and courtiers. The Princess's attendants were dispirited upon seeing such a glorious and dashing procession, for they realized that their mistress could never compete with the household of their rival, Roku no kimi. Peeking out from behind the blinds to watch the retreating escort, they spoke among themselves.

Some praised the Minister.

"He's such a handsome nobleman!"

"And with so many fine young sons! He's incomparable."

"No doubt, a splendid man whom fortune has favored."

Others, however, could not help deplored the situation.

"Well ... he may be as distinguished as you all say he is, but it was despicable of him to make such an obvious show of his power by coming here!"

"This does not bode well for our lady's marriage."

The Princess herself began reflecting on all that had befallen her, and she grew increasingly forlorn at the realization that someone whose status was as ambiguous as hers would never be permitted to mingle with such brilliant members of court society. She was more than ever convinced that it would be better for her to withdraw discreetly to the old Uji villa, where she could still

find some peace of mind.

And so, with her circumstances unsettled and her future unresolved, the year came to a close.

As the end of the first month of the New Year approached, the Princess began to experience greater physical discomfort. Niou, who had never before witnessed a pregnancy, was alarmed. He commissioned a large number of priests to conduct healing rites at various temples. Worried that these steps were not enough, he went on ordering more and more services for her. When the Princess was in the most extreme distress, even the Akashi Empress sent a note expressing concern over her condition.

The Princess and Niou were going into their third year together, and his loving regard for her had never wavered in any way. Her position, however, had not been recognized generally as one worthy of respect until this moment. Members of court society from every household were startled when they heard what was happening with her, and despite the need to show deference to Roku no kimi, they all sent messages wishing her well.

Kaoru was no less concerned about the Uji Princess than Niou, and his heart ached with apprehension over the impending birth. Of course, there were limits to what he could do, and he was careful to behave within strict bounds, sending perfectly prim messages and visiting Nijō infrequently and only when appropriate. He also privately commissioned prayers and services.

While all of this was going on, the donning of the first train by the Fujitsubo Princess was scheduled to take place at around that time. The court was abuzz with activity as people rushed to finish up the arrangements for the ceremony. His Majesty was single-mindedly focused on the event, personally seeing to all the details, and so his daughter's lack of supporters at court, which had once been such a concern, turned out in this case to be a rather fortunate situation. In addition to the items the late Consort had already prepared, the Office of Palace Works and the relevant provincial governors each provided supplies and treasures too numerous to count. Because Kaoru would begin calling on the Fujitsubo Princess soon after the ceremony was held, he should have been using the time to ready himself for his role as groom. Given his natural inclinations, however, he was reluctant to turn his attention to the matter of his marriage and, sighing in lament, was occupied solely by his concern for the well-being of the Uji Princess.

On the first day of the second month, at a Supplemental Ceremonial for Court Promotions,⁶¹ Kaoru was named both Acting Major Counselor and Major Captain of the Right, which raised his rank to senior third. The latter post had opened up when Genji's son was appointed Minister and he stepped aside as

Major Captain of the Left, a position that was subsequently filled by the previous Major Captain of the Right.⁶² Kaoru was obligated to make the customary visits to various noble houses, including the Nijō villa, in order to express his joy and gratitude for the promotions. The Uji Princess was in considerable distress by now, and because Niou was staying with her, Kaoru made Nijō his first call.

It was an inconvenient moment for such a visit, what with all the priests performing services to protect the Princess, and Niou was caught off guard. He changed his clothes, donning a vibrant, casual cloak over more somewhat more formal robes, and descended the stairs leading off the main hall into the garden to exchange greetings with his guest. The two men cut equally magnificent figures.

"I will be hosting a banquet for the Right Palace Guardsmen this evening," Kaoru said humbly, "and I would be honored by your presence."

Niou seemed reluctant to accept the invitation. No doubt he was worried about the Princess's condition.

Thinking of the precedent that had been set at the time when Genji's son was named Minister of the Right,⁶³ it was decided that the banquet celebrating Kaoru's promotions should be held at the Rokujō estate. A large crowd, including many princes of the blood and high-ranking officials, gathered for the event, so that the banquet was extremely lively and in no way inferior to other similar celebrations of important appointments. Prince Niou even made an appearance, though he was so anxious about his Uji Princess that he hurried away well before the festivities had ended.

The Minister was displeased that Niou had left without calling on Roku no kimi. "I must say," he complained, "this is unacceptable ... truly shocking!"

In terms of status, the Uji Princess was of course every bit Roku no kimi's equal, but apparently the Minister behaved as he did out of a puffed-up sense of pride over his own daughter's reputation, which was flourishing at that moment.

At last, as dawn broke on the morning after the banquet, the Uji Princess gave birth to a boy. All the worry Niou had suffered and the precautions he had taken had been worth it, and he was overjoyed. Kaoru was also happy, news of the birth adding to the joy of his appointment to Major Captain. Presently, he made his way over to the Nijō villa to express his gratitude to Niou for attending the banquet the previous evening and his congratulations for the birth of a son. He remained standing throughout his visit in order to avoid the defilement of childbirth.

Niou had to remain at his villa during the period of confinement, and so everyone at the court had to call on him at Nijō. The celebratory banquet held on the third night following the birth was, in accordance with custom, a private

affair for Niou's immediate household. For the fifth-night celebration, Kaoru provided fifty sets of trays filled with rice balls for the attendants, coins to be used as prizes for the winners of Go matches, bowls heaped with rice and other provisions—all customary gifts. He presented the Uji Princess with thirty cypress trays on stands that were to be used for serving meals, as well as a five-layer set of infant's robes, diapers, swaddling clothes and the like. The presentation of these items was understated, without any ostentatious display. However, when one examined the gifts more closely, it was apparent that Kaoru had gone out of his way to display a striking sensibility at once considerate and properly restrained.

Kaoru presented Niou with celebratory sweet cakes of five colors⁶⁴ served on tall stands, which in turn rested on fragrant aloeswood trays. Each of the ladies-in-waiting received from him one of thirty boxes filled with various delicacies—in addition, of course, to one of the cypress trays he had given to their mistress. For these items as well, Kaoru did not go out of his way to make an especially showy presentation.

On the evening of the seventh night, the Akashi Empress sponsored the celebrations. Because it was an imperially sanctioned event, an exceptionally large number of people attended. The guests included the Master of the Empress's Household, as well as imperial chamberlains and high-ranking officials—all too numerous to count. As preparations were being made for this banquet, His Majesty was heard remarking, “Now that my son has reached full maturity, how should I acknowledge his fatherhood?” In the end, he sent a ceremonial sheathed dagger for his new grandson,⁶⁵ a talisman symbolizing a father’s protection.

The ninth-day celebration was sponsored by the Minister—though his heart was not really in it. Still, there was Niou’s reaction to consider, and so all of the Minister’s sons attended. As it turned out, everything came off perfectly, and the occasion was so stylish, bright and auspicious that even the Uji Princess herself, who had struggled with anxiety and depression for months, took some measure of solace from these pleasant diversions.

Kaoru, the Major Captain, was experiencing conflicting emotions: *Now that the Princess is a mother and has reached full womanhood, he reflected, she'll be increasingly aloof and distant with me. At the same time, Niou will be that much more attentive to her.* This was a cause for regret, and yet, when he recalled that he had only wished the best for her from the beginning, it also made him feel very happy.

Following these events, the Fujitsubo Princess donned her first train at a ceremony held a few days after the twentieth of the second month. On the day

following the ceremony, Kaoru went to her quarters to take her as his bride. The celebration of the First Night was conducted in private. The extraordinary care with which His Majesty had nurtured his daughter had always been the talk of the court. Thus, it now struck many as distressingly unsatisfactory that she should have ended up married to a commoner. Some even voiced their disapproval: “He may have intended all along to give her away, but there was certainly no need to rush the decision!”

Despite such grumblings, His Majesty was, by temperament, inclined to immediately implement his decisions once he had made up his mind. Apparently, he had decided that, all things being equal, he would bestow this unprecedented honor upon Kaoru. Of course, there have been many men—past and present—who have been chosen to be the groom of an imperial princess, but examples of an Emperor at the height of his power hastening like some commoner to select a groom for his daughter are rare indeed, are they not?

Later, when Genji’s son, the Minister,⁶⁶ was speaking with the Second Princess, he made the following observation: “Kaoru is certainly a man of remarkable expectations and rare destiny. Even my late father was unable to marry an imperial princess as a bride until Emperor Suzaku was just about to retire from society near the end of his life. My case, of course, was different ... I simply swept you up without anyone’s permission.”

The Second Princess acknowledged the truth of his words, but she was too embarrassed to be able to respond to him.

On the evening of the Third Night of the nuptials, His Majesty issued orders to the patrons and household staff who supported or cared for the Fujitsubo Princess—beginning with her half brother, the Treasury official—that they were to discreetly distribute gifts and rewards among each of Kaoru’s outrunners, escort, ox drivers, and guardsmen. All these matters were handled informally, as if they were private in nature.

In the days following these nuptial ceremonies, Kaoru quietly and inconspicuously made nightly visits to his bride in the chambers of the wisteria courtyard. In his heart and mind, however, he continued to find it all but impossible to forget the past, to forget the one he had loved. During the day he would idly pass the time at his Sanjō villa lost in melancholy reverie. When evenings arrived, he would hurry back to the Fujitsubo Princess, even though he had no desire to go. The feeling of being caught in such an uncomfortable situation was extremely dispiriting and oppressive, and he wanted to have his bride withdraw from the palace and move to Sanjō.

His mother, the Third Princess, thought this was a splendid idea, and told him that she would move out of the main hall to make room for the newlyweds.

“That’s asking far too much of you,” Kaoru replied, turning down the offer. Instead, he had a passageway constructed to connect the west facade of the main hall to his mother’s meditation chapel. Apparently, his plan was to move the Third Princess into quarters on the west side. The east side had been beautifully reconstructed after the fire,⁶⁷ and so it was ideal for Kaoru and his bride. He had it further refurbished and lavishly appointed.

When the palace learned of these plans, His Majesty was uneasy. Wasn’t it too soon for his daughter to drop all reserve and move to the Sanjō residence? He may have been the Emperor, but like any other father, he knew what it was to be lost in the darkness of a parent’s heart.⁶⁸ He dispatched a messenger with a letter for his sister, the Third Princess. In it, he spoke only of his concerns for his daughter. His father, the late Emperor Suzaku, had expressly entrusted him with the responsibility of looking after the Third Princess. Even after she had withdrawn from the world to become a nun, his commitment to her never wavered, and he was always deeply kind and considerate, never failing to do anything she asked of him just as he had in the past.

It was a great honor for Kaoru to receive so much attention from such exalted figures as His Majesty and his own mother, who together made a great fuss over him. In his heart, however, he did not consider this a cause for joy. While continuing to be as pensive and melancholy as ever, he pushed to quickly finish the construction of the temple at Uji.

Counting down the days in anticipation of the fiftieth-day celebration for Prince Niou’s son, Kaoru turned his attention wholeheartedly to preparing the pounded rice cakes for the event. While carefully inspecting the baskets and cypress boxes that would be used to serve the rice cakes and other delicacies, he made it clear that he intended this to be no ordinary occasion by ordering masters of various crafts to fashion fine gifts from aloeswood, red sandalwood, silver and gold. These craftsmen, apparently motivated by competitive pride, produced all sorts of remarkable items.

Naturally, Kaoru did not just send retainers with these gifts, but visited the Nijō villa himself. As he had always done in the past, he chose a time when Niou was absent to call on the Uji Princess. Perhaps it was the workings of his heart, but it seemed to him that she had acquired an even greater air of poise and dignity since he last saw her. For her part, she felt comfortable granting him an audience, since she assumed that surely by now—what with the distractions of his recent promotion and marriage—he was over those awkward, absurdly presumptuous yearnings of his. Her assumption, however, proved false; he was the same old Kaoru.

Tears filled his eyes as he openly poured his heart out to her: “Having married

someone I do not cherish, I am more anxious and troubled than ever about this world, convinced that it's a realm where nothing ever turns out as I wish."

"A shockingly disrespectful thing to say," the Princess replied. "Just think of the consequences were someone to overhear even a snatch of our conversation."

Despite her words, the Princess recognized his extraordinary devotion and was moved to compassion: *How deep his feelings must be that still he seems to long for my late sister, unable to forget her or find solace in what should be a most auspicious marriage. If only she were alive!* But then, as she recalled the past, she was filled with bitter self-recrimination. *Of course, if she had lived, she would have ended up in the same wretched circumstances in which I find myself, and neither of us would be in a position to envy the other. No matter what, so long as one is not counted among the elite, then one has no prospect of being accepted in court society.* She looked back with increasing respect at the nobility of her sister's refusal to give herself to any man.

Kaoru was eager to see the child, and though his request was awkward for the Uji Princess, she had no good reason to kept the boy hidden away. *Apart from the Major Captain's unpleasant attachment to me,* she mused, *what other cause for resentment has he given? How can I refuse the wishes of a man who has otherwise been so kind?* She did not respond directly to Kaoru, but had the wet nurse bring out her baby.

Naturally, the child was adorable—how could the offspring of such beautiful parents not be? Kaoru gazed at the little boy's face, handsome and so fair of complexion as to be ominous, babbling and cooing and laughing with a delightful lilt. He felt a twinge of envy and found himself coveting the child—was he perhaps finding it difficult to turn his back on the world after all?

If only the woman who passed away all too quickly had consented to live with me in a normal relationship and left behind a child like this ... This was his only thought—an indication, apparently, that his obsessive attachment was utterly beyond his control, for it never occurred to him that the splendid imperial princess he had just married might soon give him a child of his own.

It would be a pity if, by recording all of these events, I left the impression that Kaoru was somehow womanish or perverse by nature. Had he been anything but decent and serious, then surely His Majesty would never have brought him into the intimate circle of the imperial family. We must assume, therefore, that, in managing practical affairs of state, Kaoru was a principled man of outstanding ability.

Just as the Uji Princess had expected, Kaoru was deeply moved that he had been allowed to see the child, and as a result, he stayed longer than usual, talking at length with her until evening. As darkness fell, he was painfully aware that he

could not remain there late into the night and feel at ease. Sighing sigh after sigh, he took his leave.

“Such fragrance! And a thoroughly charming man,” one of the mischievous young attendants teased. “It brings to mind a poem: ‘Having broken off a branch of plum ...’⁶⁹ I’m sure the warbler is bound to pay us a visit.”

It was determined that once summer arrived, the route between the palace and the Sanjō villa would be blocked by a directional prohibition. Accordingly, the Fujitsubo Princess was moved to Kaoru’s residence around the first day of the fourth month, just before the change of seasons. On the day prior to the move, His Majesty went over to his daughter’s residence in the Fujitsubo to hold a banquet celebrating the wisteria blooms there. The blinds in the south aisle room were raised, and the imperial throne was set up facing the courtyard. Being an official banquet, the Fujitsubo Princess did not serve as the host.

Treasury officials brought food, drink and other provisions from the Imperial Storehouse for the entertainment of high-ranking officials and imperial chamberlains. Those officials in attendance included, among others, the Minister and the Major Captain of the Left,⁷⁰ as well as Tamakazura’s oldest stepson, who was now serving as the Fujiwara Middle Counselor, and her own son, who was Commander of the Left Palace Guard. Among the Princes of the blood were Niou and Prince Hitachi.

The chamberlains were seated beneath the wisteria blooms in the courtyard on the south side of the Fujitsubo. The court musicians had been summoned to the east side of the Kōrōden⁷¹ and were playing wind instruments in the bright, springlike *sō* mode as evening arrived. When kotos, flutes and other instruments were brought out from the Fujitsubo Princess’s quarters to be played in concert for His Majesty’s pleasure, the distinguished guests—beginning with the Minister—brought them forward and presented them to their sovereign. In addition to the instruments, the Minister presented His Majesty with two scrolls containing scores for the seven-string koto that the late Lord Genji himself had copied for his wife, the Third Princess. An auspicious branch of five-needle pine was attached to the scrolls. Next, in succession, came a thirteen-string koto, a *biwa* lute, and a six-string Japanese koto that had all once belonged to His Majesty’s father, the late Emperor Suzaku.

When the Major Captain, Kaoru, came forward, he presented the flute that had been passed down to him as a keepsake in accordance with the wishes that the spirit of Kashiwagi had conveyed to Genji’s son in a dream. His Majesty once praised the tonal qualities of this flute as peerless, and so Kaoru had brought it out, thinking that there might never be a more auspicious occasion than this glorious banquet to make such a presentation.

His Majesty then selected in turn players for each of the instruments—the Minister for the Japanese koto, Niou for the *biwa* lute, and so on. Kaoru's performance on the flute that day was exquisite, taking full advantage of the instrument's potential. Those among the chamberlains who were noted for their skill at accompanying the instruments by singing solfège were also called forth, and their performance was delightful.

Celebratory sweet cakes of five colors were sent out from the quarters of the Fujitsubo Princess. These were served on tall stands that rested on four aloeswood trays covered with cloth dyed various hues of purple and embroidered in a pattern of wisteria clusters. The plates and utensils were of silver, the winecups of purple-tinged blue glass, and the decanters of dark lapis lazuli blue glass.⁷² The Commander of the Left Palace Guard would serve as His Majesty's proxy when offering the imperial winecup. The Minister felt it would be awkward for him to receive the cup from his sovereign, since the honor came to him so frequently. Similarly, there was no one among the Princes of the blood who would be an appropriate choice, since they too had all received the cup on numerous occasions. Thus, the honor fell to Kaoru, and though he declared himself unworthy—no doubt wondering if this was what His Majesty intended—he raised the cup and offered the customary toast: "Your Highness!"⁷³ His tone of voice and his gestures were what one would expect at a public ceremony, and yet he came across as special, different from others. Is it possible that this perception of him sprang from the imaginations of those who, on this particular day, were even more predisposed than usual to view him in a favorable light?

Kaoru cut an incomparably magnificent figure as he poured the wine into a different vessel to drink later, returned the imperial winecup, and descended the stairs to the courtyard. There he performed obeisance to His Majesty by placing his ceremonial wand on the ground, rising and bowing, flourishing his sleeves left, right and left again, then sitting and repeating his actions.⁷⁴ Even the noblest princes and highest-ranking officials find it gratifying when His Majesty bestows the cup on them, so how much more honored Kaoru must have been, as an imperial son-in-law, to have been shown such gracious favor. The high esteem in which his sovereign lord held him was truly a marvel. Still, his status had its limits, and it was awkwardly deflating to see him return to his seat, which was in a subordinate position.

How hateful this is, Kōbai⁷⁵ was thinking as he sat there. *I had hoped to have the honor of being His Majesty's son-in-law myself.*

Years ago, Kōbai's heart had been set on taking the Fujitsubo Princess's mother to wife. Even after she went to the palace to serve as Consort, he found it

impossible to get her out of his mind, and they continued to exchange letters. Eventually he gave up, and his attentions shifted to the daughter, whom he hoped to look after and support. He quietly indicated his wishes to the Consort, but because she did not convey his suit to His Majesty, he was left feeling bitterly frustrated.

“It seems that fortune truly smiles on the Major Captain. But why must His Majesty go to such absurd lengths to favor him as a son-in-law? There’s never been anything like it! That a commoner should be permitted to reside so close to the ninefold imperial chambers—in the Fujitsubo, no less—and to serve in such intimate proximity to our sovereign … and then, to top it off, to have everyone falling all over him, honoring him with banquets and the like ...”

Despite muttering these extremely harsh criticisms, Kōbai had attended the banquet because he was curious and didn’t want to be left out of a splendid event. Still, as he sat and observed the celebration, his heart was churning with anger.

Small wooden hand torches were lit and the guests offered poems to His Majesty. Each man wore a self-satisfied look on his face as he approached the low table at the foot of the stairs and placed upon it the composition he had set down on ceremonial paper. If past experience is any guide, one can only imagine how peculiar and old-fashioned the poems must have been, full of clichés and idiosyncrasies. That’s why I didn’t go out of my way to examine them all or copy them down. I did record one or two representative examples that I heard some of the higher-ranking officials and princes recite—though it doesn’t mean that their compositions seemed all that special.

For example, when Kaoru descended into the courtyard to fetch a spray of wisteria blossoms to adorn His Majesty’s cap, he intoned the following:

*Thinking to pluck a cluster of wisteria
For Your Highness’s cap, my sleeve caught on a branch
As far above me as your exalted daughter*

His saucy impudence was wickedly delightful!

His Majesty replied:

*Since these are blossoms whose fragrance will last
For all worlds to come, I shall this day gaze
Upon their endlessly appealing hue⁷⁶*

Someone—perhaps the Minister⁷⁷—composed the following:

*No less auspicious than the purple clouds
Of the Pure Land is the royal color
Of blossoms plucked for Your Highness's cap*⁷⁸

Someone else added this verse:

*The color of these wisteria blooms
A cresting wave rising to the heavens
Is not commonly observed in this world*

This last was most likely by Kōbai, who was fuming over Kaoru's success.⁷⁹ I probably transcribed some of these poems incorrectly, but even if I did, as one can see from these examples, none of them had any distinctive or appealing quality.

As the night deepened, the musical performances became even more entralling. Kaoru sang the *saibara* "Glorious Day" in an incomparably superb voice. Kōbai still possessed traces of that remarkably lovely voice for which he had been famous in the old days, and now he joined Kaoru, accompanying him in a wonderfully grand, solemn manner. The Minister's seventh son, who was still just a boy, played the *shō* pipes. His performance was so delightful that His Majesty rewarded him with a robe. In gratitude for this gesture, the Minister descended to the courtyard and performed obeisance. Dawn was approaching when the Emperor finally withdrew to his own quarters. His Majesty provided gifts for the Princes and high-ranking officials, while the Fujitsubo Princess rewarded the chamberlains and court musicians with items that were appropriate to each man's status.

On the evening of the day after the banquet, the Fujitsubo Princess withdrew from the palace and set off for Kaoru's Sanjō villa. The ceremony marking her departure was a truly extraordinary event. His Majesty ordered all of his closest ladies-in-waiting to see his daughter off by accompanying her to Sanjō. She rode in a servant-drawn carriage decorated with brightly colored embroidered cloth and with a broad, flat roof that flared out to form eaves. The procession included: three ox-drawn carriages without eaves that were also decorated with colorful embroidered cloth; six ox-drawn carriages decorated with gold-foil trim and gold fittings; twenty plain ox-drawn carriages with roofs and sides of woven palm fronds; and two wickerwork carriages. Eight pages and servants attended each of these carriages. In addition, Kaoru sent numerous carriages from Sanjō to greet the Fujitsubo Princess. These carried ladies-in-waiting whose gorgeous sleeves and trains peeped out from under the blinds. Her escort consisted of

courtiers from all ranks—from the highest officials and chamberlains down to gentlemen of the sixth rank. All in all, a resplendent spectacle that was beyond the power of words to describe.

Once the Fujitsubo Princess had moved to Kaoru's villa, he could observe her at his ease and get to know her better. She had an extremely enchanting air about her. Slight of build, regal in bearing, quiet and calm—as far as he could determine, she had no flaws. It gave him a sense of smug satisfaction to think that, having met with such good fortune, he could hardly complain about his destiny. Under the circumstances, it thus would have been best if he could have forgotten his lost beloved, and yet not a moment went by when he wasn't yearning obsessively for her. *It seems I'll never be able to find consolation in this world. If ever I achieve the enlightenment of Buddhahood, perhaps I'll come to understand what karmic retribution led me into such a strangely troubling, cruel relationship with the late Princess at Uji, and then I'll be able to resign myself to my loss and let it go.* With such thoughts constantly in mind, he concentrated on completing his plans for the construction of the temple at Uji.

Late in the fourth month, some time after the twentieth day when the bustle of the Kamo Festival was finished, Kaoru paid one of his customary visits to the Uji villa. He inspected the temple, which was under construction, and gave specifications for the various tasks that had to be completed. He would have felt sorry had he not paid his usual visit to Bennokimi—the old nun who had once referred to herself as “this withered tree”—and so he started over to her quarters, which were in an aisle room on the west side. On the way he noticed, just now coming across the Uji Bridge, a humble-looking woman's carriage accompanied by a large escort of rough-looking men from the Eastern Provinces, who were equipped with quivers strapped to their waists, as well as a large number of menial servants. All in all, the scene exuded an air of affluence.

What a countrified lot, Kaoru thought, observing the party as he was about to enter the residence. While his own outrunners were still noisily milling about, Kaoru watched as the woman's carriage pulled into the villa. Ordering his escort to be quiet, he sent one of his men to inquire after the identity of the person in the carriage.

“It is Lady Ukifune,⁸⁰ daughter of my lord, the Vice Governor of Hitachi Province,” one of the guards replied in the drawling accent of an eastern rustic. “She is returning from a pilgrimage to the temple at Hatsuse. She lodged at this villa on the way out as well.”

Kaoru was startled: *Could it be? Is she the young lady the Uji Princess described to me?* He ordered his men to withdraw and stay out of sight, so as not to make the visitor self-conscious and guarded. He then sent a message to the

arriving party: “Have the lady’s carriage pulled in at once. There is another visitor here as well, but that person is lodging on the north side of the residence ... as our honored guest, the lady may stay in the chambers on the south side.”

The men of Kaoru’s escort hardly cut impressive figures, since they were all wearing hunting robes, but there was something about them, their bearing perhaps, that suggested they were accompanying a distinguished nobleman. Ukifune’s party felt troubled and hesitant, and they led their horses off to the side of the villa, all the while displaying a humble deference. The carriage was drawn in through the gate and pulled up to the aisle room on the west side.

A new main hall had been constructed to replace the one that Kaoru had dismantled for his temple. It was not yet completely furnished, however, and since there were no blinds, its interior was open to view from the outside. Kaoru surreptitiously watched Ukifune’s arrival from the room between the second and third pillars off the east veranda, where the lattice shutters had been closed. He peeked through a gap in the sliding doors that divided this room off from the rest of the hall. Because the rustling of his silk clothing might give him away, he removed some of his layered robes so that he was wearing only a cloak and trousers cinched at the ankles.

The young lady did not alight from her carriage right away. Instead, she sent a message to the old nun, Bennokimi, most likely inquiring, among other things, about the identity of the visitor who appeared to be a person of very high status. Kaoru, having realized that the carriage belonged to the younger half sister of the Uji Princess, had already instructed Bennokimi and the attendants to be discreet: “Do not under any circumstances tell Ukifune that I am here.”

The women all understood his wishes, and so they sent out the following reply: “Please alight at once. There is another guest here, but he is staying in a different wing.”

A young attendant who had been riding with Ukifune stepped out first and raised the blind on the carriage. Being much more refined than the rustic men of the escort, she was quite pleasant-looking. Next, a more mature attendant alighted and said, “Please hurry, my lady.”

“I feel strangely insecure,” Ukifune replied, “as if I’m exposing myself to someone’s gaze.” Her voice was faint, but still attractive and dignified.

“You’re so suspicious ... always imagining things like that,” the older attendant chided. “Just look around. See? It’s exactly the same as last time. All the shutters are down. So tell me, then,” she added triumphantly, “from where, exactly, could anyone possibly see you?”

Ukifune emerged from the carriage with an air of shy reserve, and the moment Kaoru caught a glimpse of her—the contour of her head and the lithe, slender

figure, all so elegant and refined—the sight conjured up the very image of his lost love. After she suddenly spread open a fan to conceal herself, he watched in frustration, no longer able to see her face, his chest pounding in excitement all the while.

The carriage was tall, and there was a depression in the ground where she was to alight. Her attendants had managed to do so with ease, but Ukifune hesitated, seemingly perplexed and afraid. It took an unusually long time before she managed to step down and quietly slip into the villa. She was wearing a short outer robe of light green over a long robe that appeared to be in the pinks style of red plum lined with blue. Underneath, she had on a robe of deep crimson hue. A folding screen was spread open just inside the sliding doors where Kaoru was positioned, but the opening through which he was peeking was higher than the screen, and so nothing was blocked from view. Ukifune, however, remained guarded and, worried that she might be exposed to someone looking in from the sliding doors, she lay down, her face turned away from Kaoru.

The two attendants were chattering away, showing no ill effects from their journey.

“This has certainly been an arduous trip!”

“Especially the ferry crossing at the Izumi River⁸¹ today ... that was awfully nerve-wracking.”

“It wasn’t so bad in the second month. Of course, the water level was much lower then.”

“Still, when you consider the roads we traveled in the Eastern Provinces, this hasn’t been nearly as scary.”

Meanwhile, their mistress continued to lie prone, uttering not a sound. Her arm, which she had stretched out to pillow her head, was adorably soft and full. Indeed, her looks were so refined that it seemed inconceivable that she could be the daughter of a provincial like the Vice Governor of Hitachi.

Because he had been standing rigidly for some time, Kaoru’s lower back gradually began to ache. He didn’t want to give his presence away, however, and so he remained motionless and continued to spy on the young lady.

“What a delightful fragrance,” said the younger attendant. “It must be from some exceptionally fine incense! I wonder if the old nun is burning it?”

“You’re right ... how marvelous it is,” the older attendant replied approvingly. “Even in a place like this, people from the capital are still so very courtly and modish. Our lady’s mother tried her best to fashion a splendid, sophisticated lifestyle for her daughter, but it’s impossible to blend incense as remarkable as this in the uncouth provinces back east. The old nun here may live in a humble dwelling and wear the drab gray and blue robes appropriate to a religious

devotee, but she embodies a pure, courtly beauty, does she not?"

A page girl entered from the veranda directly across from Kaoru and said, "I've brought some hot water and refreshments. Please serve them to your lady." Several trays were then brought in one after another, and the attendants offered some fruit and sweets to Ukifune.

"Pardon us, your ladyship," they said, trying to get her up, "but would you like some of this?" When she did not rise, the two women went ahead and, with smacking lips, greedily ate up what looked—from Kaoru's vantage—to be chestnuts.

He had never seen or heard anything like this before and, finding the spectacle rather distasteful, he stepped away from the sliding doors. But then, driven by curiosity, he drew back to the opening over and over to observe the young woman further. In the palace quarters of the Akashi Empress and in various aristocratic houses Kaoru had seen all types of women who were fair of feature, dignified in bearing, and far superior in status to this Ukifune. Nonetheless, Kaoru's sensibilities were uncommon, given his preoccupation with religious concerns, and these women attracted neither his eye nor his heart. Indeed, his sense of propriety was so overblown that it even invited criticism. Now, here he was, standing like this, unable to pull himself away, driven by an overpowering urge to gaze on a young woman who, given her background, was not really all that special. How very, very peculiar was his heart!

Bennokimi sent a message over to Kaoru's quarters. His quick-witted men covered for him: "Unfortunately, our lord is not feeling well and is resting now." Because Kaoru previously mentioned his wish to meet Ukifune, the old nun was thinking that he would probably wait until nightfall to take advantage of this opportunity and express his desires to the young lady. She was unaware that, at that very moment, he was peeking in on her guest.

As they always did when Kaoru visited Uji, retainers from his nearby manors arrived with cypress boxes filled with food and other provisions. They presented some of these to Bennokimi, who in turn used them to feed her guests from the Eastern Provinces. After making various other arrangements, the old nun made herself presentable and went over to receive Ukifune and her party. Her robes, which the older attendant had praised as graceful, had a truly fresh, appealing quality, and her face still possessed a lovely glow.

"I was expecting you yesterday. Why did you come today while the sun was still high?" Bennokimi asked—or at least that's what it sounded like to Kaoru.

The older attendant replied, explaining, "My lady was feeling strangely distressed yesterday, and so we stayed overnight at a place near the Izumi River. She was still out of sorts this morning as well and had to rest for a long while

before we could set out.”

The attendants tried again to rouse Ukifune, and this time she sat up. Feeling embarrassed in the presence of the nun, she shyly turned aside so that she was now facing the sliding doors where Kaoru was concealed. Her profile was clearly visible to him. Although he had never looked all that closely or carefully at the features of the older Uji Princess, upon seeing Ukifune like this—the truly exceptional beauty of her eyes ... the contour of the hair framing her face—he was reminded immediately of the image of his lost love. As always, the memory was too much for him, and he wept.

When Ukifune responded to a query from Bennokimi, the timbre of her voice sounded exactly like that of the younger Uji Princess. *Such an adorable, pitiable young lady ... and all this time I had absolutely no idea that a woman like this existed! I couldn't possibly spurn a lady who, by virtue of her family ties, bears such an uncanny resemblance to my late Princess—not even one whose status and breeding might be lower than this young lady's. So how could I reject Ukifune when I can tell by looking at her that, despite Prince Hachinomiya's refusal to recognize her, she is undoubtedly his daughter.*

Such thoughts filled him with both boundless joy and poignant sorrow. At that moment, he felt the urge to go to her at once and say these self-comforting words: “Is it really you, who was once alive in this world ... ?” *The Chinese Emperor who dispatched a Taoist summoner to Mount Hōrai on the Isle of the Immortals to find the spirit of Yang Guifei must have been frustrated to see the man bring back only a hair ornament and a few trinkets from his beloved. I know that Ukifune is not my lost love, and yet, compared to the Chinese Emperor, I can surely find some measure of consolation with her. It seems that we share a karmic bond, do we not?*

Bennokimi spoke with Ukifune briefly and then abruptly retired. She realized from Kaoru’s ethereal scent, which the attendants had remarked on earlier, that he was apparently close by and peeking in on them. Given the circumstances, she must have been too uncomfortable to continue talking on intimate terms with the young lady.

When the sun was about to set, Kaoru quietly withdrew to his quarters, changed robes, and, as he always did, called for the old nun to come to the doorway of her chambers, where he could ask for more details about Ukifune and her circumstances.

“I’m delighted to have come here at such a fortuitous moment. So how about it ... were you able to do what I asked of you?”

“After you indicated your wishes last fall,” Bennokimi explained, “I waited for an opportunity to let the young lady know of your interest in her, but the year

came to a close and no appropriate occasion presented itself. It wasn't until the second month of this year that I finally met her when she stopped on the way to Hatsuse. I vaguely intimated the nature of your intentions to Ukifune's mother, who responded by saying that your gracious proposal was humbling—though she insisted that her daughter was unworthy to serve as a stand-in for the lost love of such a great lord. I was reluctant to say anything to you at the time because the moment didn't seem right. After all, you were busy dealing with other obligations, including your marriage to the Fujitsubo Princess. Ukifune evidently decided to make the same pilgrimage this month as well, and it seems that she's on her way back today. Apparently, the reason she feels so intimately drawn to this place as a stopover is that she wants to connect with the lingering presence of her late father. Something must have prevented her mother from accompanying her this time, and with the young lady on her own like this, there's no proper way for me to mention your proposal or even let her know that you're here."

"I didn't want those uncouth provincials to see me going about furtively dressed in robes that disguise my rank, so I ordered my men to make sure that no one knew I was here. Still, servants are incapable of keeping secrets, and I suspect they may not have obeyed. In any case, what should I do? It makes it somewhat easier for me that the young lady is alone. Do be sure to tell her that our mutual arrival here is proof that we share a deep karmic bond."

Bennokimi smiled wryly. "It's an expedient destiny, to be sure, that suddenly binds the two of you. Very well, then, I shall let her know."

As the old nun went back inside, she heard Kaoru murmur the following poem, which she then conveyed to Ukifune:

*Thinking the song of the fair-faced kaho bird⁸²
Resembles the one I once heard, I come here
Parting the thick undergrowth to seek her out*

¹ This character is mentioned only briefly in passing in several chapters, including *Umegae*, in which his daughter, the Fujitsubo Consort, first appears.

² The text refers to this daughter as the Second Princess (meaning that she is the current emperor's second daughter). However, because she is associated throughout with the Fujitsubo (the chambers of the wisteria courtyard), I have decided to use the title Fujitsubo Princess in order to avoid confusion with the woman who is the widow of Kashiwagi and the second wife of Genji's son.

³ *Hakushi monjū* 920. In this poem Bai Juyi claims that to enjoy the coming of spring (and the viewing of blossoms) one must pass the time drinking. To relieve the tedium during a time of idleness, he recommends

Go.

4 *Wakan rōei shū* 783 (Ki no Tadana, on asking a father for his daughter): “I’ve heard a fair flower grows in your garden ... grant me leave to pluck a stem of springtime.”

5 *Tales of Ise*, section 28: On being left by a faithless wife, a man wrote, “Why must this basket now be a memento of the time we were together, tightly bound to each other like these woven reeds, which I had hoped were watertight?” (alluded to earlier in the *Fuji no uraba* chapter).

6 This character is Kōbai, the son of Tō no Chūjō. Niou’s interest in his middle daughter is recounted in the *Kōbai* chapter.

7 *Hakushi monjū* 160. The legend of this magic incense was mentioned earlier, in the *Agemaki* chapter.

8 *Motoyoshi Shinnō shū* 94 (Prince Motoyoshi): “Watching the showy flowers of your heart scatter faithlessly, how am I ever to begin to believe your claims of devotion?”

9 *Kokinshū* 955 (Mononobe Yoshina): “I would go off on mountain paths to escape the woe that is this world, but the one I love is a fetter holding me back.”

10 I translated *asagao* (literally, “morning faces”) as bellflowers in earlier chapters. In this case, however, most commentaries agree that *asagao* refers to the flower now commonly called morning glory. *Shūishū* 1283 (Fujiwara Michinobu): “What must the morning glory make of people who grieve for it because its life is so short?”

11 The source of this allusion has not been definitively identified.

12 *Kokinshū* 227 (Furu no Imamichi, on seeing maidenflowers at Otokoyama on his way to Nara to visit Bishop Henjō): “Gazing at the maidenflowers as I go on my way, I find them disagreeable ... they seem to flaunt their beauty on Otokoyama.” Otokoyama means “man-mountain,” a name that further suggests the seductive allure of maidenflowers that is so distasteful to a priest. This poem follows a poem by Henjō, *Kokinshū* 226, which is alluded to in the *Niou miya* chapter. The language in the text also echoes another poem by Henjō, *Kokinshū* 1016, alluded to in the *Agemaki* chapter. The choice of flowers by Kaoru suggests just how greatly his romantic desires are constrained by his religious sensibility.

13 Kaoru’s poem likens the Uji Princess to the morning glory and her late sister to the dew. The Uji Princess parries this by reversing the meaning of the symbols (i.e., she is now the dew and her late sister the morning glory).

14 *Hakushi monjū* 790.

15 *Kokinshū* 248 (Bishop Henjō): “The house is desolate, the lady grown old, the garden and enclosure have become a bleak moor in autumn” (alluded to earlier in the *Yūgao* chapter).

16 *Kokinshū* 944 (Anonymous): “A mountain hut is certainly a lonely, dreary dwelling, but it is still better to reside there than in this world of woe.”

17 *Kokinshū* 934 (Anonymous): “When I consider my life, which will not last for generations on end, why is it that my feelings are as tangled as the seaweed the fisherwomen gather?”

18 *Motoyoshi Shinnōshū* 150 (Prince Motoyoshi): “Even the moon in the vast heavens finds shelter here, but you, my lord, pass beyond the clouds and will not stay.”

19 *Kokinshū* 879 (Ariwara no Narihira): “I do not want to praise or cherish the moon too greatly ... for with each night it courses through the sky, a person grows that much older.” It was believed that gazing on the moon by oneself would hasten the aging process. It is not certain that Niou has this belief in mind, but given the way it is presented in works like Narihira’s poem, the reference to the belief here makes sense, since Niou doesn’t want his wife to add to her woes.

20 *Shūishū* 1258 (Anonymous): “If the waters of my river of tears should rise, the pillow I lay out on my bedding will float away, and I shall not be able to stop it.” This poem is alluded to in the *Suma* chapter. (Another possible source is a similar poem by Kakinomoto Hitomaro, *Kokin rokujō* 3241.)

21 *Kokinshū* 878 (Anonymous): “Inconsolable, I gaze at the moon shining on Mount Obasute in Sarashina.” Mount Obasute (*obasute* means, literally, “abandoned old woman”) is the legendary peak where old women (and, in some variations of the story, old men) were brought and left to die, usually by their eldest son, when they became a burden on society. The poem is alluded to in the *Wakana* chapter, Part 2.

22 *Kokinshū* 965 (Taira Sadafun): “Would that I not be beset by obsessive thoughts about the sorrows of

this world ... at least not while waiting for my life to run its course.” This poem is first alluded to in the *Matsukaze* chapter.

23 *Kokinshū* 631 (Anonymous): “Because I live in a world where I cannot hate him, I never learn, and must always keep my notorious reputation” (alluded to earlier in the *Agemaki* chapter).

24 *Gosenshū* 937 (Lady Ise): “The anguish of being unable to clearly accept or reject you ... it is the way of the world that one cannot do as one’s heart desires.” Note that the numbering for this poem, which is also alluded to in the *Agemaki* chapter, varies according to text (937 or 938).

25 This may be an allusion to *Kokinshū* 377 (Anonymous): “Now, when we cannot know how our affair will turn out, let us try a test. If we both survive, will I be the one to forget, or will you be the one who fails to call on me?” The allusion is not precise (the original is a partial phrase, *inochi nomi koso*—“indeed, our lives ...”), but the meaning is clear that if they live long enough, Niou will prove his devotion by making the Uji Princess his empress.

26 This sentence carries a series of wordplays, including *tamamo* (“lustrous seaweed” or “lovely train”) and *kazuki* (“to dive” or “to receive a gift on one’s shoulder”).

27 The Second Princess is the daughter of Emperor Suzaku and the widow of Kashiwagi. Genji’s son took her as a second wife (Kumoinokari was his first), an event recounted in the *Yūgiri* chapter. She is thus Roku no kimi’s stepmother. Roku no kimi was born to the daughter of Koremitsu (Genji’s loyal confidant), a lover Genji’s son took as consolation during that period in his life when he was kept away from Kumoinokari.

28 The poem plays on the word *okikeru*, which may mean “to fall” or “drop” as the dew, or “to arise” from sleep.

29 *Kokinshū* 204 (Anonymous): “What I took to be the coming twilight, the time when evening cicadas sing, was in fact the shadow of the mountain.” The poem plays on the word *higurashi*, which refers to a type of cicada and to the setting sun. This poem is alluded to in the *Yūgiri* chapter.

30 An early commentary cites a possible source for this line, but the source poem has not been definitively identified.

31 This character is mentioned in passing in the *Wakana* chapter, Part 2.

32 *Yamato monogatari* 161 & 162 [section 106]: “People look at it and think it shallow, but I sense that the depths of the barrier stream flow unceasingly.” “Because the waters that ripple amidst the rocks in the barrier stream are shallow, it looks as though they will stop flowing, and yet in the depths below ...”

33 The source of this line has not been definitively identified, but a later commentary cites the following poem: “Is my misfortune due to my woeful destiny or to his cruelty? I recall the little shrimp that live amid the seaweed the fishermen harvest and know it is my own fault.” The poem plays on the word *warekara*, which may be read as the name of a species of shrimp or as a phrase meaning “I’m to blame.” See also *Kokinshū* 807 (Fujiwara no Naoiko): “Lamenting that it’s my own fault, I recall the name of the little shrimp, *warekara*, that live amid the seaweed the fishermen harvest ... and no longer wish to resent him.” This poem is alluded to in the *Yūgao* chapter.

34 This belt was a kind of sash (*obi*) worn low on the belly to provide support during pregnancy.

35 *Gosenshū* 563 (Anonymous): “How must they have been, those times before ever we met? For when I cannot see you in the present moment, I yearn for you.”

36 *Kokin rokujō* 2122 (Anonymous, possibly Lady Ise): “Why should I trust one who treats me so cruelly? No, I shall be the first to forget our vows, not he.”

37 The Princess’s poem plays on the phrases *naka no koromo*, the middle layer of robes often exchanged by lovers as tokens of their devotion, and *ka bakari*, which can mean either “to this extent” or “a mere scent.”

38 Because they were physically close to the Uji Princess, the younger attendants would have been visible to any visitor (including, most importantly, to Kaoru). Thus, even though the younger women were presumably lower in status, they had to receive the finer gifts in this case in order to dress properly for the sake of appearances.

39 *Kokin rokujō* 2096 (Anonymous): “In this world of woe can our heart’s desire ever come true . . . for no one is like a pine that lives a thousand years.” Alluded to earlier in the *Kashiwagi* chapter.

40 *Kokin rokujō* 2571 (Sakanoue no Korenori): “If this were a world in which there was an end to love’s longing, we might well pass through the years untroubled.” This poem is alluded to earlier in the *Yokobue* chapter.

41 *Kokin rokujō* 1296 (Anonymous): “I seek out a silent village somewhere that I might give tearful voice to the pain of my love-longing.” The words “silent village” (*otonashi no sato*) in this context likely refer to the Uji villa. This poem is almost identical to *Shūishū* 749, except that the phrase *otonashi no sato* (“silent village”) is replaced with *Otonashi no taki* (“Silent Falls”) mentioned earlier in the *Miyuki* and *Yūgiri* chapters. The location of this waterfall has not been firmly established. However, one strong possibility is a waterfall near Ono, which is mentioned in a poem by Genji’s son in the *Yūgiri* chapter (the courtship between Genji’s son and the Second Princess takes place at Ono). This is noteworthy here in that Ono will again become an important site at the end of the narrative as a direct result of what happens in this chapter. Kaoru’s choice of words thus illustrates the degree to which Murasaki Shikibu brings both narrative and aesthetic coherence to her complex story through the use of poetic allusions.

42 *Kokinshū* 501 [also *Tales of Ise*, section 65] (Anonymous): “Alas, the gods do not accept the offerings I made at the purification stream and will not answer my prayer to be cleansed of my love for you.” This poem is alluded to earlier in the *Asagao* chapter. The “purification stream” (*mitarashigawa*) mentioned by the Uji Princess here could perhaps be understood as the Kamo River (at the Kamo Shrine), but more likely it is a general term that refers to any stream used for ritual lustration at a Shinto shrine. The custom of transferring one’s sins or malign spirits to a doll and then setting it afloat as an act of expiation and purification is mentioned earlier in the story (cf. the *Suma* and *Miotsukushi* chapters). The image of the doll as a scapegoat being set adrift is obviously inauspicious, which is why the Uji Princess feels sorry for her sister.

43 This story is alluded to earlier, in the *Suma* chapter. An unflattering portrait of Wang, who failed to bribe the corrupt artist, led to her being sent off as a concubine to a barbarian ruler. When Emperor Yüan realized that she was in fact a great beauty, he came to regret his decision. The series of intertextual references to the period of Genji’s exile at this point in the story is perhaps meant to suggest Kaoru’s alienated state of mind.

44 The source of this story (if there is one) has not been identified.

45 *Gosenshū* 1187 (Nurse to Kanetada’s mother): “If there were no children as a memento of the relationship that bound us together, would I have to pick the young grasses of remembrance?” This poem plays on the word *shinobugusa*, a kind of fern whose name means “grasses of remembrance.” It is mentioned in the *Yūgao* chapter, where the name carries a related meaning of “yearning love.”

46 *Kokinshū* 546 (Anonymous): “Not a moment goes by without pangs of longing for you, and yet, how strange it is that I should feel them more keenly in the autumn dusk.” *Shikashū* 109 (Izumi Shikibu): “What color is it, this wind that blows in autumn … how keenly it cuts through my body, tingeing me with the hues of sorrow.” The poem by Izumi Shikibu is alluded to earlier in the *Minori* chapter.

47 *Kokin rokujō* 593 (Bishop Henjō): “The dewdrops on the tips of the leaves, those on the stems … some linger, some pass quickly, but both teach us the truth that everything in this world is evanescent.”

48 The source of this parable has not been definitively identified, but elements of it are found in an early commentary on the *Genji* and in the *Dainichi-kyō*.

49 The timeline of Bennokimi’s account differs from what the Uji Princess told Kaoru, but given the context of this scene, in which an isolated old woman is reporting rumors she heard, the difference is probably not a textual error.

50 *Kokinshū* 287 (Anonymous): “The autumn has come, the foliage falls in the garden . . . yet no one cuts his way through the park to this abode.” Alluded to earlier in the *Hahakigi* chapter.

51 The word used here, *tsuta*, is usually translated as “ivy.” *Tsuta* may refer to several varieties of creepers, but in this case, it probably refers to a particular variety, Japanese ivy (*Parthenocissus tricuspidata*), which is not a true ivy, but a vine belonging to the grape family. It was used as a decorative plant because its leaves turn a rich crimson hue in the autumn.

52 It is not clear what variety *kodani* refers to, but the plant was catalogued in poetic manuals as one of the elegant seasonal grasses. It is mentioned, for example, in section 66 of Sei Shōnagon’s *Pillow Book*.

53 In the *Hashihime* chapter, Bennokimi likens herself to a withered tree (*kuchiki*) in an allusion to *Kokinshū* 875 by the monk Kengei. Here the meaning of “withered tree” is expanded to include the Uji villa in its present state. These poems give the chapter its title. They play on the word *yadoriki*, which could mean “to lodge” or “a tree covered/encoiled with ivy vines.” *Yadoriki* (or *yadorigi*) now refers specifically to mistletoe.

54 *Kokinshū* 952 (Anonymous): “Amidst what towering crags would I have to live to no longer hear of this world of woe.” This poem is alluded to earlier in the *Suma* chapter.

55 *Kokinshū* 243 (Ariwara no Muneyana): “Is it because the plumes of pampas grass in autumn fields are like sleeves of a robe that they seem to beckon, waving as if to invite a lover?”

56 This poem is Niou’s way of indirectly venting his suspicions. He likens the Uji Princess to the stalk of grass not yet in plume, while the dew-drenched stalk of plumed grass she longs for is Kaoru. Dew is associated with the teary, wet passions of a lover (Kaoru), and the poem plays on the phrase *tsuyu shigeku shite* (“dew-drenched” or “heavy with dew”). *Shigeshi* can mean either “a large amount” or “frequently/constantly,” and so it is also a subtle reference to the frequency of Kaoru’s letters.

57 *Shūishū* 953 (Ki no Tsurayuki): “It is because I alone suffer a surfeit of indignities that I have grown resentful of the whole world” (alluded to earlier in the *Sawarabi* chapter). The Uji Princess’s poem plays on the phrase *aki hatsuru*, which may mean either “autumn is over/has passed” or “to weary of/grow tired of.” The end of autumn is, by poetic convention, the season of the year when love fades.

58 *Wakan rōei shū* 267 (Yüan Chen): “Among all types of flowers, it’s not that I’m partial only to chrysanthemums/It’s just that after they have bloomed and faded, there are no more flowers left to bloom.”

59 The prince is Minamoto no Takaakira (914–983), a son of Emperor Daigo. As legend has it, the spirit of Lian Chengwu, a master of the lute at the Tang court, descended from the heavens and, through a child medium, explained the meaning of Yüan Chen’s poem emphasizing the special poignant beauty of chrysanthemums as the last flower to bloom. He then imparts his secret teachings for the lute. A similar story involves the spirit of Lian Chengwu and Emperor Murakami (926–967). Since Takaakira was exiled from court, the competing version of the story involving Emperor Murakami may be a vestige of political intrigues.

60 This is the *saibara* mentioned in the *Akashi* chapter.

61 The ceremony is called a *naoshimono*. As the name implies, this special ceremony was intended to amend appointments or to make a promotion that was overlooked at the normal ceremonies held in the spring and autumn. In this case, the ceremony is obviously intended to raise Kaoru’s status in anticipation of his marriage to an imperial princess.

62 These promotions are mentioned earlier, in the *Takekawa* chapter. The previous Major Captain of the Right was Tō no Chūjō’s son, Kōbai.

63 As noted in the *Takekawa* chapter, Genji’s son was promoted from Minister of the Right to the more powerful post of Minister of the Left. In the *Shiigamoto* chapter there is some confusion about his position but here the meaning is clear—the text is simply harking back to the time when Genji’s son (Kaoru’s putative half brother) celebrated his initial appointment to the rank of Minister of the Right.

64 These traditional sweets, called *fuzuku*, were made by mixing syrup with various kinds of flour: rice, wheat, barley, soybean, and sesame (often the base was rice flour flavored with another grain, or with beans). This flour mixture would be pounded like mochi and steamed, then placed in bamboo molds. When the sweets were firm, they would be squeezed out of the mold and cut into dumpling-shaped cakes. Their festive colors were appropriate for celebrating auspicious occasions.

65 As recounted in the *Miotsukushi* chapter, Genji included a ceremonial dagger of this type among the gifts he gave to his daughter, the Akashi Empress.

66 The text explicitly refers to him as the Minister of the Right. This is clearly a mistake or a textual corruption.

67 This fire is mentioned in the *Shiigamoto* chapter.

68 *Gosenshū* 1102 (Fujiwara no Kanesuke): “Though the hearts of parents do not dwell in darkness, how easy it is to lose one’s way out of love for a child!” This poem, by Murasaki Shikibu’s great-grandfather,

has been alluded to numerous times, beginning in the *Kiritsubo* chapter.

69 *Kokinshū* 32 (Anonymous): “Having broken off a branch of plum, my sleeves are scented ... is it because he thinks there are plum blossoms here that the warbler comes and sings to me?” (alluded to earlier in the *Wakana* chapter, Part 1).

70 The text refers to Genji’s son as the Minister of the Right and Kōbai as the Azechi Major Counselor. I have listed them according to their current respective appointments. Once again, the confusion over promotions and postings is the result of either textual corruption or a mistake on the part of the author.

71 This description is unclear. The wisteria courtyard is on the north side of the Kōrōden, but the location seems a bit distant for the musicians (though perhaps a far-off sound was the intended effect). It is more likely that they were situated in the passageway running along the east side of the wisteria courtyard that connected the Fujitsubo with both the Kōrōden and the emperor’s residence in the Seiryōden.

72 The word *ruri* may refer to glass or to lapis lazuli. Given the importance of an imperial banquet, it seems entirely possible that lapis lazuli was used in making these utensils. However, given the relative scarcity of that gemstone, the material in this case is more likely richly colored glass, which, in any case, would have been a symbol of wealth and power.

73 Kaoru utters a single word: “*Oshi*.” The precise meaning is unclear. Escorts and guards used the word to warn others of the approach of the emperor or an aristocrat, and so in this case it may be understood as a kind of verbal salute.

74 This ritual, known as *butō* or *haimu*, is depicted in the opening chapter, *Kiritsubo*. Its mention here serves to heighten the irony that suffuses the relationship between Genji and Kaoru, both highly honored commoners who keep important secrets from the court.

75 Kōbai is identified as the Azechi Major Counselor. To avoid the recurring confusion of positions that occurs throughout these later chapters, I refer to him here by the name used earlier in the narrative.

76 *Shinkokinshū* 163 (Emperor Daigo): “How I long to gaze upon them just as they are, these waves of wisteria flowers whose fragrance will last for all worlds to come.” Although this poem is included in a collection that postdates the *Genji*, Daigo (884–930) reigned almost a century before Murasaki Shikibu wrote her work, and his poem was a likely source for her.

77 The text does not explicitly identify the composer of this poem and the one before it. However, it is virtually certain that the first is by the emperor (in reply to Kaoru) and the second by the Minister (Genji’s son), whose rank would entitle him to offer a reply. I have taken the liberty of explicitly ascribing the authors of these poems in the translation. In contrast, the poem that follows is clearly ascribed to Kōbai in the original.

78 *Shūishū* 1068 (Fujiwara no Kuniaki): “One cannot help mistaking wisteria blossoms within the imperial palace for the auspicious purple clouds of paradise.”

79 The narrator’s comment gives the poem a particular inflection, suggesting that the wisteria blooms stand in for Kaoru’s rise at the court, which is equated here with the heavens (*kumoi*, the realm above the clouds, i.e., the palace).

80 As I have done with several characters, I am taking a small liberty with the text here by introducing the name of the younger half sister of the Uji princesses. *Ukifune* (meaning, “drifting boat”), which is the (extratextual) name assigned by tradition to this character, derives from the title of chapter LI below. The poetic image of a boat cast adrift is thus not associated with the young woman until quite late in the narrative. However, I have chosen to begin using the name at this point not just as a matter of convenience, but for two compelling reasons. First, in terms of social standing, *Ukifune* does not denote a title and thus differentiates her from her older half sisters, whose highborn status she does not share (she is desirable for her looks, not her breeding as a princess). Second, her first direct entrance into the story takes place at Uji. As first noted in the *Hashihime* chapter, the orthographic conventions at the time Murasaki Shikibu wrote allowed the place name Uji to be read in *kana* as *ushi*, a homophone for the adjective meaning “sorrowful,” “woeful,” or “gloomy.” Uji is not only physically on the margins of court society, but its very name has both religious and aesthetic nuances. This wordplay is further complicated by the first element in the name *Ukifune*. *Uki* (“floating” or “drifting”) is a homophone of the modifying grammatical form (*uki*) of the

adjective *ushi*. By connecting this place with the young woman through such wordplay, the name Ukifune symbolically evokes her precarious life and isolation in the world.

81 The Izumi River is now known as the Kizu River. The ferry crossing there was an important link between the capital and the temple at Hatsuse.

82 The *kaho* bird (*kahodori*) appears in several *Man'yōshū* poems (e.g., 372, 1047, 1823, 1898, 3973), and in these early works may have referred to a type of cuckoo. However, *kaho* is a homonym for the word for “face” (*kaho*, or, in modern Japanese orthography, *kao*), and because of this wordplay, *kahodori* came to denote not a specific type of bird, but any lovely bird—one that was fair of face and thus a symbol for a beautiful lady.

L

Azumaya

A Hut in the Eastern Provinces

KAORU YEARNED to meet the lady he desired by making his way through densely overgrown foothills to Mount Tsukuba in Hitachi Province.¹ Yet he hesitated, afraid that courting a woman of such low pedigree would inevitably make him look foolish. As a consequence of his uncertainty, he failed to send Ukifune even the briefest of notes.

While he dithered, Bennokimi was dropping the occasional hint about Kaoru's hopes to the young lady's mother. Chūjō no kimi, however, found it impossible to believe that such a distinguished gentleman could possibly be serious. It wasn't that she didn't find the Major Captain's interest in her daughter intriguing and gratifying. In fact, she would dream one moment about the incomparably splendid life Ukifune might have with a gentleman who was a paragon of courtliness for the present age, only to lament the next that her daughter was not a woman of greater consequence.

Now, the Vice Governor of Hitachi had several children by his first wife, who had passed away many years earlier. He subsequently married Chūjō no kimi, and she bore him a daughter, whom he favored very much, as well as five or six younger children, one right after another. He was so preoccupied with raising this brood that he was rather distant with Ukifune, treating his stepdaughter almost as if she were a stranger. Chūjō no kimi resented his attitude and constantly complained about her husband's cruelty. She would dream day and night of somehow arranging a marriage for her precious girl with an outstanding man of distinguished lineage. Of course, she wouldn't have fretted or gone to so much trouble had her oldest daughter been ordinary in any way. In that case, she might have been content simply to let Ukifune be regarded as equal to the Vice Governor's other daughters. Chūjō no kimi, however, could not accept that a

young lady who was so fair of face, so alluring of figure, who had grown to such refined, noble adulthood, should have to mingle with hoi polloi. It broke her heart to think that people might mistakenly conclude that Ukifune was merely common.

Once it became widely known that the Vice Governor had several eligible daughters, numerous proposals began arriving from young suitors of families that had recently acquired the status of lower-ranking nobility. The Vice Governor made arrangements for two or three of the girls he had from the marriage with his first wife and managed to set them up suitably. In the meantime, Chūjō no kimi continued to act on her desire to find a superior match for Ukifune. She kept a constant eye out for opportunities, all the while lavishing boundless attention on her favorite daughter, who had been sired by an imperial prince.

It perhaps bears mentioning here that the Vice Governor was not an intrinsically vulgar person. His forebears had been high-ranking officials and his relatives did not come from the lower classes. Because he was quite wealthy, he considered himself a man of some status in the world and behaved accordingly, living in a stylish, beautifully appointed residence and pursuing elegant pastimes. Still, despite his affectations, there was a peculiarly rough quality to his demeanor. He had been rusticated to the distant world of the Eastern Provinces at a tender age, and as a result, had acquired an alien vocabulary and a slight accent.² This was a source of some embarrassment for him, and he avoided the houses of the mighty and powerful, where he was made to feel at once inferior and exasperated. He was always wary lest his provincial upbringing expose him to disadvantage, and yet he never tried to compensate for his deficiencies by mastering any polite accomplishments, such as the koto or flute—though he was, it must be said, a very skilled archer. All in all, his reputation would have been described as only average for an official of his rank had it not been for his great wealth, which was, needless to say, very attractive to others. A large number of well-bred young women who were fond of opulence gathered in his household to serve as attendants. They would dress and adorn themselves fashionably, exchange extremely clumsy poems or tales with one another in order to stay awake all through the night of Kōshin,³ and indulge in otherwise blindingly undignified amusements.

The youthful parvenus who were attracted to this house eventually noticed Ukifune and pursued her fervently. “I’ve heard she’s very gifted,” they would say, “and stunningly lovely.” Among these suitors was a Lesser Captain of the Left Gate Guards. He was about twenty-two or twenty-three, a young man recognized for his calm, steady personality and talent for studies—though his

pursuit of another woman had ended in rejection apparently because he lacked a certain élan, having neither sparkling wit nor a flair for modish style.

Ukifune's mother decided that this Lesser Captain was, among all her daughter's many suitors, the one whose circumstances were most acceptable. *He seems steady of temperament, a man of sound judgment and refined sensibility. No matter how much I might dream, it's unlikely that anyone of truly superior status would come to a place like this to find a bride.* With that in mind, she began passing along the young man's letters to her daughter and, whenever the occasion called for a reply, would have Ukifune write pleasing responses in turn.

Chūjō no kimi planned out everything on her own. Her husband might treat his stepchild lightly, but she was determined to do anything to secure her daughter's future, even if it meant sacrificing her very life. She was convinced that no one who saw how beautiful Ukifune was could possibly dismiss her, and so eventually she accepted the Lesser Captain's proposal and agreed to hold the wedding during the eighth month. She began collecting furnishings and accessories for the trousseau, making sure that even the smallest trinket or bauble she commissioned was delightfully executed. If an exceptionally fine piece of lacquerware or mother-of-pearl inlay caught her eye, she would hide it away for her daughter and recommend other inferior pieces to the Vice Governor, saying to him, "Look ... this would be just perfect for our daughters."

The Vice Governor had no idea how to judge such items, and so he collected everything he was shown, regardless of its worth. He ended up hoarding so many objects for his daughters' dowries that the poor girls were all but overwhelmed and could barely see over the piles of bric-à-brac. In addition, he engaged masters from the Bureau of Female Dancers and Musicians⁴ to train his daughters on the koto and *biwa* lute. If one of his girls managed to play through a piece on her own, he would gush over the performance to an absurd degree, obsequiously showering the masters with gifts and emoluments. One beguiling evening, when the daughter who was his favorite was accompanying her teacher on an upbeat, lively tune, the Vice Governor could not hold back his tears and began praising her extravagantly. Chūjō no kimi, who at least had some sense of taste and decorum, found this sort of overwrought behavior unbecoming and refused to join in on the flattery, whereupon her husband hurled bitter accusations, saying, "You're always looking down on my sweet little Princess!"

Meanwhile, the Lesser Captain was growing impatient as he waited for the day when he would marry Ukifune, and so he pressed her mother about it, saying, "If it doesn't make any difference to you, let's perform the nuptial ceremonies sooner." She hesitated, suddenly uncertain about making this sort of decision on her own and concerned about the difficulty of gauging the man's

true intentions. When the person who was acting as go-between for the Lesser Captain arrived one day, she took him aside to have a private conversation.

"I have many things to consider that make me cautious about this," she told the go-between. "For some time, now, the Lesser Captain has been asking when he might take my daughter. Since he's hardly a man of ordinary status, it has been painfully embarrassing to keep putting him off like this. You see, although I have agreed to this match, my daughter does not have a father, and so I have had to arrange everything for her on my own. From the beginning I've been worried that I might come across as presumptuous or that the arrangements I make might be inadequate. There are many young daughters here, but all of them have the Vice Governor to properly secure their futures, and so naturally I leave them in his hands. My daughter, on the other hand, worries me terribly, especially when I observe how fleeting life is. I understand that the Lesser Captain is prudent and sensitive, and that I should forget all these uncertainties and just go ahead with the marriage, but it would be terribly upsetting if he were to have a change of heart toward her and she ended up a laughingstock."

When the go-between returned and reported what the mother had said, the Lesser Captain's expression suggested that his mood had turned black.

"She's not the Vice Governor's daughter? Well ... that's certainly news to me! I suppose it shouldn't really matter that much—she *is* his stepdaughter, after all. But I can't help feeling that my reputation will suffer when word of this gets out. And having to travel to and from a place like that isn't so great either. You didn't investigate this very well, did you? Careless, really, to arrange such an unpromising match."

The go-between was abashed. "I'm not privy to all that goes on in that household," he said defensively. "I know one of the attendants there, and so I used her as an intermediary for your messages. When I heard that the young lady in question was the favorite daughter of the wife, I assumed that meant the Vice Governor favored her as well. I never heard that he was raising a stepdaughter, and so I didn't ask about it. What I did hear is that she's a woman of superior looks and character, that her mother cherishes her and wants her to be married to a man of prestige and high standing. In any case, you expressed your hope of finding someone to act as an intermediary with the Vice Governor's house, and so I offered my services. It isn't as if I've been frivolous or negligent."

The man was hotheaded and loquacious, and the Lesser Captain responded with an attitude that displayed an utter lack of grace and tact.

"Hardly anyone at the court really approves of marrying into a provincial house like that, but it seems the thing to do nowadays, and no one should censure me for it. Evidently, there have been many cases in which a groom has

overlooked the faults of his wife's family in exchange for being honored or receiving support. But even if the Vice Governor thinks of her the same way he thinks of his own daughters, public opinion will surely say that I'm merely trying to ingratiate myself with him. His other sons-in-law—the Minamoto Lesser Counselor and the Governor of Sanuki—come and go as they please, lording it over the place. Just think how small it would make me look if I had to mingle with men like *that* with hardly any recognition from my father-in-law."

The go-between was a toady and a man of disreputable character to boot. He fretted that this proposal might now go awry, damage his relationship with both the Vice Governor and the Lesser Captain, and, most seriously, cost him favors.

"The Vice Governor's remaining eligible daughters are still a bit young, but I shall inquire after them ... if you so desire," he wheedled. "I've heard that the next one in line is in fact his favorite ... his 'little Princess,' he calls her."

"Very well, then," said the Lesser Captain. "It's not going to be pleasant withdrawing my original proposal and then asking for the younger daughter instead. But so be it. I sought out this household in the first place because the Vice Governor is a man of substance and standing and I very much desired his support. That's all I was thinking when I decided to make this proposal. A pretty face, a sterling character? Who needs them? If I were seeking a lovely woman of grace and elegance, I could find one easily enough. No, that's not for me. Just look at what happens when men who are without means and always short of money marry for courtliness and beauty. It never ends well. They're poor and miserable and no one in the world considers it acceptable to deal with such people. I may come in for a bit of criticism over this, but I can live with that, since all I want is to pass through this world in peace and comfort. So let the Vice Governor know of my interest, and if he's willing to let go of his 'little Princess,' then he certainly won't object to my withdrawing the earlier proposal for this one."

The go-between had begun conveying the Lesser Captain's letters through one of his sisters, who served in Ukifune's residence in the west hall. He was thus not acquainted with the Vice Governor. Still, he went directly to the Vice Governor's residence and announced himself, saying, "I have something I must discuss with you."

"I've heard that you come and go here on occasion, but what could someone I've never summoned before have to say to me?" The Vice Governor sounded a little brusque, but he consented to a meeting after the go-between announced, "I've come with a message from the Lesser Captain of the Left Gate Guards."

The go-between moved in a little closer, looking as though he was having a hard time broaching the subject that had brought him.

"For some months now, the Lesser Captain has been in correspondence with your wife and obtained her permission to marry Lady Ukifune. The nuptials were scheduled for this month ... you see, he was eager to hold the ceremony as quickly as possible. Anyway, he was in the process of determining an auspicious date when apparently he heard from someone that his prospective bride, while the daughter of your wife, was not, in fact, *your* child. Were he to go ahead with such a match, court society would most certainly assume that he was currying favor with you for material gain. Scions of noble families who marry into the houses of provincial governors are to be respected and looked after exactly as if they were the actual sons of those houses, supported and treasured like a jewel one might hold in the palm of one's hand. Indeed, it seems that several other noblemen have already made similar arrangements with you.

"Now, however, the Lesser Captain is extremely troubled, because a number of courtiers have spoken out repeatedly in opposition to the match. They say that if he were to marry your stepdaughter, he would never be recognized as a true son-in-law, never receive the respect and support he was hoping for, and, by being in an inferior position compared to your other sons-in-law, would surely come off looking foolish. Why, I myself have heard the Lesser Captain say that he set his sights exclusively on your house from the very beginning because of the dazzling magnificence of your reputation, which inspired confidence that he could trust you as a benefactor. He had no idea that Lady Ukifune was not your offspring, and so it would please him greatly if, in accord with his original hopes and intentions, you would grant him the oldest of your many other available daughters, even though she may still be quite young. He has sent me here to see how you might respond to his proposal."

The Vice Governor replied openly and in some detail:

"I must say, I wasn't informed of the reasons for the Lesser Captain's correspondence with my wife. You see, even though I cherish Ukifune as one of my own, I have a great many daughters, all hopelessly inadequate, and ... well, a man of my station in life is not all that practiced when it comes to arranging for their future. Of course, I try to provide for my girls and do things for them, but whenever I do, my wife scolds me ... says I'm biased against Ukifune, that I treat her like a stranger. It's gotten so that I don't even have a say in my own stepdaughter's affairs. That's why, despite having heard vague rumors about the Lesser Captain's proposal, I had no idea that his interest was not so much in Ukifune herself as it was in finding someone like me whom he could rely on for support. I'm extremely pleased to hear about his true feelings. You see ... I have a young daughter who's so precious to me that she's the only one of my children for whom I'd do anything. Why ... I'd even give my life for her. She has had

many suitors, but I've been told that young men these days are untrustworthy, and so I hesitate to agree to any proposal, afraid that I might end up arranging a marriage that will bring her nothing but heartache. I struggle anxiously with this matter day and night, unable to decide because I worry about how to set her up in a situation in which she will always be cared for in comfort and security. But the Lesser Captain is a different matter. When I was young, I served his late father, a distinguished man who achieved the high position of Major Captain. As a retainer in that household, I had the opportunity to observe the Lesser Captain and, seeing that he was a splendid young nobleman, I was drawn to him, hoping with all my heart that I might be able to serve him as well. As things turned out, however, I was commissioned to serve in one distant province after another, and I never called on him after I returned to the capital. You see, I felt that it would be awkward asking to be taken back into his service after so much time had elapsed. And now the Lesser Captain himself is proposing to join *my* house! Of course, normally it would be a simple matter to grant his request and give my daughter to him, but I'm held back by the thought of how my wife might react to a decision that would dash the plans she has been making for Ukifune over these many months."

The Vice Governor seems most pleased, the go-between observed happily.

"There's no reason why should you hold back. As for the groom's expectations, he's hoping to receive your consent ... and *yours* alone. Indeed, he has told me that his heart's true desire is taking the daughter whom you genuinely treasure for his bride, no matter that she's still quite young. He added that it wouldn't be proper to make this request to anyone else, since he has to seek your consent directly. So, as you can see, he's a lord of upstanding character and sterling reputation.

"You mentioned your concerns about the reliability of young men these days, but the Lesser Captain is not some effete, self-absorbed courtier. Quite the contrary, he's a man of shrewd judgment who understands how the world works. He possesses quite a large number of manors, and though they don't produce much revenue for him yet, the status that comes with the dignified air of a distinguished nobleman is naturally worth much more than the influence that the unlimited wealth of a man of common stock might seem to provide you. Next year he'll be promoted to the fourth rank, and His Majesty himself has proclaimed it an absolute certainty that the Lesser Captain will be appointed the next Head Chamberlain.⁵ What's more, His Majesty reportedly spoke directly to the Lesser Captain, saying, 'Just look at you—an attractive young lord with all the qualifications and status one could desire, and you have yet to take a wife! Really, now, you must choose a suitable bride as quickly as possible, one whose

house is capable of providing you with ample support. As for your promotion to a senior post, I shall see to it that it happens in the very near future, so long as I occupy the throne.'

"The Lesser Captain is the only one who is called on to serve intimately in the imperial presence. All in all, it seems clear that he is a serious gentleman of sterling character, and you'll regret it if you let such a prize slip through your grasp. It would be a shame if he married into another family, and so, given all I've told you, I think it would be best for you to make a decision immediately. Many houses are vying to make him their son-in-law, and if you show any hesitancy, he will likely turn elsewhere to realize his expectations. I'm telling you all this merely to set your mind at ease so that you'll make the right choice."

The go-between continued on at great length to describe the Lesser Captain's good points. The Vice Governor, who was hopelessly provincial, just sat there listening and smiling.

"You mentioned that his present financial circumstances are somewhat straitened, but so what? You mustn't speak of such things. As long as I'm alive, I'll provide everything he needs. I will never, ever give him cause to feel constrained or dissatisfied. Even if my life is cut short and I cannot serve him, I shall leave my entire fortune, including all my possessions and every one of my estates, to my little Princess, so that no one else can assert a claim to her inheritance. True, I have many children, but she's the one I've always favored. All I ask is that he cherish her with a sincere heart. If he does so, then when the time comes and he seeks to be appointed Minister, I shall support his aspirations by providing him with treasures the likes of which have never been seen in this world. Everything I have will be at his disposal. Since the Lesser Captain is blessed enough to be held in high esteem by our sovereign, he will never lack for benefactors at the court. Of course, I can't know for sure that a match between this young lord and my daughter will bring them good fortune, but even so..."

The go-between was immensely pleased to hear the Vice Governor in such good spirits. He spoke not a word to his younger sister about this new proposal, and he did not even bother dropping by the quarters of Ukifune and her mother. Instead, he left and went straightaway to the Lesser Captain to report on the extremely positive and auspicious response to the request for the Vice Governor's favored daughter.

As he listened to the go-between's report, the Lesser Captain couldn't help smiling at the provincial naïveté of his prospective father-in-law—though he wasn't displeased by it. Nonetheless, he was put off by the overly blunt talk about spending whatever it might take to secure the post of Minister.

"That's all very well," he replied to the go-between, "but have you informed

the Vice Governor's wife of this change of plans? Since I originally promised to take Lady Ukifune as my wife, some will surely criticize my change of heart as a perverse betrayal. What should I do? I wonder."

When he saw his young lord wavering like this, the go-between sought to reassure him.

"What's there to worry about? Even the Vice Governor's wife thinks of his 'little Princess' as their most treasured child. It's just that she's anxious about Ukifune and aches with pity for her. She feels that her eldest daughter should be married first, and that's why she encouraged your initial proposal."

The Lesser Captain had no idea what to make of this sudden alteration in the go-between's account. After all, for months the man had been assuring him that Ukifune was the favored object of her mother's extraordinary devotion. Still, despite his doubts, the young gentleman was nothing if not a shrewd, pragmatic sort; he considered the acquisition of a reliable source of long-term support indispensable, even if it meant that in the short term his caddish behavior would be resented and subjected to criticism at the court. With that calculation in mind, he made his choice. He didn't even bother to change the date for the first night of the nuptial ceremonies, but decided that he would set off on the previously agreed-upon evening to consummate his marriage with the Vice Governor's favorite.

Unaware that all of this was happening, Chūjō no kimi busily continued her preparations. She had the attendants ready their wardrobes and saw to it that the nuptial chambers were renovated and furnished in a most elegant fashion. On the appointed day, as she observed her daughter having her hair washed and makeup applied for the occasion, she couldn't help feeling a twinge of regret that such a lovely young lady was being given to such a shallow man.

Ahh ... if only she had been recognized and supported by her father! Had Hachinomiya done so, then we wouldn't have to feel inhibited by her status or worry that it might be considered outrageous of her to accept the Major Captain's proposal. In my heart of hearts I know that she would be a worthy wife for him, since she's the daughter of an imperial prince. But in society's estimation, she's nothing more than the child of a provincial official, and it makes me sad that people look down on her when they learn the truth about her birth and upbringing.

She continued this train of thought. I suppose that I have no choice. What else can I do? It would be a shame to let Ukifune remain unmarried while she's in the prime of youth and beauty. That being the case, it would be a mistake to pass up what seems like an ardent proposal from a man of outstanding family and attractive prospects.

The unctuous go-between had been persuasive, convincing Chūjō no kimi that she was arranging the proposal to suit her own wishes. Did his deception succeed because women are by nature easier to beguile?

Realizing that the date set for the nuptials had finally arrived, Chūjō no kimi felt pressed as she rushed about to finish all the preparations. Ukifune found it impossible to remain calm; she was restless and unable to sit still. Just then, the Vice Governor came over from his residence and began rebuking his wife, speaking on and on without a break.

“I found out that you’ve been acting against my wishes by trying to steal away the prospective groom my little Princess had her heart set on. What a presumptuous, thoughtless thing to do! Gentlemen have no need for a highborn lady like that precious girl of yours. As a matter of fact, they seem to prefer the daughters of men like me—lowborn, eccentric rustic though I am. You planned it all so carefully, but it turns out that Ukifune wasn’t what the Lesser Captain really wanted. I knew that if I did nothing, another house would have snatched him away, and so I offered my own daughter to him. When he indicated that that was what he had been hoping for all along, I gave my consent to his request.”

Gauche and inconsiderate of the feelings of others, the Vice Governor had spoken impetuously, leaving his wife shocked and at a loss for words. She spent a few moments trying to collect her thoughts and, as she recalled all the heartaches and hardships she had endured, tears came to her eyes. Quietly, she stood up and left. She went over to her daughter’s quarters and, upon seeing Ukifune sitting there looking sweet and lovely, took comfort in the thought that, regardless of what had happened, her girl was in no way inferior to other young ladies.

As Chūjō no kimi was speaking with her daughter’s nurse, she broke down and started to weep.

“How cruel are the hearts of men! While I would of course treat all my daughters’ grooms the same way, doing everything I could for them, I’d lay down my life for the man who marries Ukifune. Does the Lesser Captain disdain her now? Perhaps he found out that her father is dead. That would explain why he changed his mind and asked instead for my husband’s favorite, even though she’s still a child. I’d rather be nowhere near people like that, to see or hear them behave so callously, and yet my husband thinks this proposal is a great honor and is boasting about becoming the man’s benefactor. So be it! Those two are a perfect fit for each other, and so I won’t say anything about this. I just want to go away for a while ... to be anywhere but here ...”

The nurse was absolutely livid; she concluded that it was just as well that her young mistress had been rejected in this manner.

“So what if he changed his mind! This may be the luckiest thing to ever happen to my lady. Any man as insensitive as that could never understand Ukifune’s true worth. I’d much rather she go to a man with the temperament and sensibility to properly appreciate her—a man with the character and looks of the Major Captain. I caught just a glimpse of him once, and that was enough to add years to my life. Ahh ... and to think that he’s attracted to her! I believe you should accept his proposal and let their destiny play out.”

“You’re getting carried away. I’ve heard that for many years he swore he would never accept an ordinary woman. The Minister, the Major Counselor, and the Minister of Ceremonials⁶ all intimated how eager they were to have him for a son-in-law, but he ignored their proposals and ended up with one of His Majesty’s cherished daughters, the Fujitsubo Princess. So what kind of woman could seriously attract the interest of a man like that? And even if such a woman *did* exist, he’d probably want her to serve at his mother’s residence, where he would visit her only once in a while. It certainly would be wonderful to live in residence like that, but such an arrangement would bring its own form of sorrow. They say that my daughter’s half sister, the Uji Princess, was exceptionally fortunate to have been taken by Prince Niou, but when I observed her troubled expression, it brought home to me the truth that the only stable, reliable relationships are those with men whose affections aren’t divided.

“I know, because I’ve experienced what she’s going through. Hachinomiya was an extraordinary man, sensitive and dazzlingly handsome. Still, in his eyes, I was a woman of no consequence, and his cruel treatment of me was hurtful. Though my present husband is not much to speak of—he’s not terribly attractive and is sometimes unkind to me—he *has* been faithful, at least, and to that extent I’ve never known an anxious moment all these years I’ve lived with him. Of course, there’ve been times like tonight when I hated his boorish, thoughtless behavior, but he has never given me reason to feel jealous resentment. Oh, we’ve had our quarrels, but we’ve always been open with each other about our disagreements.

“High-ranking officials or princes of the blood make one feel small and diffident with their distinguished breeding and courtly elegance, and so being close to them is of no avail to someone as insignificant as me. It makes me sad to look at Ukifune and realize that my own low status has been the cause of all her difficulties. That’s why I want to do everything I can to help her, so that she never becomes the target of ridicule.”

The Vice Governor was scurrying about, looking after all the final details. Rushing in and out of Ukifune’s quarters in the west hall, which he was now appropriating for the Lesser Captain’s use, he caused a considerable commotion

with his various demands.

"Since you have so many pretty ladies-in-waiting over here, I'll have them attend my little Princess for the time being. Also, it looks as though you recently had new curtains and blinds installed. This has all happened so suddenly that I've had no time to furnish the place, so I'll have to use them just as they are!"

Ukifune's chambers were neat and clean and had been tastefully appointed with carefully chosen fixtures and accessories. Nonetheless, the countrified Vice Governor, convinced that he knew best, had more folding screens brought in and set up, overwhelming the space and making it feel oppressive. In addition, he added so many cabinets and two-tiered shelves that the rooms now looked bizarre and offputting. Nonetheless, as he pressed the servants to complete the preparations, he wore a look of self-satisfaction, apparently delighted by his own handiwork. His wife thought the new décor was hideous, but she had vowed not to utter a word about anything, and so she just watched and listened. All the while, Ukifune was sitting in an interior room on the north side of her residence.

"At last, I understand your true sentiments," the Vice Governor told his wife. "My little Princess is your child as well, and so I always assumed that you would never reject her like this. Well ... so be it. It's not as if there aren't other children who have to go through life without a mother."

At around noon he and his daughter's nurse turned their full attention to getting the bride ready, and once she was dressed and done up, the results weren't half-bad. The young lady was about fifteen or sixteen, plump and quite small. Her hair, which had a lovely sheen, reached down to the hem of her robes. Its ends were thick and luxuriant. As the Vice Governor stroked and combed her tresses, he proudly considered them to be her glory.

"Your mother had been making other plans for your bridegroom," he told his little Princess, "but that can't be helped now. You see, he's a gentleman of upstanding character and superior looks, and there were many other houses that wanted him for a son-in-law. It would have been a shame to have had him taken away from us."

The Vice Governor was an utter fool, repeating the very words the go-between had used to inveigle him into agreeing to the new proposal.

The Lesser Captain, realizing that the circumstances into which he was marrying were as opulent and ideal as any he could have hoped for, justifiably concluded that he could do absolutely no wrong in the Vice Governor's eyes. Consequently, he didn't even bother to change the date for the first night of the nuptials that he had originally agreed upon with Ukifune's mother. She and Ukifune's nurse deplored his appalling behavior.

The Vice Governor's hostile attitude toward Ukifune and his apparent

unwillingness to look after her prompted Chūjō no kimi to send the following letter to Prince Niou's principal wife, the Uji Princess:

Fearful that I might come across as presumptuous, I was reluctant to write to you without a compelling reason and thus could not bring myself to contact you sooner. Now, however, I find that I must move my daughter to a different residence for a while as a result of a prohibition,⁷ and I would be most grateful if you could provide her with a hideaway, some place close to you where she could reside quietly, shielded from prying eyes. A person as poor and insignificant as I cannot provide my daughter with the sheltering shade she needs to retreat from a world that offers her only a surfeit of sorrow. Yours is the first place I thought of to turn for help.

The Uji Princess was moved to compassion, for the letter had obviously been written amidst a flood of tears. Despite her sense of pity, however, her thoughts were conflicted: *I'm the sole survivor of my family, and so I'm reluctant to acknowledge the existence of a half sister my late father refused to recognize as one of his own while he was alive. Yet how can I turn a blind eye to a young lady who has fallen on such hard times? To dismiss her problems as none of my concern and keep my distance from her would surely stain my father's reputation.*

With her heart in turmoil, the Uji Princess did not know what to do. She confided in her longtime lady-in-waiting, Taifu.

"She must have a good reason to make this request," Taifu advised. "You really shouldn't be curt in your reply to Chūjō no kimi, for that might offend her or make her feel ashamed. After all, it's quite normal for a person of lower birth to mingle with relatives who are her social betters. Your late father was far too unkind whenever he spoke of her."

After counseling her mistress in this manner, Taifu sent a response that included the following lines: "Given what you've told us, I've decided to have a hideaway prepared for you in an out-of-the-way room in the west hall, which you're familiar with from your previous visit. That will give you the privacy you seek. The space may be a little cramped and untidy, but if you're willing to put up with the inconvenience, it should do as a temporary abode."

Chūjō no kimi was elated by this response and began to make secret plans to leave the Vice Governor's house. Ukifune was also delighted. For years she had yearned to grow closer to her half sister. Now that events had taken this turn, she would have the opportunity to do so.

The Vice Governor felt that he should make the reception for the Lesser

Captain as grand an entertainment as possible, but he had no idea how to go about creating a dazzlingly elegant ambience. As rewards for the men of the Lesser Captain's escort, he had several lengths of coarsely woven silk from the Eastern Provinces rolled up and tossed into the bridegroom's quarters. The banquet itself was a noisome, boisterous celebration at which so much food was served that there wasn't space to put it all. The lower-ranking servants and menials considered this excessive display the height of gracious hospitality, while the Lesser Captain exulted in the treatment he was receiving, satisfied that he had made a wise match. Chūjō no kimi was careful about how she conducted herself, worried that she might come across as perverse if she ignored the proceedings and thereby revealed her lack of interest. She endured the occasion, but let her husband take care of everything.

Although the Vice Governor's house was spacious, it was quite crowded following the mad rush to set up spaces for the guests and their servants. Many of his sons were still living at home, and one of his sons-in-law, the Minamoto Lesser Counselor, already occupied rooms in the east hall. Now that Ukifune's quarters had been taken over for the Lesser Captain's use, the idea that she would have to live out on the edge of one of the aisle rooms or corridors was too depressing for her mother to bear.

It was her concern over this bleak prospect that had prompted Chūjō no kimi to contact the Uji Princess. *It's obvious*, she mused, *that my Ukifune is scorned because she has no one to support her*. So thinking, she willfully set off for Nijō with her daughter— a visit that Hachinomiya would never have sanctioned— accompanied by Ukifune's nurse and two or three young attendants. The party occupied a space on the north side of an aisle room in the west hall some distance away from the other residents of the Nijō villa.

Chūjō no kimi may have been long estranged from Hachinomiya's family, but she was not someone the Uji Princess could treat as a stranger. Thus, the Uji Princess felt no awkwardness receiving her when she arrived. For her part, Chūjō no kimi felt a twinge of jealousy as she watched the Uji Princess caring for her little boy with grace and dignity in surroundings that seemed perfect. In her mind, however, the scene was oppressive.

*Was I not related to Hachinomiya's wife?*⁸ *It's only because I was brought in as an attendant, she reflected bitterly, that I was treated like a woman of no importance. How humiliating it is that others should think so little of me!* It was distasteful to her to have to impose like this as a way to get closer to the Uji Princess.

Because she had said that Ukifune was in retreat in observance of a directional prohibition, no one came to call on them. Chūjō no kimi remained secluded with

her daughter for two or three days, and she was able to use that time observing the residence at her leisure, which she had not been able to do on her first visit to Nijō.

Niou, who was in residence during this period, made his way over to the west hall. Chūjō no kimi, eager to catch a glimpse of him, peeked out through an opening in her blinds and saw how dazzlingly handsome he was, his looks conjuring up the image of a spray of cherry blossoms. Although she did not want to alienate the affections of her husband, whom she relied upon just as much as she resented him, she could not help marking the contrast to Niou's retainers—men of the fourth or fifth rank who were far superior to the Vice Governor in both looks and demeanor. They would kneel before Niou, reporting on various matters or conveying messages from various places. She did not recognize the younger men of the fifth rank. One of her stepsons, the chamberlain who served in the Ministry of Ceremonials, arrived bearing a message from the palace, though he was not permitted to approach Niou too closely.

Ahh ... what an extraordinary man, she mused as she gazed on Niou's incomparable figure. What happiness must attend those who are permitted to be in his presence! And how foolish of an outsider like me to entertain the woeful notion that such a superior man could possibly bring heartbreak to any woman who is fortunate enough to have a close relationship with him. Now that I've seen his face and figure, I understand just how truly marvelous it would be to receive a visit like this from him, even if it happened only once a year, like the meeting of those heavenly lovers on the festival of Tanabata.

Niou holding his little boy made for a charming scene. A low standing curtain separated the Uji Princess from them, but her husband pushed it to the side and spoke directly to her about various matters. They were an ideal couple, perfectly matched in beauty. In her mind's eye, Chūjō no kimi compared Niou to the late Hachinomiya, who had led a lonely, isolated existence. Both men were princes of the blood, but she felt that Niou was very different, that he was special.

Niou slipped inside the curtains surrounding the bedding on the dais, leaving his son in the care of the younger attendants and the nurses. Many people gathered seeking an audience with him, but he remained in seclusion until sunset, claiming that he wasn't feeling well. His meals were brought on trays to his bedchamber. Everything seemed so grand and elegant that Chūjō no kimi felt embarrassed thinking back on all her efforts to make Ukifune's quarters stylishly attractive and realizing just how common the households of people of lower status really were.

Ukifune need not feel inferior or ashamed to be in the company of splendid nobility. My husband is always boasting about his wealth, saying that he'll use it

to make “empresses” of his daughters. I know they are my girls as well, but when I think about how much more beautiful and superior Ukifune is compared to all of them, I remain convinced that I must continue to hold onto my high expectations for her well into the future.

With these thoughts racing through her mind, she remained awake all night, fantasizing about Ukifune’s prospects.

By the time Niou got up the following day, the sun was already high.

“My mother is suffering from her usual maladies, and so I must pay a visit to the palace,” he said as he was putting on formal court attire.

Chūjō no kimi peeked out again, eager to catch another glimpse. Niou, who was now properly dressed in his resplendent robes, exuded a peerless grace. As he was playing with his son, it looked as though he was finding it harder than ever to leave the little boy behind. Still, after dining on a light repast of gruel and steamed rice, he prepared to depart the Uji Princess’s quarters.

His retainers had arrived at Nijō earlier that morning and were waiting at the household offices in the main hall when their lord appeared. Among the men who came forward to relay some message or other was a young official dressed in formal cloak with a sword at his side. Although this official made a neat, presentable impression, his looks on the whole were rather mediocre and he had a decidedly unattractive face. Being in Niou’s presence made him look all the more plain and undistinguished.

The Uji Princess’s attendants were gossiping among themselves.

“Look there! That’s the Lesser Captain who recently married the daughter of the Vice Governor of Hitachi.”

“I heard that he was supposed to marry the young lady who’s in retreat here, but that he changed his mind and said he preferred to take the Vice Governor’s daughter so that he’d have someone to support him. That’s why he ended up with a bride who’s little more than a child.”

“Is that true? Our visitors haven’t breathed a word about it.”

“Oh, it’s true all right. One of the Lesser Captain’s attendants told me all about it.”

Chūjō no kimi felt her chest tightening as she listened to these women, who had no idea she was eavesdropping. She was mortified to think that she had once considered the Lesser Captain an attractive match for her Ukifune. *It’s true, she thought, there’s absolutely nothing to recommend the man at all.* She now detested him more intensely than ever.

Niou looked back and caught sight of his little boy, who had crawled over to the blinds and was peeking out. He turned back to the west wing once more.

“If my mother seems to be feeling well,” he announced, “I shall withdraw

from the palace and come back straightaway. However, if she's still sick, then I'll have to spend the evening attending her—though the anxiety I suffer when I'm apart from you for even a single night is difficult to bear."

He played with his son a little while longer in order to calm and soothe the child. Niou's appearance when he finally took his leave, glancing back at the boy over and over again, was so radiantly charming that one could never grow weary of gazing at his figure. His departure seemed to create an intensely lonely, empty feeling that lingered in his absence.

When Chūjō no kimi came forward and lavished extravagant praise on Prince Niou, the Uji Princess smiled at the woman's provincial manners.

"You were just a baby when your mother passed away, and so of course you had no idea what was happening, but your late father and all those who cared for you grieved and sighed and worried about your future," Chūjō no kimi said, tears welling up. "As things turned out, you have been unusually blessed by karmic destiny, having grown to splendid womanhood despite having been raised at that secluded villa deep in the hills of Uji. What a shame that your older sister is no longer with you."

"Many are the times," the Uji Princess tearfully replied, "when I feel forlorn and resent the woe that I have suffered in my marriage. Yet because I have lived on for so long, there are also times when I feel reconciled to my fate and take some comfort in it. I have more or less come to terms with the fact that it is the natural order of this world to outlive one's parents—the people whose sheltering shade I relied upon in the old days. After all, as you said, I never really knew my mother. On the other hand, the grief I continue to feel over the death of my sister will never be assuaged. Whenever I observe the depth of feeling exhibited by the Major Captain, who in his own grief has remained single-mindedly devoted to her memory, I am filled with bitter regret that she did not live."

"No doubt he is devoted to her memory," Chūjō no kimi said, "but it would appear that the Major Captain is also filled with pride at being held in such unprecedented regard by His Majesty. If your older sister were still alive, then surely she would have been an obstacle to his marriage with the Fujitsubo Princess."

"I wonder about that. In any case, it's just as well that she didn't have to endure what I've experienced—the oppressive feeling of having become a laughingstock. I suppose it's commonplace for a man who has failed to consummate a relationship with a woman to have a lingering attraction for her and to be curious about what might have been. Yet even if that's true, for some inexplicable reason the Major Captain has been utterly incapable of letting go of her memory. He has, apparently, shown an extraordinary degree of sensitivity in

seeing to the memorial services for the repose of my father's soul." She spoke in soft, gentle tones.

"I've heard that the Major Captain told the old nun at Uji, Bennokimi, that he wanted to take Ukifune as a substitute for your sister, even though she is a woman of no standing whatsoever. I am in no position to agree to his proposal—she is, after all, embarrassingly unworthy of him. Still, I'm moved all the same by his deep compassion, which prompts him to consider her 'this one' ..."⁹

Now in tears, Chūjō no kimi went on to relate all the hardships her daughter had suffered. Figuring that the attendants at Nijo already knew what had happened, she did not go into any great detail. She did, however, allude to the dismissive attitude the Lesser Captain had displayed toward Ukifune.

"However long I live, I feel confident that I'll be able to get by every day and night with my daughter as my constant source of comfort," she added at the end. "But then I worry that she'll meet with some unexpected misfortune and come down in the world after I'm gone, and my grief and sorrow are so overwhelming that I feel it might be best to have her take vows as a nun, retreat deep into the mountains, and give up all prospects of a normal married life."

"As you say, her situation is heartbreaking," the Uji Princess replied, "but why should you be so obsessed about this? People always look down upon a woman who has lost a parent. That's just the way the world is. The option of going into retreat as nuns was out of the question for my sister and me, and so my father decided that we should live in that isolated villa cut off from the world. Because I survived them and lived on longer than I ever wanted, I now find myself in vexing circumstances that are beyond anything I ever imagined. Still, it *would* be a pity if a young lady as lovely as Ukifune were to change her appearance by taking vows."

Chūjō no kimi found the mature manner with which the Uji Princess spoke most pleasing. Ukifune's mother had aged, of course, but her well-kempt figure had an attractive air about it. To be sure, she was overly plump, but perhaps that was to be expected for a wife of a provincial governor.

"It seems to me," Chūjō no kimi responded, "that courtiers are all the more likely to look down on my daughter as someone who is unworthy of their consideration because your late father cruelly refused to recognize her as his own. For all that, however, just being allowed to meet with you and hear you speak brings consolation to me for all the tribulations of the past."

She went on to share memories accumulated over many years and to tell of the moving sorrows they had experienced at Ukishima.¹⁰ "I revealed to you my life on Mount Tsukuba in Hitachi, where, because I had no one to confide in, I felt that 'I alone'¹¹ was suffering the woe that is this world. I would like to be

allowed to remain in your gentle presence like this forever, but my useless, ill-bred children will no doubt be clamoring for me to return home, and I feel truly stressed and uneasy about them. I am fully aware of my present lowly station in life, and I regret that I have had to change my appearance like this by becoming a provincial official's wife. I would prefer to leave Ukifune's future in your hands and no longer be involved with it for her sake."

The Uji Princess agreed to accept this sort of responsibility, hoping at the same time that the reports were true and that Ukifune was not unattractive. As it turned out, the young lady's looks and personality were most appealing; and nothing about her could have been considered offputting. She was gentle and yielding in demeanor, but not to the point of excess, which would have made her strange. She also possessed a childlike innocence, but she wasn't careless or passively lacking in spirit. Indeed, she made sure to keep herself modestly concealed even from the women who served her most closely. The Uji Princess was also struck by the uncanny resemblance between Ukifune's voice and manner of speech and her older sister's. Suddenly she felt the urge to show the young lady to Kaoru, who was searching for an image of his lost love.

Just then, one of the attendants called out, "The Major Captain has arrived."

The Uji Princess withdrew behind a standing curtain as she always did and prepared to receive him.

"I really must take a look," Ukifune's mother said. "Those who have caught the briefest glimpse of him say he's a remarkable lord, though I find it hard to believe that he could possibly compare to Prince Niou."

Some of the attendants in service to the Uji Princess offered their opinions.

"Oh, I'm not so sure about that. I think it's impossible to choose between the two of them."

"Really, now, how can you say that! Is there a man alive who could eclipse Prince Niou?"

From the sound of the shouts and bustling of Kaoru's escort, he was apparently dismounting his carriage at just that moment, but he did not come into view right away. When he strode into the west hall where all the attendants were waiting and they finally caught sight of him, his appearance struck them not so much for its captivating radiance as for its elegance and noble bearing. His demeanor made one feel somehow ashamed and inferior, and his neat and tastefully attired figure was so peerlessly magnificent that people couldn't help but instinctively reach up to make sure that every strand of their hair was in place. Apparently, he was on his way back from the palace, for his retinue was enormous.

"Yesterday evening," Kaoru began, "I got word that Her Majesty was not

feeling well, and when I went to call on her, I saw, to my dismay, that none of her sons were in attendance. That's why I was serving in their place until just a short while ago. Niou was just as negligent and didn't show up until late this morning. I may be speaking out of turn, but I couldn't help concluding that you are the cause of his thoughtless behavior."

"Your kind consideration is truly extraordinary," was all that the Uji Princess said in reply.

Kaoru, who kept track of when Niou would stay over at the palace, seemed to be having a difficult time keeping his emotions in check.

As always, he spoke in a warmly familiar manner. No matter what topic they discussed, however, he would subtly shift the conversation, without saying anything explicitly, to mournfully complain about how hard it was to forget the past and how the sorrows he experienced in this world only seemed to multiply.

The Uji Princess observed him, wondering about his motives. *Why is he always so obsessed with memories of my sister? Since he has already spoken to me with passionate intensity about his feelings, could it be that he doesn't want to leave the impression that he has forgotten her already?*

Still, as she continued to gaze at him, his expression told her clearly that he had not forgotten. Since she was not without compassion, like some insensate piece of wood or rock,¹² she understood the nature of his poignant feelings. He voiced his discontent so often that she found it unbearable and sighed, feeling powerless to do anything. Was it due to her wish to try to cleanse his heart¹³ of its obsessive longing for her sister that she brought up a certain *doll* they had once discussed?

"Your object of worship is secretly in retreat here," she casually intimated to him.

Although the disclosure excited him and made him eager to see the young lady, Kaoru felt that it would be unseemly to suddenly transfer his affections to another woman.

"Well, now, imagine how grateful I would be if such an idol were to answer my most fervent prayer ... though if she were to stir up the occasional longing for you, it would surely roil the pure mountain waters of my heart."

As soon as he said that, the delightful lilt of the Uji Princess's gentle laughter could be heard. In the end, she replied, "For someone who aspires to be a holy man, you're hopelessly incorrigible."

"Ah, well, so be it. Please let the young lady's mother know of my wishes. Still, when I recall that time you first mentioned Ukifune in order to deflect my advances, I can't help having an ominous feeling about all of this."

Tears welled up again as he was speaking, and so, in order to hide his true

feelings, he playfully composed the following:

*If she is a true likeness of the one I knew
I'll keep her near, a purifying doll to stroke
Each time I feel the surging rapids of desire*¹⁴

The Uji Princess replied:

*Who would believe your vow to keep as close to you
As your shadow a doll you'll stroke from time to time
Then cast adrift on the rapids of lustration*

“As the poet says, ‘So many hands reach out,’”¹⁵ she added. “I feel sorry for Ukifune.”

“I don’t have to tell you that ‘in the end there is only one rapids.’¹⁶ The sorrow I experience over your cruel behavior is comparable to foam on a stream that never dissipates, but constantly flows along.¹⁷ In reality, I’m the one who’s like a doll that’s been abandoned and set adrift. How am I ever to find solace for my longings?”

While they were talking, it was growing dark outside. The Uji Princess was on edge, mindful that the women who were in temporary retreat here might think it peculiar if Kaoru stayed on too late. Speaking in soothing tones, she convinced him to leave, saying, “I think it’s best for you to go home early today.”

“In that case,” Kaoru replied, “please assure your guests that I have harbored hopes of meeting the young lady for some time. She mustn’t think my feelings are shallow or capricious. And please convey my message in a way that does not make me look awkward or foolish. A man like me, who is completely unschooled in these matters, will come off as self-important and overbearing no matter what I do.”

After securing the Uji Princess’s promise to act on his behalf, he took his leave.

Chūjō no kimi, who had been listening all this time, praised Kaoru, saying, “How perfectly splendid he is!” She had once rejected as preposterous the idea of giving her daughter to the Major Captain—an idea that Ukifune’s nurse had abruptly conceived and repeatedly encouraged. However, now that she had seen Kaoru with her own eyes, she very much wanted such a man for her daughter, even if it meant that Ukifune might have to spend her life waiting for that one time each year when his radiance would come to her like the light of the Celestial Oxherd’s star crossing the Milky Way to reach the Celestial Weaver

Maid. She would regret giving a young lady as lovely as her precious daughter to just any man, and it shamed her to realize that she had grown so accustomed to being in the company of provincial bumpkins that she once actually considered that horrid Lesser Captain a worthy suitor.

Kaoru's lingering scent, which had suffused both the cypress pillar against which he had been leaning and the cushion on which he had been sitting, was so incomparably fragrant as to be almost ethereal.

Even those attendants who had seen him on previous occasions sang his praises this time as well.

"According to the *Lotus Sutra*, the Buddha himself said that there are certain signs of karmic grace, and that one of them is an exceptionally aromatic fragrance. If I remember correctly, it's the sandalwood from Mount Oxhead in India that He singles out for special praise in the chapter on the Medicine King.¹⁸ A horrid name, Oxhead ... but the Major Captain gives off a scent so similar to sandalwood fragrance that you understand the truth of the Buddha's words. After all, his lordship has been devoted to pursuing the path of enlightenment ever since he was a child."

Another attendant added, "He's so magnificent ... I'm curious to know what he did in previous lives to accrue such merit."

As she sat there listening to all these words of approval, Ukifune's mother couldn't help but smile.

The Uji Princess discreetly conveyed to Chūjō no kimi what Kaoru had said to her in private.

"Once the Major Captain has bestowed his affections on someone," she said, "he is the kind of man who will never take the relationship lightly, but will remain faithful to the point of obsession. To be sure, when you consider his present circumstances, now that he's married to the Fujitsubo Princess, you may feel that his proposal brings with it too many troublesome complications. Still, you *did* mention that you were considering having your daughter turn her back on this world, and so I think it might be better to at least consider his proposal."

"Hoping to keep her from a life of misery and from the scorn of others, I did indeed consider having her live in a place where not even the cries of birds could be heard.¹⁹ What you say makes sense, and now that I have observed his looks and demeanor, I realize that it would surely be worthwhile to serve in the intimate presence of such a lord as this, even in a lowly position. If I feel that way, then a young woman would no doubt be even more strongly attracted to him. Still, Ukifune is of such undistinguished background that I can't help worry that her status will sow the seeds of future misery.²⁰ I'm convinced that under these circumstances any woman, whether of high or low birth, would end up

suffering in this world and the next. I feel sorry for my daughter. Despite my misgivings, however, I shall leave her in your hands to do as you think best. Whatever happens, I ask that you never cast her aside.”

The Uji Princess, feeling the burden of this demanding responsibility, sighed. “Well, now, I’m not sure what to say. He has always been kind and considerate, but it’s impossible to know how the future will turn out.” Beyond that, she said nothing more of interest.

At dawn the following day a carriage arrived bearing a threatening message from the Vice Governor of Hitachi. Apparently, he was very angry.

As she was preparing to leave, Chūjō no kimi spoke to the Uji Princess again. “It’s presumptuous of me, I know, but I must ask you to do all you can for her. Please let her stay here out of sight for a while longer while I deliberate about her future, whether to send her off to live amidst some crags somewhere²¹ or to make some other arrangements. Although she may not be worthy, keep her in your thoughts, and teach her all that she needs to know.”

Ukifune, who had never before been separated from her mother, was feeling forlorn, but she was cheered by the thought of staying on in such a stylishly attractive residence.

The dawn sky was faintly light when the carriage from the Vice Governor was being pulled out. Just then, Niou arrived, having withdrawn from the palace. He had made his way back to Nijo, impatient to see his little boy again as soon as possible. Wishing to remain inconspicuous, he had not taken his usual carriage and escort, but rode in a more humble conveyance with a smaller retinue. As the two carriages met, Chūjō no kimi’s was stopped and pulled off to the side, while Niou’s was drawn up to the gallery where he would alight. Her departure caught his attention.

“Whose carriage is that, hurrying off in the dark?” he asked apprehensively, since he knew from his own amorous escapades that a man would leave the residence of a woman he was secretly visiting in just this furtive manner.

“It is the carriage of the noblewoman Madame Hitachi, who is returning home,” came the reply.

“Noblewoman? What an impressive title the *Madame*’s given herself,” the young men in Niou’s escort jeered. Hearing their laughter, Chūjō no kimi sadly reflected, *It’s true ... I’m not worthy of such a title.* Yet how she longed to be considered one of the nobility—not for her sake, but for her daughter’s. Now, more than ever, having observed the noblemen here, she was struck anew by the realization of what a terrible waste it would be if Ukifune were to lower herself by marrying some mediocrity.

Niou went inside and, still suspicious, expressed his doubts to the Uji

Princess.

“Did a person who styles herself *Madame Hitachi* call on you here? A carriage accompanied by an escort hurrying away in the twilight of an elegant dawn seems to suggest some reason for secrecy, wouldn’t you agree?”

She was mortified to hear his intolerable insinuation.

“The woman has been a friend of my attendant, Taifu, ever since Taifu was a little girl—certainly not someone *you* would find all that stylish or interesting. You always take things you see and hear in the worst possible way, then speak as if you have just cause for casting vile aspersions. Stop raising unfounded accusations about me!”²²

She abruptly turned her back to him—a gesture he found adorably sweet.

Heedless that the dawn had broken, Niou shut himself away in his bedchambers to sleep. However, so many people came to call on him that eventually he made his way over to the main hall. He arrived to find the Minister’s many sons playing Go or word games, such as guessing the rhymes that completed Chinese poems. They were all in high spirits because they had learned that Niou’s mother, the Akashi Empress, was not seriously ill and was recovering nicely.

That evening, when Niou came back to the west hall, he was told that the Uji Princess was washing her hair. As a result, all of her women had withdrawn to rest, leaving no one in attendance there. He called over a little page girl and had her convey a message to her mistress: “You picked a most inopportune moment to wash your hair. Am I to be left by myself, bored and lonely?”

Taifu felt sorry for her lord. “You’re right, it *is* inconvenient,” she replied. “Usually my mistress washes her hair during those times when you are not in residence, but for some strange reason she has been unwilling to do so recently. Today is the last auspicious day of this month. And after that ... well, she can’t very well do it during the ninth and tenth months.”²³

With his little boy already asleep in his chambers and various women and nurses looking after him there, Niou was restlessly wandering about the hall. Entering the aisle room on the west side, he came upon a page girl he had never seen before. Wondering if she had just come into service, he noticed a narrow opening in the panels of the sliding door leading into a space within the main chambers. When he peeked inside, he could see a folding screen, which was about a foot inside the door. A standing curtain had been set up on the side of the screen closest to the blinds. One of the curtain panels had been draped over the top of the frame, and sleeves were spilling out beneath it to reveal layered robes in the aster style of vibrant pale purple lined with bluish-green under a cloak in the maidenflower style of yellow lined with bud green. One panel of the screen

had been folded back just enough that Niou was able to observe the young lady without her noticing him. Impressed by the new arrival, who struck him as not at all unrefined, he stealthily widened the opening in the door and slipped in from the aisle room without anyone noticing.

The young lady was reclining near the veranda, leaning on an armrest as she gazed out at the courtyard framed by the passageways on the west side of the villa. She was evidently captivated by the extraordinary beauty of the flowers blooming there in a riot of colors and by the charm of the tall stones that lined the garden stream. Niou opened the sliding panels just a bit wider so that he could peer around the edge of the screen.

It never occurred to Ukifune that the person who had entered was Prince Niou. She just assumed that it was one of the women who were always coming and going in her quarters. So thinking, she raised herself up, which allowed him to see how lovely she was. Driven as always by his amorous disposition, Niou could not let the opportunity pass. He reached out and grabbed hold of the hem of her robes, slid the door closed, and sat down in the space between the screen and the standing curtain.

Realizing that something was amiss, she hid her face behind a fan; the way she glanced back at him was most alluring. Niou clasped the hand that was holding the fan and asked, "Who are you? I'm dying to know your name."

Taking great care to keep his identity secret, Niou turned back toward the screen to hide his face from her. By now she was thoroughly alarmed. Judging from the remarkable scent of his perfumed robes, she was left to wonder if he wasn't the Major Captain, the man who had intimated his extraordinary feelings for her. Completely mortified, she was at her wits' end.

The young lady's nurse, who had detected the unfamiliar fragrance, suspected something was amiss. She pushed the screen aside and entered the room.

"What do you think you're doing? There'd better not be any funny business going on here!"

Her threats were hardly enough to deter Niou, and though this sudden encounter had taken him by surprise, he was gifted with an eloquent tongue and thus never at a loss for seductive words. He chatted and cooed until it was dark.

"I won't let you go until you tell me your name," he said, stretching out beside Ukifune in an intimate manner that suggested he had the run of the house.

The nurse, realizing at last that the man was Prince Niou, was stunned into silence.

The oil lamps hanging beneath the eaves were being lit when a voice called out: "Our mistress is returning." At once the sound of attendants lowering all the shutters except for those in the quarters of the Uji Princess was audible. Now,

the young lady's temporary quarters were rooms that had been divided off from the rest of the west hall and used for various purposes. Crammed with furnishings—a set of tall cabinets fitted with shelves and several folding screens stored in large sacks—the space had been in a state of disarray before Ukifune moved in, at which time enough clutter was cleared away to make a passage the width of the sliding doors. At that moment, Ukon, an attendant who also happened to be Taifu's daughter, entered Ukifune's hideaway through this very passage. She had come to lower the shutters.

"Goodness, it's dark in here," she exclaimed. "Has no one come to light your lamps? I know that it's hard rushing around taking care of the shutters, that it takes time, but really ... a person could get lost in here!"

Ukon raised the shutter she had just put down to let in some light, and when she did so, even Niou was somewhat discomfited. The nurse, an irascible, strong-willed woman who did not hesitate to speak her mind, couldn't stand the situation another minute.

"Excuse me, but I must speak to you. There's something scandalous going on here, and it has been a terrible ordeal trying to watch over my charge. I haven't dared move from this spot."

"What's happening?" Ukon reached out, groping in the dim light, and touched the reclining figure of a man dressed casually in a fragrantly perfumed singlet. She recognized at once that her lord, Prince Niou, was up to his usual disgraceful tricks. Because she assumed that the young lady had not consented to his advances, she said, as she stood up to leave, "This is absolutely indecent! Whatever shall I tell my mistress? I suppose I'll have to go and report to her in private."

All of the attendants would be shocked and outraged over this incident, but Niou himself wasn't in the least concerned about their reaction. Instead, his thoughts were focused on the mystery of the young lady's identity: *She has uncommon grace and beauty! What's her background? The way Ukon was carrying on just now, it's obvious that she's not just some ordinary newcomer to the staff.*

He used all manner of verbal wiles and lover's complaints to seduce her. Though nothing about Ukifune's demeanor suggested that she was outraged or disgusted by his advances, it was apparent that she was so embarrassed she could die. Niou felt sorry and gently comforted her.

Ukon told the Uji Princess what she had witnessed. "I feel sorry for the young lady," she added. "Imagine how she must feel."

"He's up to his old hurtful ways again. Ukifune's mother will think I've been unforgivably careless. Before she departed, she told me over and over how safe

she felt leaving her daughter under my care here.” The Uji Princess also felt sorry about this unfortunate situation, but she didn’t know what to do. *What can I possibly say to Niou? It’s all the fault of that appalling inclination of his. He simply can’t keep his hands off any young woman in service here who’s the least bit comely. Still, what could possibly have driven him to make advances toward her?* She was so shocked that she was at a loss for words.

Meanwhile, Ukon was speaking with another attendant, Shōshō. The two of them were commiserating over the young lady’s plight.

“Whenever a party of high-ranking officials visits from the palace,” Ukon said, “our lord plays games with them until late in the evening, and by the time he makes his way over here, as he did today, all the women are resting and have relaxed their guard. So tell me, what are we supposed to do? Though I must say, that young lady’s nurse is fearless! She stayed right beside her throughout, and I thought she might even grab him and pull him away.”

Just then a messenger from the palace arrived with the news that Her Majesty had begun suffering chest pains earlier that evening and was now seriously ill.

“His mother certainly picked an inelegant moment to fall ill. How tedious of her. I shall go inform him,” Ukon remarked as she started to leave.

“I doubt if it will help the young lady at this point,” Shōshō replied. “In any case, you mustn’t be impertinent and scold him too severely.”

“Don’t worry,” Ukon whispered privately, “he won’t have been able to go that far with her yet.”

The Uji Princess overheard their whispers. *It’s his amorous nature that gives rise to such unpleasant gossip. Anyone with even a modicum of refinement would likely find fault with me as well.*

Ukon appeared before Niou and told him what the messenger had said. She embellished the report, making the situation sound more desperate, but he gave no indication that he was about to move on that account.

“Who was this messenger?” he asked. “I think you’re exaggerating things just to startle me.”

“A man named Taira no Shigetsune. A gentleman in Her Majesty’s service.”

Niou, who had yet to learn the young lady’s identity, very much regretted having to leave her and seemed completely untroubled about who might see him there. He had Ukon go tell the messenger to come round to the veranda on the west side of the hall. One of Niou’s retainers came along to act as intermediary, since the messenger himself did not have the status to speak directly to Niou.

“Your younger brother, Prince Nakatsukasa, is already at the palace,” the intermediary said, “and the Master of Her Majesty’s household office was seen leaving just now in his carriage, so he’s on the way.”

Mother does indeed suffer these sudden bouts from time to time. The thought of what people at the palace must be thinking about him pricked Niou's conscience, and after pouring out his resentments at her refusal to identify herself and promising the young lady over and over that they would meet again, he took his leave.

Ukifune was lying facedown. She was drenched in perspiration, feeling as though she had just awakened from a nightmare. The nurse was fanning her.

"It won't do to stay here—this place is much too cramped and unsuitable for someone in your position. Now that Prince Niou has begun calling on you like this, nothing good can possibly come of it. The consequences of an affair are too terrible even to contemplate. People may consider him an exalted aristocrat, but his unsettling behavior is deplorable. It makes no difference what an outsider who has no relationship with you might think of this, good or bad, but I'm concerned about the misery that gossip might bring you. That's why I sat here scowling at him just like Fudō Myōō²⁴ when he's warding off demons. He must have thought I was a frightfully vulgar woman, for he reached out and pinched my hand. That was something a servant might do as an expression of endearment, and I had to laugh in spite of myself."

"By the way, I hear that your mother and the Vice Governor had an awful row today. He rudely accused her of being concerned only about you and of neglecting their other daughters. He also said it was deplorable of her to have left the household to reside elsewhere just when the new bridegroom was moving in. Everyone heard him, even the menials, and they felt bad for her. I understand as well that they all find the Lesser Captain lacking in charm and grace. Of course, there have been times when your mother and stepfather encountered difficulties that led to discord between them, but if the proposal with the Lesser Captain had never been accepted, they would have been able to live on in harmony as they did for so many years."

The nurse broke down and cried.

In her present state of mind, Ukifune could not concern herself with such matters. Besides having just gone through a shameful ordeal unlike anything she had ever experienced, she was distraught over what her half sister must be thinking. Weeping, she remained prostrate.

The nurse was troubled and tried to comfort the young lady by assuring her that the world could also be a place of comfort and security.

"Why are you carrying on like this? Life is truly sad and uncertain for a young woman who doesn't have a mother. Of course, society pities those who don't have a father, but you're in a much better situation than someone who's reviled by a mean-spirited stepmother. Whatever happens from now on, your mother

will see to it that you're taken care of. Don't be downhearted. Just keep praying to the Kannon Buddha at Hatsuse, and I'm sure he'll show compassion for you. You've made the pilgrimage there many times, even though you're not physically suited for the rigors of such journeys, and I've been fervently praying for you to be granted the blessings of good fortune so that those who found you beneath contempt will have no choice but to recognize your auspicious destiny. Who could possibly ridicule you then?"

Niou was making hurried preparations to leave. He had his carriage brought round to the gate on the west side, perhaps because it was nearest the palace. As a result, Ukifune could hear him speaking to his escort. His voice was incomparably sonorous and noble, but when he passed by her quarters intoning some elegant old verse, she thought it extremely vexatious. Niou's escort was comprised of ten retainers who were mounted on fine steeds that had been brought to the Imperial Stables from various provinces.

The Uji Princess, imagining how unpleasant Niou's advances must have been for the young lady, was moved to compassion. Feigning ignorance of the situation, she sent a message to Ukifune: "Her Majesty has fallen ill, and so the Prince has gone to the palace and won't be returning tonight. I'm not feeling quite myself at the moment and cannot sleep—it may be the lingering aftereffects of having just washed my hair. Please come to my chambers. I imagine that you're feeling bored."

Ukifune had the nurse reply for her: "At the moment I'm feeling distressed and not at all well. Perhaps after I rest..."

"What's troubling you?" the Uji Princess responded immediately with a message of concern.

"I'm not sure what it is. I simply don't feel well," came the response.

Shōshō and Ukon exchanged glances. "She must be too embarrassed to appear before our mistress," they whispered to one another.

The sympathy of the Uji Princess was intensified in this case because Ukifune was not some stranger, but her half sister. *What a regrettable, cruel situation, she thought. Kaoru has indicated that he's attracted to her, but he'll likely assume that she was at fault for being careless and think less of her for it. Niou is always behaving wantonly in this way, then he goes about twisting things and making intolerable accusations about me that are absolutely baseless while willfully dismissing his own indiscretions as mere peccadilloes. In contrast, Kaoru, who has experienced bitter sorrows that he keeps in his heart, confides in no one and is so deeply prudent and thoughtful that he comes across as inhibited. Alas, it seems that he's destined to undergo further disappointment by having his desires thwarted yet again. Although many years passed before I met*

Ukifune and got to know her, now that I've observed her character and looks, I find her so sweet and pitiable, and her circumstances in the world so cruel and difficult, that I could never banish her from my heart and mind. I feel that there are many things in my own life that are less than satisfactory, but even though my situation has been as precarious as hers, I have been blessed in that I did not come down in the world as far as she has. If only Kaoru would quietly set aside his attachment to me, which I find so objectionable, my worries would finally be over.

Because her tresses were thick, they took a long time to dry. It was hard on her to have to stay up so late, but she looked slim and attractive dressed in a white single-layer robe.

In truth, Ukifune was not feeling well, but her nurse pressed her to go speak with the Uji Princess. “It won’t look good if you don’t go. She’ll think that you don’t want to show your face because something really did happen. Just maintain your composure. I’ll tell Ukon and the others the whole story from the very beginning.”

The nurse went over to the sliding doors leading to the Uji Princess’s quarters.
“May I speak with Ukon?”

When Ukon appeared, the nurse proceeded to explain the situation, saying, “The bizarre incident that took place this evening has left my young lady an emotional wreck. She’s feverish and seems to be in genuine discomfort. She says she would like to meet with your mistress and seek solace in her company. She’s blameless, having done nothing wrong, but is embarrassed and terribly upset all the same. If she were a little more sophisticated, she might be expected to be able to deal with the situation, but with the way she is, it’s no wonder she looks so pitiful.”

Soon after, she helped Ukifune get up and they went to see the Uji Princess.

Ukifune was dazed and distracted, ashamed at what the attendants there must have been thinking. However, she was very submissive—almost excessively easygoing—and allowed her nurse to push her forward to a seat before the Uji Princess. She tried to hide the tear-soaked strands of hair framing her face by sitting with her back to the lamp. She exuded a graceful charm that easily bore comparison with her half sister’s incomparable beauty. Now that she was in the presence of the Uji Princess, Ukifune could not remain completely hidden from view, despite feeling so bashful, and as Ukon and Shōshō observed her more closely, the same thought occurred to both of them: *It would be an unmitigated disaster should our lord grow too attached to her. He’s incorrigible ... always intrigued by a woman he has never seen before, even those who aren’t nearly as attractive as this young lady.*

The Uji Princess addressed Ukifune in a warm, familiar manner. “I hope you won’t stand on ceremony with me, or think this place unfamiliar and offputting. You see, after my older sister passed away, I’ve grieved constantly, unable to forget her for even a moment. I’ve carried on unhappily, regretting that I’m the one who survived. However, seeing how closely you resemble her, I’m consoled and feel a deep nostalgic yearning. At present I have no one who treasures me, and so I would be overjoyed were you to regard me with the same tenderness my sister showed me in the old days.”

Ukifune was so deferential by nature and provincial in upbringing that she wasn’t sure how to respond to this overture. “For years I longed for you from afar,” she replied, “and now that I’m meeting you like this, I too feel consoled for everything that has happened.” Her voice had a lovely, youthful lilt.

The Uji Princess called for some illustrated texts. When they were brought out, Ukon began to read the accompanying captions and poems. Ukifune was fascinated by the pictures and, overcoming her embarrassment, turned toward them to have a better look. When she did so, the lamplight completely illuminated her exquisite figure, which was flawless. Her forehead and the area around her eyes gave off a fragrant glow, and she had an extremely gentle, delicate manner reminiscent of the late Princess.

The Uji Princess was so distracted by Ukifune’s appearance that she paid no heed to the illustrations. Instead, she inwardly compared the young lady with the older sister. *The resemblance is deeply affecting*, she mused, tears filling her eyes. *How is it that they are so alike—the very image of Father? The older attendants swear that I take after my mother ... ahh, this brings back overpowering memories. My sister was infinitely refined and noble, but also affectionate and yielding. At times she may have come across as overly accommodating and helpless—a shortcoming in the eyes of some. Ukifune, on the other hand, still has the demeanor of a girl, and she’s so shy and diffident about everything that she lacks that fresh, eye-catching beauty that others found so impressive in my sister. Of course, once she’s a bit more mature, she’ll have an air of dignity about her, and even the Major Captain won’t be able to find any flaws.* She was thinking like an older sister, calculating ways to help Ukifune.

They talked until almost dawn before finally settling down to sleep. The Uji Princess had Ukifune lie beside her and told her a little about their father and about what life had been like during the many years they spent at Uji—though she did not go into great detail. Ukifune was eager to hear about her father, and she was filled with wistful regret that in the end she never had the chance to meet him.

The attendants who knew what had happened the night before continued to whisper in sympathy amongst themselves.

“What really went on, I wonder?”

“She is very sweet and attractive ...”

“Our mistress may be fond of her, but that won’t mean anything now. How sad for her!”

“No, no, it’s not like that,” Ukon interjected. “That nurse of hers pulled me aside and sounded desperate to assure me that nothing sordid took place. In fact, just as our lord was departing, he murmured a snatch of verse ... ‘though we met, we were not truly together’²⁵ ... that seems to back up her claim.”

“She’s just saying that, isn’t she? We don’t know for sure what happened.”

“Perhaps not, but last night the young lady looked rather serene and composed, her face betraying no sense of guilt.”

The nurse requested a carriage and set off for the residence of the Vice Governor of Hitachi. When Chūjō no kimi heard her report about the incident with Niou, she felt her chest tightening in shock. Her own experience told her that people would naturally assume that something scandalous had happened, and she felt a wave of panic come over her. *What must the Uji Princess have thought about this? When it comes to an affair like this, not even the most aristocratic woman is immune to feelings of jealousy.* With that concern in mind, she left for the Nijō villa that very evening.

Relieved to see that Niou was not in residence, Ukifune’s mother went over and spoke with the Uji Princess. “I’ve sent you a daughter who is unusually childish and trusted that she would be safely cared for here. But I am by nature as wary and restless as a weasel,²⁶ and that’s why my other useless, ill-bred children resent and despise me.”

“She doesn’t seem nearly as childish as you suggest,” the Uji Princess replied with a smile. “What does bother me, however, is that anxious, suspicious look in your eyes.”

The expression on the Uji Princess’s face would have humbled anyone, and when Chūjō no kimi observed it, she felt ashamed that she had exposed her innermost fears and doubts. *What is the Princess really thinking about my daughter?* she wondered. However, she found herself unable to pose the question directly.

“To have Ukifune residing here fulfills a wish I’ve harbored for many years, and even if word of her retreat slips out, I consider it a wonderful honor for her to be in your presence. Still, I suppose I ought to have been more deferential and never wavered from my original plan for her, which was to go into retreat into the deep recesses of the mountains.” She began to weep, which moved the Uji

Princess.

“Is there something about this place that makes you anxious? I would never treat Ukifune indifferently or reject her, no matter what. True, there is someone here who misbehaves now and then, but all of the attendants are aware of his penchant for romantic pursuits, and so they’re always on guard. I’m confident that nothing untoward will befall your daughter, so what can you possibly imagine will happen?”

“It has never once occurred to me that you might become estranged from Ukifune,” Chūjō no kimi replied, speaking with utmost sincerity. “And it’s certainly not for someone like me to speak about the circumstances that led your father to decide he could not recognize my daughter without some embarrassment. I’ve turned to you for help not because of my connection to your father, but because of the relationship between your mother and me—a relationship that cannot be lightly dismissed. Ukifune must deal with strict directional prohibitions over the next two days, and so she must go into special retreat somewhere. However, she will return here again.” So saying, she left with her daughter.

The Uji Princess felt bad for her guests and did not want them to leave, but there was nothing she could do to stop them.

The incident with Niou had so shocked and upset Chūjō no kimi that she left the Nijō villa with hardly a word of farewell to anyone. She already had a place in mind, a small abode she had chosen ahead of time in order to deal with directional prohibitions like this. It was a stylish house in the vicinity of Sanjō, but because it was still under construction it was not yet completely furnished.

“It makes me sad to think that everything I try to do to find you a decent, settled position in life is such a painful struggle. How can we be expected to go on when nothing ever turns out the way we want? If I had only myself to think of, then I would simply turn my back on the world altogether and live out my life alone, with no regard for dignity or thoughts of social advancement. My relationship to the family of the Uji Princess was once a source of resentment for me, and, after all that, if something shameful should happen to you now as a result of my trying to draw closer to her, I shall be ridiculed as an utter fool. It’s a terrible predicament. I know that this house is small and may seem eerily isolated to you, but please stay out of sight and don’t let anyone know you’re here. Of course, I’ll try to arrange something for you,” Chūjō no kimi said as she prepared to return to the Vice Governor’s residence by herself, leaving her daughter behind.

Ukifune was in tears, looking wretched and depressed by her precarious position and uncertain as to how she would ever manage on her own. Her mother

was, if anything, beset by even greater sorrows. She couldn't stand the thought that her daughter's prime might go to waste and was desperate to do anything she could to prevent that. Now, as a result of Niou's unseemly advances, came the additional worry that people might gossip about Ukifune and censure her for being careless. Chūjō no kimi was not lacking in judgment, but was quick-tempered and headstrong, always wanting things her way. She could have kept Ukifune hidden at her husband's residence, but she believed that the circumstances there were too miserable. Thus, she decided that the small house on Sanjō was preferable. Of course, both mother and daughter felt forlorn, since they had never been separated all these years and were used to being in each other's company day and night.

"This place may look deserted and vulnerable from the outside, since it isn't finished, and you must therefore be vigilant. Be sure to call upon the staff in the household offices if you need things. I have left instructions that the watchmen are to be on their guard. I'm concerned about this place and don't want to leave you, but I am also troubled that my husband should be so angry and spiteful, and so ..." Breaking down in tears, she made her way home.

The Vice Governor fussed over the Lesser Captain, treating his new son-in-law like some sort of priceless treasure, and he criticized his wife for not being of like mind, expressing dissatisfaction at how awkward it was that she was not helping to look after the young man. For her part, Chūjō no kimi considered her husband's attitude cruel and dispiriting, for the Lesser Captain was the person most responsible for creating the difficulties now facing the daughter she favored above all the others. She found this son-in-law odious and, since she couldn't stand his presence, had very little to do with him. He had looked practically subhuman next to Prince Niou, and so she was filled with nothing but contempt for him. Previously, she had treated him with the care and respect befitting a prospective groom, but no more.

What he's like, now that he's coming here? I've never actually had a good look at him. Her curiosity piqued, she went over to Ukifune's old quarters on the west side of the residence around noon, when the Lesser Captain was relaxing, and peeked in at him from behind a blind. He was sitting near the edge of the veranda, leisurely gazing out at the main garden. He was handsomely dressed in a soft, informal robe of white brocade under a gown of plum red silk that had acquired a fine sheen from fulling. He looked quite splendid, which made her wonder if he was really as inferior as she had thought.

Her young daughter was lying next to him. Not yet grown to womanhood, she had an innocent air about her. Chūjō no kimi recalled the image of Niou and the Uji Princess lying together, and when she did, the young couple before her now

paled into insignificance. Still, the relaxed, playful figure that the Lesser Captain cut as he bantered with the attendants there was not as unappealing or abject as what she had witnessed the other day, and that puzzled her. *Could it have been a different man who appeared before Prince Niou then?*

Just as that thought occurred to her, the Lesser Captain remarked, “The bush clover at the Minister of War’s villa at Nijō is exceptionally lovely. I wonder how he came by those seeds? They have the same stems and leaves as any common variety, yet they possess a special elegance. I called on the Minister the other day, but he was just about to leave at that time, and so I didn’t have a chance to break off a sprig. He murmured a line of verse as he departed: ‘Sadly they have already turned their autumn hues.’²⁷ Oh, I wish you young women could have seen him at that moment!” He then composed a verse himself.

“So it was him after all,” Chūjō no kimi muttered. “He’s so mediocre and truly craven at heart, it’s hard to think of him as human. He’s so far beneath Prince Niou that there’s absolutely no comparison. And that poem he just composed? That’s rich, coming from the likes of him.”

Of course, the Lesser Captain could hardly be called uncultured, and so she decided to test him with a poem of her own in order to see how he would respond:

*Bound by a rope frame as strong as the vow you made
The upper stems of bush clover remain pristine ...
What dew, then, could have caused the lower leaves to fade²⁸*

The Lesser Captain, feeling guilty over what had transpired, replied:

*Would the dew have shown preference for settling
On other leaves had it known the princely roots
Of the young bush clover in Miyagino²⁹*

“I would like to speak with you in person to explain my motives,” he added.

Apparently, he’s heard that Ukifune’s father was a Prince, Chūjō no kimi thought. Now, more than ever, she was driven by the single-minded desire to somehow arrange things so that her favored daughter would enjoy good fortune equal to that of the Uji Princess. She knew, alas, that this was mere wishful thinking on her part, but she couldn’t help wistfully conjuring up an image of the face and figure of the Major Captain. She had seen for herself that he was every bit as splendid as Prince Niou. Niou, however, wasn’t seriously pursuing Ukifune, and it angered her to think that the man had so little respect for her

daughter that he felt perfectly justified in trying to force himself on her. In contrast, Kaoru had indicated genuine interest in her without saying anything inappropriate. Indeed, the discretion he had shown was laudable.

If I have these impressions of him, Chūjō no kimi mused, then a young woman like Ukifune would surely have even stronger feelings. And to think that I considered taking a despicable man like the Lesser Captain for a son-in-law. How shameful of me!

Her favored daughter was all she cared about, and as she gazed off in reverie, she envisioned several scenarios, imagining that everything would turn out perfect in the end ... though of course, she was aware of the tremendous obstacles that stood in the way. *The Major Captain is a man of the highest pedigree and noblest bearing, and if the Princess whom he has taken to wife is even more distinguished than he, what is it about my Ukifune that he finds so alluring? From what I've seen and heard about people at the court, the merits and flaws of their looks and character are largely determined by whether they are born of high or low status. Observing my own children, do any of them resemble Ukifune? People in this household consider the Lesser Captain a prize second to none, but once I saw him next to Prince Niou, it was obvious that he's a disappointment. As for my Ukifune, how could she not feel shy and humble under the gaze of a man who has had one of His Majesty's beloved daughters bestowed upon him?*

Contemplating her daughter's future in this manner, Chūjō no kimi felt as if her fears and aspirations were vaguely drifting off into the empty sky.

The little house where Ukifune was staying was a tedious place. The landscaping created a dull and dreary atmosphere, the only staff who came in and out on a regular basis consisted of vulgar rustics speaking in their rough eastern accents, and the garden contained no diverting flowers to ease the monotony. She passed the days, from morning to evening, with nothing to cheer her up. Whenever she conjured the lovely figure of the Uji Princess in her mind, her youthful heart would be filled with a yearning ache. Recalling the presence of the man who had behaved so improperly toward her, the memory of that evening unsettled her. He had spoken so many fervent, passionate words to her —what, she wondered, did he mean or intend by them?—and she could still smell the intoxicating fragrance of his perfume, which had lingered on after he left.

Chūjō no kimi, wanting to keep track of how her daughter was faring, sent a heartfelt letter expressing her concerns. When Ukifune read it, she understood that all of her mother's extraordinary efforts on her behalf had been useless in the end, and that realization brought her to tears. Her mother had written: "In

your idleness you must feel lost in a strange place. Please bear up a little while longer.” To this, Ukifune replied, “I’m not bored at all. In fact, I feel quite at ease here.”

*Could I but think of this place as a refuge
Not in this mundane world but in another
Then would I experience absolute joy³⁰*

As Chūjō no kimi read these innocent, childlike words, tears streamed down her cheeks. How terrible it was that her daughter should feel cast adrift like this, lost and uncertain. She replied:

*Even as I seek out some refuge for you
Not in this mundane world of woe, how I long
To see the glory of your full flowering*

The poems they exchanged were nothing special, but they brought some degree of solace to their hearts.

As the autumn deepened, Kaoru would lie awake night after night, unable to forget his lost love and experiencing poignant sorrows. It had always been his custom to go to Uji during this season of the year, and when he heard that the temple that was being constructed there was finally completed, he went to see it himself. It had been so long since his last visit that the foliage of the hills struck him as a marvel. The old main hall, which had been dismantled to provide materials for the new temple, had been replaced with a structure that was brighter and more cheerful. Kaoru recalled how plain and austere the villa had looked in the old days—almost like the hermitage of a holy man. Gazing absently at the renovated villa, lost in an unusually melancholy reverie, he thought longingly of the late Hachinomiya and regretted that the place had undergone such a change.

The original fixtures and furnishings of Hachinomiya’s rooms had possessed a noble air, while those in the residence of his daughters created an extraordinary ambience—neat and gracefully feminine. The humble-looking furniture and accessories, such as the screens made of woven palm fronds, had been specifically selected and sent off to the temple for the use of the monks. Kaoru had replaced the furnishings with ones that were executed and installed in a style appropriate for a mountain villa—not as spare as Hachinomiya’s residence, but with a simple, stately elegance all the same.

Sitting down on a stone beside the garden stream, Kaoru tarried there awhile.

*Why does a pure stream that flows ceaselessly
Fail to hold in its surface an image
Of the face of that love of mine who died*

Brushing away his tears, he stood up and went over to the residence of Bennokimi. Seeing how sad he was, her own face was soon contorted with grief. He sat for a time on the floor beam between two pillars. Raising the bottom edge of the blind, he spoke with the old nun. She was hidden from his view behind a standing curtain. During the course of their conversation, the opportunity arose for him to ask about Ukifune.

“I’ve heard that the young lady I’m interested in has recently been staying at Niou’s villa. I haven’t visited her yet—I feel that it would be awkward to do so. I would appreciate it if you would continue to inform her of my feelings.”

“A letter arrived from her mother the other day. Evidently, she’s been moving Ukifune around in order to avoid directional prohibitions, and in recent days she’s had to hide her away in some peculiar little house. She wrote that this is all very upsetting, and if this villa were only a little bit closer, she would definitely feel more at ease having her daughter go into retreat here. However, she doesn’t think it’s feasible, what with the mountain roads being so rough and wild.”

“How *brave* of me to keep coming here, just like the old days, over mountain roads that everyone finds so frightening. It moves me to think that I must be driven by some vow I made with my lost love in a previous life.” As always, tears welled up in his eyes at the memory. “If that’s how she feels,” Kaoru continued, “then do send a letter to that place she finds so reassuring. Perhaps you might even take it there yourself?”

“It would be quite easy for me to carry a message for you,” Bennokimi replied. “Lately, however, I’ve found that traveling into the capital has become too much of a bother. I don’t even go to call on my mistress at Nijō any more.”

“Why is that? I could understand your reluctance if your trip gave rise to gossip, but even the holy men of Mount Atago³¹ leave their hermitage when the occasion calls for it. It’s truly noble and virtuous to break a sacred vow for the sake of fulfilling another person’s request.”

“It’s not for me to help lovers cross over to meet.³² If I were to do this for you, it would certainly give rise to vexatious gossip,” she said, looking troubled.

“Ahh, but this is the perfect moment!” Kaoru was unusually insistent. “I will send a carriage for you the day after tomorrow. You must find the location of her temporary retreat. Trust me ... I swear, I won’t do anything foolish or outrageous.”

He was smiling as he spoke.

This is worrisome. What's he planning to do? Bennokimi fretted, but she knew that Kaoru was not a shallow, irresponsible sort of man, and that he would be careful for her sake not to behave in a way that would give rise to gossip.

"All right, then, if you promise," she said. "Her retreat is near your Sanjō villa. However, you must send her a letter prior to my visit. Otherwise, she'll get the impression that I'm acting on my own. At this point in my life I'd rather avoid getting the reputation as an impudent, meddlesome go-between like that foxy crone of Iga."³³

"Writing a letter is the easy part. It would be most unpleasant if people were to talk about this, because they're likely to go on about how a Major Captain is pursuing the daughter of the Vice Governor of Hitachi. Apparently the man is an extremely rough, uncouth character."

Bennokimi laughed when she heard Kaoru express this particular worry, but at the same time she also felt sorry for him.

He left when it was dark. He plucked some lovely flowers from the undergrowth and broke off some sprays of autumn foliage and presented them to his wife, the Fujitsubo Princess. Although Kaoru treated her with the tender care appropriate to an imperial bride who had married a man below her station, it seems that his attitude toward her was ceremonious and reserved, lacking the intimate warmth one might expect between husband and wife. His Majesty, like any other father, mentioned this to Kaoru's mother, and as a result, Kaoru's behavior changed, and his regard for the Fujitsubo Princess, whom he treasured as a woman of the highest distinction, knew no limits. Along with the responsibilities demanded of him by a wife who had various important supporters, he was now faced with the difficult burden of having to manage a private affair.

Early in the morning on the day that he had chosen for Bennokimi to travel to the capital, Kaoru sent a carriage accompanied by one of his closest aides and driven by a new ox driver whose face would not be easily recognized. "Summon some of the rustic men from my manors near Uji," he instructed, "and have them join the escort."

Kaoru had told Bennokimi that she must go, and thus, painful though it was for her, she deferred to his orders. After arranging her robes and makeup, she boarded the carriage. As she stared out at the views of the fields and mountains, memories of the past came back to her and she passed the entire day lost in her thoughts. When her carriage was drawn inside a quiet, deserted residence, she had the guide announce her arrival.

A young woman, whom Bennokimi recognized as one of the attendants who had accompanied Ukifune on her pilgrimage to Hatsuse, came out and helped

the old nun alight. After being moved to this strange, miserable abode, Ukifune had spent all her time sunk in melancholy reverie. Delighted to receive someone who could talk with her about the past, she invited Bennokimi into her quarters. She naturally felt close to her guest, considering that the old nun had once served her father.

“After our meeting at Uji,” Bennokimi began, “not a moment has gone by when I have not secretly entertained fond memories of you. As someone who has turned her back on this world, I normally don’t venture out, even to see my former mistress, but because the Major Captain was strangely insistent that I speak with you, in the end I decided to make the journey here.”

Ukifune and her nurse were both touched to hear that a man whom they had always considered dazzlingly splendid had not forgotten them, but they were surprised that he had so suddenly made these unexpected plans.

The early evening hours had just passed when there came a soft tapping at the gate. “There is a messenger from Uji,” an attendant announced.

One of Kaoru’s men, is it not? Despite Bennokimi’s misgivings, she ordered the gate opened, whereupon a carriage was pulled inside. This struck her as most peculiar when, at that moment, someone called out, saying, “I should like to speak with the nun.”

The speaker identified himself as the steward of one of Kaoru’s manors near Uji. Bennokimi came out and sat near the door. A light rain had started to fall and a chill breeze blew in, carrying with it an ineffable fragrance.

So that’s *who it is*, she thought.

Kaoru was so captivating that his looks would have set anyone’s heart aflutter, and because they had not expected him to come at this moment, when they were unprepared and the place was an unsightly mess, they were flustered.

“What can this possibly mean?” the attendants asked one another.

He had an intermediary take a message to Ukifune: “I should like to meet with you in a private, relaxed setting and share with you the powerful yearnings I’ve barely been able to control the past few months.”

Ukifune looked distressed as she struggled to figure out how to reply to him.

Her nurse couldn’t stand seeing her charge behave so indecisively. “You can’t very well refuse to receive him and send him home after he’s gone to all this trouble. I’ll quietly let your mother know he’s here. The Vice Governor’s house isn’t far away, after all ...”

“How childish!” Bennokimi interjected. “Why do you need to send for her mother? It’s not like two young people are going to fall madly in love with one another right away on the basis of a single conversation. The Major Captain is remarkably calm and prudent, and he would never be overly familiarly toward

the young lady without her consent.”

As she was talking, a steadier rain began to fall and the sky grew very dark. The watchmen were making their rounds, calling out to each other in their unfamiliar provincial dialects.

“The corner on the southeast side of the house is crumbling. That’s very worrisome.”

“The carriage ought to be inside, so pull it in here and lock the gate.”

“His lordship’s escort sure is careless.”

Kaoru found the rough accents repulsive. “There is no refuge at the crossing at Sano,”³⁴ he murmured to himself as he took a seat near the edge of the veranda.

*I’ve waited too long in the rain ... have weeds
Grown so thick that they block your door to me
At this hut in the Eastern Provinces*³⁵

Each time Kaoru brushed away the droplets of rain that fell on him from the eaves, the motion of his hand wafted his strange, ethereal fragrance inside, no doubt startling the eastern provincials there.

Since they could come up with no pretext to put him off, they prepared a seat for him in the south aisle room. Ukifune was too shy and reserved to feel comfortable receiving him, and her attendants had to push her forward. She unlocked the shabby, humble-looking door³⁶ and slid it open a mere crack.

“I resent those master carpenters of Hida³⁷ for devising this means of separating us. Tonight, however, marks the first time that I’ve had to sit outside a door like *this*,” Kaoru grumbled. He then forced his way in somehow, leaving the attendants to wonder how he managed to do it.

Kaoru tactfully said nothing about wanting Ukifune as a substitute for his lost beloved. Rather, he explained his motives to her by saying something like this: “Ever since I caught an unexpected glimpse of you at Uji through an opening in the doors to your chambers, I’ve experienced overpowering longings. Perhaps it’s the working of our karmic destinies, wouldn’t you agree? Whatever the reason, I’m mysteriously drawn to you and can’t get you out of my mind.” He was deeply affected to see that Ukifune looked so adorable and relaxed—in no way inferior to other women.

Kaoru felt that dawn would surely break at any moment, but no cock crowed. From the direction of the main thoroughfare nearby he could make out the dull, drawling voices of peddlers gathering and moving along, calling out the names of wares he did not recognize. Even as he listened, thinking that these people who carried their goods on their heads must look like demons in the dim early

morning light, he was enchanted by the novel experience of spending a night in a temporary abode nestled amidst a tangle of weeds.

Kaoru caught the sounds of the watchmen opening the gate and departing and, upon hearing the other men on night duty retiring, each to his own room to lie down and rest, he summoned one of his men and ordered a carriage brought round just outside the double-hinged doors off the corner of the residence. He swept Ukifune up in his arms and carried her out.

Her attendants were stunned by this shocking, unforeseen turn of events. "My lord," they pleaded, "this is truly ill-advised. After all, it's the ninth month, and there are prohibitions to consider. It's not an auspicious time for a marriage, so what do you think you're doing?"

Bennokimi, who had been caught off guard by Kaoru's actions, was taken aback and felt terrible for Ukifune. Still, she tried to soothe the attendants, saying, "It would seem that he has thought this out, so don't worry about her. It may be the ninth month, but I've heard that tomorrow is the start of the winter season, so this is not an unlucky time."³⁸

That day was the thirteenth of the month.

"I cannot go with you this time," she continued, speaking to Kaoru. "My mistress at Nijō may hear that I'm in the capital, and if I were to furtively return to Uji without seeing her, she would be hurt."

Kaoru, however, was feeling a bit sheepish and did not want the Uji Princess to find out what he was doing just yet. "Save your apologies for later," he said, pressuring her. "Without an experienced hand, there will be no one to help her once she arrives at her destination." He then turned to the attendants and added, "I need one more person to go with them."

An attendant named Jijū, who was close to Ukifune, got into the carriage with Bennokimi. The nurse, the page girl, and the others who had accompanied their young mistress here were left behind in a state of bewilderment.

Ukifune assumed that he would take her somewhere nearby, but they went to Uji. Before setting out, Kaoru had made all sorts of arrangements, including a change of the team of oxen along the way. By the time they had passed the banks of the Kamo River and were in the vicinity of the Hōshōji³⁹ Temple, it was daybreak. Now, in the faint twilight of dawn, the youthful Jijū could finally observe Kaoru's dashing figure, and forgetting proper etiquette and all sense of decorum, she stared longingly at him, spellbound.

Ukifune, on the other hand, sat with her head bowed, dazed and unaware of her surroundings. Kaoru took her in his arms and said, "The road ahead is rocky in places, and the journey will be rough, so let me hold you."

A long robe of translucent silk had been hung up in the carriage to separate

Kaoru and Ukifune from Bennokimi and Jijū. The cloth shimmered in the bright rays of the morning sun. The old nun felt terribly awkward at being exposed to Kaoru's eyes. It made her sad to think that it should have been the late Princess, not Ukifune, whom she was seeing like this in the company of the Major Captain. *If you live long enough, you're sure to witness things you never expected*, she mused, and though she tried to hold back her tears, she began to cry.

Jijū was put out by this inauspicious behavior. *It's bad enough to have a nun riding along with a couple just starting out, but why does she have to go on sniveling like that?* She considered Bennokimi detestable and foolish, and rather superficially concluded that old people were too easily prone to cry.

Kaoru was not at all disappointed with the young lady before him, and yet, at the sight of those late autumn skies, that old feeling of unrequited love was more intense than ever. As they proceeded deeper into the mountains, it felt as if the fog was growing denser all around them. Lost in their thoughts as they reclined there, the long sleeves of their layered robes, now wet from the river mists, dangled out well below the bottom of the blinds. As the carriage reached the top of a steep incline, Kaoru noticed that the blue of his robe stood out starkly against the scarlet of Ukifune's, creating an ominous impression of mourning robes dyed in *futaai*.⁴⁰ He pulled the sleeves back inside the carriage. Distracted by his grief, he murmured the following to himself:

*I look on them as mementos of her
These sleeves drenched in morning dew so heavy
It weighs them down like oppressive sorrow⁴¹*

Hearing his poem, Bennokimi wept all the more, saturating her own sleeves. The young Jijū found her behavior weird and unpleasant, and she felt as if what should have been a joyous journey was becoming very trying. As Kaoru listened to the nun's sniffling, which she was apparently having difficulty concealing, he quietly began to blow his own nose as well.

He was concerned about Ukifune, wondering how she must be feeling. "When I think of how many times over the years I have traveled over this road, for some reason I feel deeply moved. Please sit up a little and look out on the colors of the hills. You seem so subdued to me."

Since she was compelled to get up, she kept her face hidden, turning away from him in a most charming manner. The expression around her eyes as she shyly glanced outside reminded him very much of the late Princess—though it seemed to him that something was lacking, that she was much too quiet and

passive. His beloved had had a similar childlike innocence, but she had also possessed a profoundly thoughtful sensibility. His grief, which had no place to go, seemed as if it would fill the vastness of the sky itself.⁴²

They arrived at Uji. *Is the spirit of my lost love still lingering here, watching me? For whose sake, if not hers, do I wander obsessively like this, going to and from this place with no good reason?* He kept turning these thoughts over in his mind.

Kaoru alighted and, after a little show of kindness, took his leave. Ukifune was distressed, wondering, among other things, what her mother would think of this, but she followed him out of the carriage, comforted by the fact that he had been so sweet and solicitous when speaking to her.

Bennokimi thought it was inappropriate for a nun such as herself to get off at the same spot as Ukifune, and so she had the carriage pulled around to a passageway connected to her quarters. This struck Kaoru as being overly deferential, since this was hardly the kind of place where it was necessary to observe formalities.

As usual, Kaoru sent for men from his manors nearby, and soon a noisy crowd had gathered. Bennokimi's staff provided Ukifune's meal. The road leading here had been overgrown and the journey gloomy, but the villa itself had a bright, airy appearance. Seeing how the buildings had been designed and constructed to take advantage of the beauty of the river vistas and the colors of the mountain, Ukifune enjoyed a sense of relief from the depression and anxiety she had suffered in recent days. Still, she felt adrift, unsure of the Major Captain and how he would treat her in the days to come.

Kaoru sent the following letter to both his mother and to the Fujitsubo Princess:

When I last visited Uji, I left before the decorations for the altar at the new temple were finished. Today happened to be an auspicious one, so I hurried here to see how they turned out. Now, however, I'm not feeling well, and I also remembered that I should be observing a prohibition. I shall stay in retreat here today and tomorrow.

Ukifune still felt embarrassed when he entered her chambers, looking even more handsome in his casual attire, but now there was no need for her to hide her face. Even though her mother had paid careful attention to the color combinations of her layered robes, there was still something provincial about them. Memories came back to him of the old days, and he could think of nothing else but how graceful and alluring his lost love had looked in her soft, well-worn

robes. But then he gazed at the luxuriant, appealing cascade of Ukifune's hair, the graceful lines of its cut, and concluded that it was no less lovely than the Fujitsubo Princess's.

How should I handle this? he asked himself as he observed her. If I treat her as someone important and send her right away to my mother's villa, the gossip would certainly be awkward. What's more, it's not really my intention to put her on the same level as those ordinary ladies at Sanjō. I shall have her stay in retreat here for a while.

He was moved to think how lonely she would be when he was not there with her, and so they passed the day in intimate conversation. He brought up the subject of her late father and, with much humorous banter, described in detail captivating stories about Uji in the old days. Nonetheless, she continued to be extremely reserved and shy around him, and that made him feel vaguely lonely and frustrated. But then he reconsidered his reaction to her. *No matter what errors she makes, perhaps it's for the best that she's vague and malleable. I'll still be able to keep her as a memento, even while I'm training her. If she were one of those provincial poseurs who likes to put on airs, or if she were uncouth, or too forward and impertinent, then she would be of no use as a substitute for the late Princess.*

Kaoru called for the seven-string koto and the thirteen-string koto that had been there for many years. Knowing that, regrettably, Ukifune would not be able to play the instruments, he tuned them himself. He then realized that he had not so much as touched these kotos in all the years since Hachinomiya's death—a fact that struck him as remarkable. As he softly played with a warm, nostalgic feel, the moon rose and he sank into a reverie. He recalled Hachinomiya's skill in producing on the seven-string koto delicate tones that had always been poignantly affecting without being overpowering.

"Had you been raised here during that time long ago when everyone in your family was still alive, then you would now have a slightly more refined sensibility. Even though I was an outsider, I remember having deep regard and affection for your father. Why did you have to spend all those years off in the provinces?"

The mere mention of her background made Ukifune feel ashamed. Kaoru gazed at her as she reclined on an armrest, toying with a white fan. The pure white complexion of her profile peeked through the thick, lustrous tresses that gracefully draped across her face—she was the very image of her dead sister, and the resemblance touched him beyond measure.

Now that he had found a living embodiment of his lost love, Kaoru felt that in order to make Ukifune perfect for him in every way, he must train her in the sort

of polite accomplishments expected of a Princess.

“Have you ever tried playing *this* instrument? It’s a six-string koto … an *Azuma* koto. People refer to it by its epithet, ‘My darling wife.’⁴³ Surely you’ve at least had some training on it, have you not?”

“I’ve never even learned the Yamato dialect properly,”⁴⁴ she replied, “so why would you assume that I know how to play a Yamato koto?”

Her clever response made it obvious that she was lacking in neither grace nor wit. The thought of having to leave her in a place that he would not be able to visit as often as he would like was now torture to him, suggesting that he was already deeply attached to her.

He pushed the koto away and sang a poem: “A white fan in the autumn in the boudoir of Consort Ban, the voice of a zither in the evening on the terrace of Emperor Cheng.”⁴⁵

Jijū was accustomed to living in a province where bowstrings were the only strings that men plucked, and so when she heard Kaoru singing, she gushed, “Oh my, how perfectly auspicious!” It was, perhaps, her vulgar upbringing that accounted for this extravagant praise, for she knew nothing of the ancient customs that governed an imperial boudoir, and thus had no idea of the significance of the color of Consort Ban’s fan. But just then, Kaoru recognized that his own choice of verse had been a mistake, since it called up associations with an ill-fated romance.

Fruits and other delectables were brought in from Bennokimi’s quarters. Sprigs of ivy and maple leaves that had turned color were arranged in the lids of the serving boxes, where they mingled gracefully. Bright moonlight illuminated every corner of the room, revealing a slip of paper spread out under the leaves. On it was a poem written in the bold, clear strokes characteristic of the hand of the old nun. As soon as he noticed the paper, Kaoru reached eagerly for it, giving the impression that he was hungry and wanted to eat something immediately.

*Though it is autumn and the ivy-covered trees
Have changed their colors, how clear and bright is the moon
That shines just as I remember it in times past*

The calligraphy was a bit old-fashioned, but Kaoru was moved and humbled all the same. He murmured the following, though it was not meant to be a direct reply:

*The name of this place bespeaking a world of woe⁴⁶
Has not been changed, and yet in this moonlit chamber*

There appears the face of one I once loved, altered

They say that Jijū conveyed this poem to Bennokimi.

¹ *Shinkokinshū* 1013 (Minamoto no Shigeyuki): “Mount Tsukuba, its foothills, forests, and thickets, may be densely overgrown, but they will not impede me from going to my lover.” Although the *Shinkokinshū* postdates the *Genji*, Minamoto no Shigeyuki (d. 1000) was a contemporary of Murasaki Shikibu. The allusion here rests on Ukifune’s relationship to the Vice Governor of Hitachi, since Kaoru obviously does not need to go to Hitachi to see her.

² *Shūishū* 413 (Anonymous): “Those children who have been raised in the Eastern Provinces never lose their rustic accent.” Not exactly a masterpiece of the *waka* form, but the poem is further evidence of the bias against (and thus anxiety about) provincial mannerisms at court—a bias that Murasaki Shikibu (perhaps from personal experience) plays off extensively in her narrative.

³ A Kōshin night occurred once every sixty-day cycle. It was believed that three small insects (or worms) inhabited the human body. If a person fell asleep on a Kōshin night, these insects would leave the body and report a person’s misdeeds to the Emperor of Heaven, who would then claim the miscreant’s life as punishment.

⁴ In the *Suetsumuhana* chapter, Genji makes fun of the old-fashioned, out-of-style women who perform in this bureau. The Vice Governor’s decision to hire teachers from this bureau for his daughters merely highlights his vulgar, provincial sensibility.

⁵ There were two of these positions (*Kurōdo no Tō*), which were important steppingstones to power. One of the chamberlains had the title of Controller (*Tō no Ben*), the other took the title of Middle Captain in the Chamberlain’s office (*Tō no Chūjō*—the title that I used, in accordance with tradition, for the name of Genji’s brother-in-law/friendly rival). Clearly, the Lesser Captain is a young man on the rise.

⁶ The Minister is Genji’s son and the Major Counselor is Kōbai. The Minister of Ceremonials refers to a character not previously introduced in the story.

⁷ This prohibition, which is a pretext for moving Ukifune, most likely refers to a directional taboo.

⁸ Chūjō no kimi was the niece of Hachinomiya’s principal wife, and thus a cousin to the Uji Princess. Their relationship explains why the Uji Princess cannot treat her coldly.

⁹ *Kokinshū* 867 (Anonymous): “Because of this one purple gromwell, I look on all the grasses in Musashino with tender feelings.” This poem is alluded to earlier in several chapters (e.g., *Wakamurasaki*, *Asagao*, *Kochō*). Chūjō no kimi’s insistent assertion of Ukifune’s royal lineage is given a deeper dimension in the narrative by allusions such as this, for it creates implicit comparisons to other characters—most notably Genji’s mother and Murasaki—whose pedigree also puts them in a vulnerable social position.

¹⁰ Ukishima is an island to the south of Shiogama in Michinokuni (also known as Mutsu Province, present-day Miyagi prefecture) where the Vice Governor served. The place name, which contains a potential play on the word *uki*, could be translated as “drifting/floating isle” or “isle of woe.” It is an *utamakura*, a “pillow word” that serves as a poetic modifier for Michinokuni. *Kokin rokujō* 1796 (Yamaguchi no ōkimi): “It is a world where relationships are as woeful and uncertain as Ukishima, the floating isle of sorrow that drifts before the bay at Shiogama.”

¹¹ *Kokinshū* 948 (Anonymous): “Have relationships always been a source of misery since ancient times, or has this misery become mine alone?” (alluded to earlier in the *Yomogiu* chapter). See also *Shūishū* 953 (Ki no Tsurayuki): “It is because I alone suffer a surfeit of indignities that I have grown resentful of the whole world” (alluded to earlier in the *Sawarabi* chapter).

¹² *Hakushi monjū* 160.

¹³ *Kokinshū* 501 [also *Tales of Ise*, section 65] (Anonymous): “Alas, the gods do not accept the offerings I

made at the purification stream and will not answer my prayer to be cleansed of my love for you.” This poem, alluded to in the previous chapter, refers to the custom of transferring one’s sins or malign spirits to a doll or effigy and then setting it afloat as an act of expiation and purification. By broaching the subject of this type of doll, in this case a veiled reference to Ukifune, the Uji Princess reminds Kaoru of their earlier conversation during which he expressed a wish to have an image or effigy of his lost love to worship as a way of purging his attachment.

¹⁴ The word I have rendered as “doll” is *nademono*, which refers to an effigy or purification doll that the user stroked or rubbed over his or her body to transfer defilements or sins to it. Kaoru’s use of this has a more suggestive nuance than the word *hitokata*, which is used when the Uji Princess first informs him that Ukifune is staying at the Nijō villa. The verb *naderu* (“to stroke/to rub”) appears earlier in the narrative in a number of sexually charged moments (e.g., when Genji strokes Tamakazura’s hair), and thus indicates that Ukifune is merely an object of physical desire for Kaoru, whose true attachments lie elsewhere. The poem also plays on the word *seze*, meaning both “rapids/shallows” (an image associated with *nademono*) and “on occasion/from time to time.”

¹⁵ *Kokinshū* 706 [also *Tales of Ise*, section 47] (Anonymous): “So many hands reach out to grasp the sacred wand—and so many women are drawn to you that I cannot trust your word, even though I long for you.” The sacred wand, *ōnusa*, was used in Shinto rituals for purification in a manner similar to a *nademono*—people would grasp it or rub it over their bodies for spiritual cleansing and then set it adrift.

¹⁶ *Kokinshū* 707 [also *Tales of Ise*, section 47] (a reply to the previous poem, Ariwara no Narihira): “Even though the sacred wand you liken me to may flow along, in the end there is one rapids toward which it is drawn.” Kaoru’s allusion to Narihira’s poem is a reaffirmation of his faithfulness to the memory of his lost love in that he promises to be true to her substitute, Ukifune.

¹⁷ *Kokinshū* 792 (Ki no Tomonori): “I compare my sad fate to foam on the water that never dissipates, but all the while I flow along, and remain faithful to you.”

¹⁸ This is the twenty-third chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*. The name Oxhead calls to mind the unpleasant image of the ox-headed demons in Buddhist Hell.

¹⁹ *Kokinshū* 535 (Anonymous): “Will she recognize that my devotion to her is as deep as those mountain recesses where not even the cries of flying birds can be heard?” (alluded to earlier in the *Wakana* chapter, Part 1).

²⁰ *Tales of Ise*, section 21 (Anonymous): “Thinking that the time has now come when he will abandon me, I do not wish to sow in his heart seeds of the grass of forgetfulness.”

²¹ *Kokinshū* 952 (Anonymous): “Amidst what towering crags would I have to live to no longer hear of this world of woe” (alluded to earlier in the *Suma* chapter).

²² *Gosenshū* 662 (Anonymous): “Though I trusted your promise of love, now I would rather have you stop raising unfounded accusations and simply forget me altogether.”

²³ The ninth month had several periods of abstinence that prohibited the kind of ritual defilement that might result from washing one’s hair. The tenth month was known as the *kaminashi* or “godless” month, and though strictly speaking there were no prohibitions against washing one’s hair during this period, the word for god, *kami*, is a homophone for “hair” and thus carried potentially ominous associations that made aristocratic women wary of courting bad luck. It should be noted that the length of the typical noblewoman’s hair made the task of washing it rather onerous.

²⁴ *Fudō Myōō* (“The Unmovable,” *Acala* in Sanskrit) is one of the five guardian deities (Wisdom Kings) of esoteric Buddhism. Protector of the living, he is notable for his fierce, scowling face.

²⁵ The source of this line, *a(hi)te mo a(ha)nu*, has not been determined with complete certainty. However, a similar line, *a(hi)te mo a(ha)de*, appears in *The Izumi Shikibu Diary* (Prince Atsumichi): “Never before have I known such a peculiar path of love. Though we met, we were not truly together the whole night.”

²⁶ “I feel as though a weasel were here” is a more literal rendering of this slightly odd sentence. The import is clear—Chūjō no kimi favors Ukifune, and so she worries and fusses over her more—and the comparison to a creature that is cautious by nature seems apt. However, the original sentence is not a straightforward simile, and it may be that the word for weasel, *itachi*, refers to a mythical creature, *kamaitachi* (a “scythe-

weasel”), that could bewitch people in order to injure them or bring misfortune. By stating that she feels such a creature is nearby, Chūjō no kimi could simply be describing the degree of her nervousness about Ukifune’s security.

27 *Shūishū* 183 (Ise): “How heavy the dew that settles, breaking the stems of my beloved bush clover that, sadly, have already turned their autumn hues.”

28 This poem is a subtle critique of the Lesser Captain’s fickle behavior toward Ukifune (which explains his defensive reply). The phrase *shime yu(h)ishi* (“bound by a rope frame/enclosure”) evokes the word *shimenawa*, the sacred rope used in Shinto rites, as well as the notion of being bound by a vow or promise. For that reason, I have made the reference to the Lesser Captain’s broken promise explicit in the translation.

29 The poem plays on the element *miya* (“prince”) in the place name Miyagino. The Lesser Captain parries the criticism by claiming he had no idea that Ukifune was the daughter of an imperial prince. The association of the imperial house with Miyagino is made in the very opening chapter, *Kiritsubo*, with an allusion to *Kokinshū* 694 (Anonymous): “Just as the bush clover in Miyagino awaits the breeze to lift the weight of dew from its delicate leaves, so I await you.” By likening her daughter to bush clover, Chūjō no kimi has made Ukifune’s imperial lineage clear. Moreover, by making this allusion, the narrative explicitly draws a parallel between Ukifune and another woman of precarious pedigree, Genji’s mother.

30 *Shūishū* 506 (Anonymous): “If only I could find a retreat from this world, a refuge where I may hide this figure of mine, ravaged by the years.”

31 An early commentary identifies these holy men as the priests Kōya (or Kūya) (903–972) and Shinzei (800–860), among others. Mount Atago is in the northwest area of Kyoto in Ukyō-ku (one of the eleven present-day wards of the city).

32 *Gosenshū* 1117 (Shichijō Empress Onshi): “Having lived such a long life and reached old age, it’s not for me to help lovers cross over to meet, like the long bridge at Nagara.” The poem plays on the place name Nagara, which contains the element *naga*, meaning “long.”

33 Iga was an ancient province that occupied what is now the western part of Mie Prefecture. The word for “crone/matchmaker of Iga” is *Igatōme*. This could also refer to the fox spirit that was worshipped at Iga Shrine and suggests the association of a wily old female matchmaker with the cunning traits of a fox spirit.

34 *Man'yōshū* 267 (Naganoimiki Okimaro): “How wretched it is that rain should fall where there is no refuge at the crossing at Sano on the cape of Miwagasaki.”

35 Kaoru’s poem, which gives this chapter its title, alludes to the *saibara* “The Hut in the Eastern Provinces,” which tells of a man who visits a woman on a stormy night and, soaked by the rain, asks to be let in. The reference echoes the scene between Genji and Naishi in the *Momiji no ga* chapter.

36 The narrative uses the specific word *yarido*, an inexpensive door that was used in place of more expensive and elegant blinds. This detail adds to the rustic, countrified atmosphere of this small house and, beyond its romantic connotations, serves to highlight the huge gulf between Kaoru’s social status and Ukifune’s.

37 Hida was an ancient province that corresponds roughly to the northern part of modern-day Gifu Prefecture. As Kaoru’s remark indicates, it was famous for carpentry.

38 Under the lunar calendar, the winter solstice would have shifted from year to year, so Bennokimi’s statement is not implausible. Moreover, in the *Tamakazura* chapter there is mention of a provincial belief that marriage at the end of a month is inauspicious, so there were conflicting views about what times of the year were propitious. Given the context, Bennokimi’s assurances are not as contrived as they may seem at first glance.

39 Founded in 925 by Fujiwara no Tadahira, this temple (Hōsōji in the text) stood on the site now occupied by the Tōfukuji Temple.

40 *Futaai* is produced by weaving threads of dark blue and scarlet together or by dyeing cloth first with scarlet (using the dye from safflowers) and then with indigo. As a subdued color, it could be associated with mourning robes, and so I have made that association explicit in the text here. In the *Fuji no uraba* chapter, Genji expresses distaste for the color, which he sees as appropriate only for “nondescript” people.

41 I have taken the word “memento” (*katami*) to refer to the sleeves whose ominous combination of colors

reminds Kaoru of mourning robes (and thus of his lost love). Some commentators read “memento” as pointing to Ukifune. That is not an unreasonable interpretation, but either way, the sense of the poem, which expresses Kaoru’s inability to let go even after he has found a substitute for the late Princess, remains the same.

42 *Kokinshū* 488 (Anonymous): “It seems that this feeling of love will fill the vastness of the sky itself, and though I try to drive it out of my mind, it has no place to go.”

43 Kaoru plays on the word *Azuma*, a general name for the Eastern Provinces that could be heard as the words *A tsuma* (“Ahh, my wife/my darling wife”). The six-string koto is also known as the Japanese koto (either *Azuma* koto or *Yamato* koto). The pun on *Azuma* is an ancient one that is found in the story of Yamato Takeru in *Kojiki* (*Record of Ancient Matters*, 712), among other sources, and it used in the final line of the *saibara* “The Hut in the Eastern Provinces.”

44 Ukifune responds with her own wordplay. “Yamato dialect” is *Yamato kotoba*, while the six-string koto Kaoru is pressing on her is *Yamato koto*.

45 *Wakan rōei shū* 380 (Tachibana no Aritsura, who, after he became a priest, went by the religious names Songyō and Zairetsu). This poem, which is based on a Chinese couplet, refers to the story of the ill-fated love affair between Emperor Cheng of the Han dynasty (r. 33–7 BCE; referred to in the poem as Emperor of Chu) and the concubine Ban Jieyu (Consort Ban). Empress Xu and Consort Ban both fell out of favor because they did not produce a male heir. As a result of court intrigues, they were accused of witchcraft. Empress Xu was banished from court, but Consort Ban pleaded her case and was allowed to stay and serve the Empress Dowager. Kaoru is reminded of this poem by Ukifune’s white fan. A white fan is a summer fan, and would have been cast aside in the autumn. The poem is thus a melancholy evocation of Emperor Cheng’s rejection and abandonment of his former love, Consort Ban.

46 This closing poem plays once again on the various meanings of *Uji* and its homophones, one of which (“woe”) I have made explicit in the translation.

LI

Ukifune

A Boat Cast Adrift

NOT A moment went by when Niou wasn't thinking about the evening when he had his all too brief encounter with that young lady. She was obviously undistinguished in pedigree, but she was charming, and she seemed sincere. Thus, the failure to make her a conquest, or to even learn who she was, filled his temperamental heart with regret and frustration.

"It's absurd of you to get so worked up over a trivial matter like this. I never expected you'd be jealous. It's unpleasant." His bitter complaint was humiliating to the Uji Princess, and she would be greatly troubled each time he made it, uncertain how to respond.

Perhaps I should just tell him the truth, she wavered, but then thought better of it. Kaoru may not care enough for Ukifune to take her as a wife, but his attachment is clearly not shallow. After all, he has hidden her away. On the other hand, knowing how incorrigible Niou is, if I were to intervene and say something now, I'm sure he'd decide that he must find the girl. The way he flirts with the attendants here is really unseemly, especially if one them happens to catch his fancy. And when that happens, he does almost anything, no matter how outrageous, to make the woman his own, even if it means he has to go to her family home. Ukifune's been his obsession for months, and if he acts on his impulses, the consequences would be more distressing for her than for a woman who's not related to me. Of course, if he finds out about her from someone else, then I suppose there's nothing I can do about it. It would be terribly sad for both her and Kaoru, but Niou is a man who will have his way. If he succeeds in finding her, then I'll have to brace myself for a scandal much worse than one involving a woman who's unrelated to me. I just don't want it to happen as a result of carelessness on my part.

Despite the disagreeable difficulties she faced, she refused to divulge anything to Niou, not even her own feelings. Incapable of lying or making up convincing excuses, she controlled herself and simply stayed silent, as if she were just like any other wife whose jealousy was causing her to resent her husband.

In the meantime, Kaoru was incredibly cavalier in his attitude toward Ukifune. While it disturbed him to think of how she must feel to be kept waiting for him to visit, he was nonetheless constrained by his position at court. Moreover, he simply couldn't head off on the journey to and from Uji without a compelling reason. He thus found himself in a situation more distressing than if the gods themselves had prohibited him from traveling that road.¹

Still, he tried to set his mind at ease. *I'll do what's best for her soon enough, he told himself. I'm committed to keeping her at the mountain villa as solace for my loss, and I'll just have to come up with some good excuses to spend a few days there now and then so that I might be able to go quietly and see her at my leisure. If I can arrange our affair like this and keep her residence a secret from others, she'll gradually come to feel at ease and more accepting of my absences, and I'll be able to avoid the censure of court society. The best course of action is to remain as inconspicuous as possible. If people were to start spreading nasty gossip about me, it would undermine all the hopes I've had from the beginning. I can hear the sniping already. "Rather impetuous of him, wouldn't you say? Just who is this woman, and when did their relationship begin?" And what will the Uji Princess think when she finds out? She'll no doubt assume that I've made a clean break with the old villa and completely forgotten the past, even though that's not my intention at all.*

Kaoru was, as usual, much too detached and careless when it came to worldly matters like this, which is why he was able to reassure himself with these thoughts. He had planned out the residence where he would eventually move Ukifune, and discreetly ordered its construction.

Although he was so busy now that he had very little spare time, he continued to serve the Uji Princess tirelessly with the same consideration he had always shown. Those of her attendants who witnessed his behavior found it puzzling. The Uji Princess, however, had gradually grown wise in the ways of the world, and to her it was more than a little inspiring to realize, as she observed his words and deeds, that his heart was sincere. He had not forgotten the past, but was, it seemed, an exemplar of virtue, ever faithful to the lingering memory of those who had passed away. As he had grown increasingly mature over the years, he had become more distinguished in character and reputation, and was held in the highest esteem by the court. Consequently, whenever Niou revealed his unreliable nature, as he so often did, the Uji Princess was left to ponder her own

destiny, in which she was bound *not* to Kaoru, as her late sister had hoped, but to a man who caused her these many heartaches.

Still, for all that, she found it difficult to receive Kaoru when he called. Many months and years had intervened, the old days at Uji were receding into the distant past, and her attendants no longer had any real knowledge of the private memories that she and Kaoru shared. They would deplore his visits, insisting that while it might be perfectly appropriate for an ordinary couple to hold on to the memory of a relationship and continue seeing one another, people of their high status had to be mindful and not flout social norms. Moreover, it was becoming increasingly difficult to deal with Niou's never-ending suspicions. Given these constraints, the Uji Princess naturally grew more distant in her dealings with Kaoru, though his feelings for her remained constant.

There were other things to be considered as well. Despite her husband's licentious nature and his dalliances, which she found so distasteful, their son was growing more adorable with each passing day. Niou doted on the little boy, convinced that no other woman would give him so special a child. Consequently, he began to favor the Uji Princess over Roku no kimi and to treat her with special intimacy. His behavior gave her greater peace of mind than she had ever known before.

Soon after the busy first days of the New Year had passed, Niou came over to the west hall. At around noon, as he was playing with his son, who was just beginning his second year of life, a little page girl, completely oblivious to proper etiquette, came scampering into the Uji Princess's chambers. She was carrying a thick bundle of letters bound in a thin green wrapping, an artificial seedling pine attached to a small basket with whiskery plaits around the rim, and another, separate letter that was formally folded and wrapped in white paper.

"Who sent those?" Niou asked, as the page presented the items to the Uji Princess.

"The messenger said they're from Uji ... for Madame Taifu," the little girl replied. "But she's not around and I wasn't sure what to do, so I asked myself what the other ladies-in-waiting would do, and decided to bring them here for my mistress to inspect. See this basket? It's made of metal—just look at the colors! And this pine? It's just like the real thing!" She seemed beside herself with excitement, beaming as she spoke.

Niou smiled back. "Well, then, I'd like to take a look at it as well," he said, calling the girl over.

The Uji Princess was disconcerted by the prospect of having Niou inspect such provincial items and uneasy that he might learn the whereabouts of Ukifune. "Take them to Taifu at once," she ordered.

Seeing her face blush, Niou immediately suspected that the letter was from Kaoru, written to look like it was from someone else. It had been sent from Uji, after all, so that would make sense. His jealousy aroused, Niou took the letter.

Of course, if it is from Kaoru, this is going to be very uncomfortable, he thought. “If I open the letter, will you be put out with me?”

“It’s indecent,” his Uji Princess replied with a studied calm. “What do you think you’re doing, reading the private exchanges between two gentlewomen?”

“If that’s what they are, then I *do* want to read them. I’ll find out what women’s writing is really all about.”

He opened the letter and began to read. The hand was very youthful-looking: “I have been distracted of late and have let the time slip by without writing to you. Now the New Year has arrived. This mountain villa feels oppressively gloomy, and the peaks are constantly shrouded in mist.” The following words were added along the margin: “Please give this to the little Prince. It’s not much to look at, but . . .” There was nothing particularly distinctive or attractive about this note, and he did not recognize the handwriting. His vigilant eyes burning with curiosity, he opened the formal letter and saw that it was in a woman’s hand, just as his Uji Princess had said it would be:

Now that the New Year has arrived, how are you getting along? I imagine that you are enjoying the many pleasant festivities there. The residence here is truly wonderful and our lord is most considerate. Still, he visits so infrequently that it does not seem to be an ideal place for my young mistress. She’s always brooding about her situation, lost in melancholy thoughts. I feel that she ought to visit you from time to time as a way to cheer herself up, but whenever she remembers that awkward, frightening incident, she becomes distraught and is unwilling to go. She is sending the little Prince a mallet for the first Day of the Hare and asks that you present it to him when his father is not there.

The letter was rambling and verbose, and despite the celebratory season, it made no effort to avoid inauspicious words—“brooding,” “melancholy,” “awkward”—and its aggrieved tone was overbearing. After reading it several times, he was puzzled.

“Speak up, now,” he insisted. “Who sent this?”

“The daughter of a woman who used to serve at my father’s villa in the old days,” the Uji Princess answered. “I heard that her circumstances changed recently and that she has moved back there.”

He deduced from the look of the letter that it had not been written by an

ordinary attendant, and the mention of that “awkward, frightening incident” provided a clue that resonated with his own memory of the young lady he had seen that evening.

The mallet was charming. The decorative cords attached to its handle appeared to be the work of someone who had a great deal of idle time. A poem was attached to a forked branch of the pine seedling, through which artificial ardisia berries² had been strung:

*Though this forked branch is not yet bowed with age
Know that, as I pine for you, I send it
With heartfelt wishes for your son’s long life³*

The poem was certainly nothing special, but his eyes were drawn to it anyway when he realized that it had to have been written by that young lady who had so preoccupied his thoughts.

“It’s not exactly the kind of letter one needs to hide, now, is it? You must write a reply to her. It would be inconsiderate not to. Why ... you’re not out of sorts, are you? If that’s the case, then I suppose I should be going,” he said, taking his leave.

The Uji Princess spoke privately with Shōshō. “This is most unfortunate. How is it that no one noticed the little girl receiving the letters from the messenger?”

“If we had seen her, we would never have let her bring the letters to you,” Shōshō protested. “Anyway, that child is a nuisance, always meddling in everything! You can never be sure how a page girl will turn out until she grows up, but the quiet ones are always best.”

“Now, now, you mustn’t be angry with her ... she’s just a child.”

The little girl had come into service during the winter of the previous year, and because her features were especially pretty, Niou was fond of her.

Niou had returned to his own quarters in the main hall and was pondering what he had just learned. *How strange! I’ve known that Kaoru’s been going out to Uji for years, but then I heard that recently he spent several nights at the villa there. I know how much he wants to honor the memory of the woman he lost, but that’s hardly the kind of place where one would spend the night. No, it makes no sense ... unless, of course, he’s keeping a lover hidden away there. And she must be the woman who wrote that letter.*

Now that he had figured things out, Niou remembered a certain Master Scrivener⁴ who had once assisted him with some matters that involved documents in Chinese. This man was at present in close service to Kaoru, and so Niou summoned him under the pretext that he wanted the Master Scrivener to

select several volumes of Chinese verse and have them placed in a cabinet in his quarters for later use in games of guessing rhymes.

"Now that you're here," Niou casually remarked, "let me ask you something. I understand that the Major Captain continues to visit that villa at Uji. They say the new temple he commissioned there is an architectural marvel. It must be something to behold, is it not?"

"I've been told that it's sublimely dignified and that the design of the hall for the Perpetual Invocation of the Holy Name is especially noble and refined. As for the Major Captain's visits, he started going out there more frequently this past autumn. His menials have been whispering in private that he's keeping a woman at the villa—someone who must be quite dear to him. He ordered men from his nearby manors to serve her in every way possible and to guard the residence. Meanwhile, he sees her now and then on appropriate occasions, traveling from the capital in strictest secrecy whenever he can manage it. They say that she's very lucky to be looked after that way, but she also seems a bit lonely and forlorn. At least that's what I heard at the end of last year."

Just what I wanted to know! Niou was ecstatic. "Did they mention anything specifically about the identity of the woman? I believe the Major Captain calls on an old nun who has lived out there for a long time."

"The nun resides in a small room in a passageway. The woman in question resides in the main hall, which was just rebuilt. She has a large number of attractive attendants and seems to be getting along quite well."

"How interesting. I wonder what he intends to do with her? And what sort of woman is she, that he should keep her shut away like that? That Major Captain is an odd one ... his inclinations aren't at all like those of ordinary men. Why, I've heard his older brother, the Minister, criticize him for taking his religious devotions too seriously. He says Kaoru's a fool for spending nights in retreat at the mountain temple in Uji. I must admit, I share the Minister's view, and question why the Major Captain secretly follows the path of the Buddha so stringently. I had assumed that his behavior was due to his lingering attachment to the dead Princess who once lived in the old villa there. Now, I gather from what you've told me, it seems there's another reason altogether for his visits. I must say! He goes around pretending to be more pious than anyone else, and yet here he is, leading a double life, deftly avoiding any suspicion."

This is too delicious, Niou told himself. The Master Scrivener was the son-in-law of one of Kaoru's closest retainers, and so the man must have heard many other things that the Major Captain would wish to keep secret.

One desire occupied Niou's heart: *Somehow or other I have to find out for certain if Kaoru's woman is the young lady I met that evening! He's gone to so*

much trouble setting her up at Uji that she can't possibly be some common gentlewoman. And how is it that she has such a close connection with my Uji Princess? I just know that she and Kaoru conspired to hide the young lady from me! This thought irritated him no end.

For the next few days Niou could think of nothing else. Following the New Year festivities at the palace, including the archery contest and the privy banquet, he enjoyed a quiet period during which he could relax. Since the Spring Ceremonial for Court Promotions—an occasion that officials at the court seemed to eagerly anticipate—meant nothing at all to the future Crown Prince, he focused only on his plans to secretly make his way to Uji.

The Master Scrivener had ambitions of his own, and with promotions coming up, the man schemed mornings and nights to find ways to curry favor with his lord. In response, Niou warmly summoned the Scrivener for service more than usual.

“May I count on you to do what I say, no matter how challenging the task?” Niou asked.

The Scrivener humbly indicated that he was Niou’s devoted servant.

“Very well, then. This is an awkward matter for me to bring up, but the young lady residing at the Uji villa may be someone I briefly encountered not long ago. I lost track of her whereabouts, but then I heard that the Major Captain was calling on her. I don’t know for certain that she’s the same woman, but I’d like to get a glimpse of her to determine the matter once and for all. Can you devise some clever way for me to do that without anyone finding out?”

Oh, this is going to be very troublesome, the man thought. Still, he sounded positive. “To get there you have to pass over some very wild and rugged hills, but it’s not really all that far. If you leave in the early evening, you should arrive a little before or after midnight, during either the Hour of the Boar or the Hour of the Rat. You’ll be able to make it back home by dawn. The only people who will know about this are the men in your escort—and even they won’t completely know your motives for the journey.”

“Just what I was thinking. You see, I traveled that road a couple of times in the past. Nonetheless, I have to be careful and not let this get around. If it does, people will be sure to censure me for being irresponsible.” In his heart, Niou realized that what he was planning was ill-advised, but once he had broached the subject with the Master Scrivener, he could no longer abandon his plans.

For his escort, he selected only men from his inner circle: the Master Scrivener, two or three retainers who had been with him on the earlier trips and knew the way to Uji, and a young man—the child of Niou’s nurse—who had been promoted to the fifth rank in his post as a Chamberlain. After being

informed by the Scrivener that Kaoru would not be going to Uji for the next two days, Niou set out.

As he made his way along the road, he recalled the past. Certain memories pricked his conscience, for he was betraying a man with whom he had once shared an unusually powerful bond of friendship ... a man who had brought him to his Uji Princess. He was also frightened, his heart troubled that a man of his position, who was incapable of traveling through the capital entirely unnoticed, even on a clandestine journey like this, should be doing something so improper that he had to ride on horseback disguised in these *déclassé* hunting robes. Yet here he was, driven by his impulsive, curious nature, heading deeper into the mountains.

When do we arrive? And how is this going turn out? It would be terribly disappointing if I have to come back without meeting her. His heart and mind were agitated. He traveled by carriage as far as Hōshōji Temple,⁵ then switched to a horse.

Hastening onward, he arrived somewhat quicker than expected, just past the early hours of the evening.⁶ The Master Scrivener had already used his connections to gather information about the villa from some of Kaoru's men who knew their way around there, and so he was able to evade the watchmen. He quietly broke down a small portion of the reed fence that enclosed the west facade of the villa and sneaked inside. Even though he had gathered information about the residence, he had never actually seen it personally, and was a bit vague and uncertain as to how to proceed. Still, there was almost no one about, and he could make out a dimly glowing lamp on the south facade of the main hall. Upon hearing the soft rustling of robes, he returned to Niou.

"It appears that the women are still up. Just enter through here, my lord." He showed Niou the opening in the fence and led him inside.

Niou quietly ascended the main stairs to the veranda on the south side of the main hall. Noticing an opening in the lattice shutters, he moved toward it, only to shrink back, startled by the loud clatter of a rustic Iyo blind. The building, which had been recently constructed, had a clean feel, but it was still a bit rough and incomplete. Regardless, the women were relaxed, confident that no one would come there and look in on them. They had done nothing to block the gaps in the blinds and shutters, and they had draped the cloth panels of the standing curtains over the top of the frames. Three or four women were sitting and sewing robes by lamplight. An adorable little page girl was spinning thread. Her face, which he was seeing clearly for the first time in the lamplight, seemed to be the face of the page girl whom he had seen earlier at Nijō. Still, having had only a brief glimpse of her in the dim light that evening, doubts lingered, and he

wondered if his eyes weren't deceiving him. Nonetheless, the young attendant named Ukon was there as well. Then he saw the young lady he had been looking for. She was reclining with her head resting on her arm, gazing distractedly at the lamp. Her forehead and eyes, which were framed by tresses cascading gracefully around her face, possessed a noble, youthful elegance that, to his astonishment, reminded him of his Uji Princess.

While Ukon pleated a robe, she spoke with her mistress. "But if you do go on this trip, you won't be able to come back here all that quickly. The messenger who arrived yesterday told us that the Major Captain is definitely planning to arrive around the first of the month, after the promotions have been announced. What did his lordship say in that letter, and what did you make of it?"

Ukifune did not reply, apparently preoccupied by melancholy yearnings.

"It won't look good if you leave just when he's planned a visit," Ukon continued. "You'll give him the impression that you're sneaking away to hide."

A woman who was sitting across from Ukon gave similar advice. "It's best that you send him a letter explaining your reasons for making the journey. You can't just go blithely running off without a word to him. And when the pilgrimage is finished, you must come back straightaway. This villa may make you feel lonely and isolated, but since you've grown accustomed to living in these quiet, comfortable surroundings where you can do as you please, your mother's residence will feel more like a temporary lodging used on a trip somewhere."

Another attendant spoke up, saying, "Still, don't you think you'd feel more at ease and show better form if you were patient and waited a while longer for the Major Captain? He's moving you to the capital, right? Once he's done that, you'll be able to see your mother whenever you please. That old nurse of yours is too impetuous, convincing your mother that this trip was a good idea! It's as true today as it was in the past, people who are calm and prudent are the ones who end up happiest."

"Why didn't you restrain your Nana? Old people can be so annoying!" Ukon said spitefully—it seems that she always spoke disparagingly of people like the nurse.

Come to think of it, there was a damnably meddlesome old nurse with her that evening, Niou recalled, though that all felt like a dream to him now.

The women talked on about matters so private in nature that even Niou felt embarrassed for them. "The lady at Nijō has certainly enjoyed glorious good fortune," Ukon continued. "The Minister may have dazzling wealth and power, and he may go about boasting extravagantly about how Roku no kimi has married a Prince who is in line for the throne, but after the birth of the Prince's

son, it is the lady at Nijō who enjoys special favor. Without a meddlesome nurse or mother to bother her, she lives at ease, with free reign over her household.”

“So long as the Major Captain is unwaveringly sincere in his regard for our mistress, she will enjoy fortune that is just as glorious,” one of the attendants added.

Ukifune raised herself up a little and said, “I can’t stand listening to you. I don’t really mind if you measure me against women who are not my relatives, but you are *not* to compare me with the Uji Princess. I’d be mortified if anyone overheard you saying such a thing.”

How closely related are they? They do bear a striking resemblance. Niou compared Ukifune and his Uji Princess in his mind’s eye. When it came to the quality of refined elegance, his lady at Nijō was so extraordinary as to make one feel awkward in her presence. The young lady here, on the other hand, possessed mere physical beauty—fine, lovely features that gave her an enchanting aura. Even though he had noticed things about her that were less than ideal, those flaws didn’t matter, for he was hardly a man to give up his pursuit now that he had confirmed with his own eyes that she was the woman who had aroused his obsessive curiosity. What’s more, now that she had been fully exposed to his gaze, his eyes were transfixed and he felt that he was losing control of his emotions.

I must make her mine, no matter what.

Just then, Ukon said, “I’m so sleepy! I was awake all last night. I’ll finish your robe first thing in the morning. Even if your mother hurries to get here, her carriage will not arrive until the sun is well up.” She picked up the clothes that she had been sewing and draped them across the top bar of a standing curtain frame. She then leaned on an armrest and appeared to doze off. Ukifune moved further to the interior of the room and lay down there. Ukon got up and went into a room on the north side, where she remained for a few moments. She then came back in and lay down at the feet of her mistress.

Niou could see that Ukon, who looked very drowsy, would soon be fast asleep, and so, having no other options available, he tapped quietly on the shutter.

Ukon heard him and asked, “Who is it?”

When Niou cleared his throat, the timbre of his voice sounded familiar to Ukon who, thinking that Kaoru had arrived for a visit, got up and went over to the shutter.

“Open this, if you would,” Niou said.

“How strange of you, coming so unexpectedly. It must be very late by now.”

“I was startled to hear from my man, Nakanobu,⁷ that your mistress was

planning to go on a pilgrimage, and so I set out at once. It was quite an ordeal getting here, I must say. Hurry and open this!" He spoke in a hushed voice, imitating Kaoru's manner so well⁸ that Ukon did not think anything was amiss. She unlatched the shutter and raised it.

"I had a terribly frightful encounter on the road here, and so I must look a mess. Dim the lamp for me."

"How awful for you," Ukon replied. Fumbling about, flustered, she took the lamp away.

"No one must see me," Niou said. "Don't wake anyone up to say I've arrived." Having an aptitude for cleverly manipulating any situation, he was able to impersonate Kaoru's demeanor and voice, which had always resembled his own, and make his way inside.

He said that something terrible had happened, Ukon thought, feeling sorry for him. *Is he really a mess?* Honoring his request, she did not look directly at him. A sidelong glance, however, revealed that he was wearing a soft, finely woven hunting cloak. His perfumed fragrance was as superb as Kaoru's.

Niou drew up close to Ukifune, disrobed, and lay down beside her at his ease, as if he were following some customary routine.

"You're not sleeping in your usual quarters?" Ukon asked. When he did not reply, she spread the bedclothes over him. She then awakened the attendants sleeping nearby and had them all withdraw and go back to sleep a little farther away. They did not concern themselves with the men of Niou's escort, because it had never been their custom to look after Kaoru's men when he visited.

The women whispered among themselves, and one of them said, with a knowing air, "How romantic of him, coming here in the middle of the night. Our mistress clearly doesn't understand just how strong our lordship's devotion is!"

"Really, now, be quiet," Ukon interrupted. "Whispering late at night can sound annoyingly loud."

Meanwhile, Ukifune had realized that the man with her was not Kaoru. She was shocked and utterly mortified, but Niou kept her from calling out. Since he had been capable of the sort of outrage he committed at the Nijō villa—a place where one would have expected him to restrain himself—there was no telling what he might do here. If she had known from the beginning that he wasn't Kaoru, she might have been able to find some way, some excuse, to put him off, but now she felt as if she were in a dream. Little by little—as he began talking of the misery he had suffered as a result of their earlier encounter and of all the months that she had been on his mind—she came to the recognition that the man was Prince Niou. That knowledge only increased the shame she felt, and rendered helpless by the thought of how she was betraying her half sister, she

broke down and wept inconsolably. Niou, dwelling on how difficult it would be for him to see her in the future, wept as well.

The dawn came all too quickly for Niou. A man from his escort came up to the shutters and cleared his throat, signaling that it was time to leave. Ukon heard him and went in to attend her mistress. Niou, however, was in no mood to leave. He felt dissatisfied and sorry to leave Ukifune. Besides, it would be difficult for him to come again. So what if people in the capital were frantically searching for him. He would remain here like this, at least for the day. Life is short, after all, and it's best to live for the present moment. If he were to go back now, he would feel that he was dying of love-longing.

Having made the decision to stay, Niou summoned Ukon. "You will no doubt think I've taken leave of my senses, but I cannot bring myself to leave today. Tell my men that they are to withdraw someplace close by and stay out of sight. My man, Tokikata, is to go to the capital and explain that I've gone into retreat at a temple in the mountains. Tell him that if they ask him why I left, he's to make up some plausible-sounding excuse."

Ukon was now in a state of shock, realizing the grave error her carelessness last night had caused. She sought to calm her feelings of panic and desperation and find some sort of consolation for what had happened. *It won't do any good now to raise a fuss or cause any further confusion*, she told herself. *That would just be insulting. It's no doubt a sign of their inescapable karmic destinies that he should have been so deeply affected by their strange encounter at Nijō. Is there any way one person acting on her own could have brought them together?*

"Her mother is coming to get her today," Ukon said. "What does your lordship plan to do about that? There is absolutely no way to explain the unavoidable destiny that has brought you and her daughter together. Still, this is an extraordinarily inopportune moment, and so it might be best for you to leave today and, if you are willing, come again when you can do so at your leisure."

She's all too reasonable, Niou thought.

"For months I've been utterly distracted by my obsession with your mistress," he told Ukon, "and I no longer care what people may say or even that they may censure me. That is how sincere my feelings are. Would a person who is the least bit hesitant to act because of his social status even consider coming here the way I have? If you're so concerned about her mother's visit, then send a note telling her that your mistress cannot go out today because of some prohibition or other. Come up with some excuse so that no one else finds out that I'm here—if not for my sake, then for the young lady's. You may try to convince me otherwise, but it's useless—I'm not leaving." His mad infatuation with Ukifune was so unparalleled that he was oblivious to all criticism.

Ukon stepped out and spoke to the man who had earlier signaled that it was time to leave. “Your lord has made his wishes known, but all the same, you must tell him that this is highly inappropriate. He may be determined to behave in this atrocious manner, but surely the men of his escort understand the consequences of his passions. How could you have been so childish, accompanying him out here? What if some peasant had rudely accosted him on the way? What would’ve happened then?”

The Master Scrivener stood there thinking, *She’s right. That would have been a terrible predicament.*

“Which one of you is Tokikata?” Ukon continued. “I have a message for you.”

After hearing Niou’s instructions, Tokikata laughed and replied, “Very well. Even if my lord had not ordered me to the capital, I would have fled anyway just to escape those fearsome tongue-lashings of yours. But all joking aside, when we observed the extraordinary feelings our lord has for the young lady, we were to a man more than willing to lay down our lives for him. But enough of this ... your watchmen are all beginning to stir.” And with that, he hurried off.

Ukon was at her wits’ end, wondering how she would keep the others from finding out about Prince Niou. As the attendants were getting up, she said to them, “The Major Captain is keeping strictly out of sight due to certain circumstances. I caught a glimpse of his clothing, and it seems that something unfortunate happened to him on the way here. He has ordered new robes be brought to him discreetly, after it’s dark.”

“Oh, how horrid! Mount Kohata is truly frightening. And the Major Captain is always traveling here in disguise and with no outrunners. It’s dreadful ... just dreadful,” said the attendants.

“Hush, now! Be still! If the menials catch even a hint of this, it’ll be an unmitigated disaster,” Ukon scolded—though inwardly she was frightened at having to lie like this. *Suppose a messenger from the Major Captain shows up? What would I say to him at such an awkward moment?* She murmured a fervent prayer: “O merciful Kannon of Hatsuse, I beg you, please let this day pass without incident!”

Ukifune’s mother was to come today and accompany her on a pilgrimage to the temple of Kannon at Ishiyama. All of Ukifune’s attendants had undergone the prescribed fasting and purification, prompting one of them to remark, “If the Major Captain is going to stay all day, then it seems our mistress won’t be able to go. What a shame, after going to all that trouble!”

When the sun was up, the shutters were raised and Ukon closely attended Ukifune. The blinds were lowered in the central chamber of the main hall, and

the words *Observing Prohibition* were written on tags and hung around the residence. Knowing that Chūjō no kimi might want to see her daughter in person, Ukon was prepared to put her off by saying that Ukifune had had an ominous nightmare the previous evening and should not be disturbed. She brought in water for washing, just as she always did when Kaoru was staying over, but when Ukifune began to pour water for Niou, he was somewhat taken aback, thinking it inappropriate.

“No, no,” he said, “it would please me if you would go first.”

Ukifune, who had grown accustomed to the subdued elegance and reserved manner of Kaoru, was now deeply moved as she came to understand that Niou, whose obsessive attachment to her was so great that he insisted he would die if they were separated for even a moment, was the very embodiment of what people mean when they talk about being passionately in love. *What a strange fate has befallen me! And what will people think of me when they hear about this?* Above all, she wondered how the Uji Princess would react.

Niou had no idea what she was thinking at that moment, because he still did not know who she was. “You’ve refused over and over to tell me about yourself. It’s really quite cruel, you know. Just tell me the truth. Even if you’re a lowly menial, I swear I would love you all the more.” He was unrelenting in his pressure, and yet she was adamant in her refusal to answer. She was more yielding when their conversation turned to other matters and her responses then were most charming. In his eyes, she was bewitching beyond measure.

The sun was high when the escort that had come to fetch Ukifune arrived. The party included two carriages, several men on horseback—seven or eight of the usual rough men of the provinces—and a crowd of men on foot. As always, their demeanor and rapid manner of speaking were uncouth. The attendants, who found their presence here awkward and embarrassing, told them to move away and stay out of sight.

How am I going to handle this? Ukon asked herself. I could tell them that the Major Captain is here, but he’s such an distinguished figure that people would soon find out whether or not he’s in the capital, and my lie would be exposed. With these considerations in mind, Ukon decided to say nothing to the other attendants, and instead sent the following note to Ukifune’s mother:

Last night my mistress was defiled by her menses, and she laments that such an unfortunate thing should happen. Moreover, she had a disturbing dream during the evening as well, and so she has been advised to be cautious today and stay in retreat to observe a prohibition. She regrets this very much. It would seem that something, perhaps a malign spirit, is

causing a disturbance.

After writing this, she had food sent out to the party. She also had a message sent over to Bennokimi: "Our mistress must remain in seclusion today and will not be traveling to Ishiyama."

For Ukifune, who normally spent her seemingly interminable days gazing out in melancholy reverie at the gloomy, mist-shrouded mountains, this day, which she spent with a man who was irritated by the wretched speed with which the evening was drawing on, was short-lived and came to an end before she knew it.

On this calm spring day with nothing to interrupt him, Niou could not sate his desire to gaze at his young lady.⁹ Her flawless beauty made him feel that way. She was gentle and winsome, and she exuded a warm, welcoming allure. That being said, she was, in reality, no match for his Uji Princess at Nijō. Moreover, she in no way compared to the Minister's daughter, Roku no kimi, who was in the very prime of her radiant beauty and thus in a class all by herself. Nonetheless, on that day, Niou considered Ukifune peerless, and thus had eyes that could see only her charms, the likes of which he had never known.

To Ukifune, Kaoru was so handsome that she hadn't imagined that there might be any other man like him. Yet as she observed Niou, she saw in him an extraordinarily noble, incandescent beauty that set him above all others.

Pulling an inkstone toward him, Niou began practicing his calligraphy. Even his jottings were exceptionally lovely, and the illustrations and sketches he drew were so skillfully rendered that Ukifune's innocent heart couldn't help but be captivated as her affections shifted to Niou.

"Though it is my heart's desire to always be with you, whenever we're apart, please look at these," he said. He then drew a delightful sketch of a man and woman lying together. "If only it could be always thus . . . , " he added tearfully.

*Though I promise to be with you forever
It makes me sad to reflect that in this life
We will never know what tomorrow may bring*

"But what a terribly inauspicious sentiment to express. I am prevented from doing as I wish by my station in life, and whenever I want to make plans for anything, I feel as if I would die. Though you treated me coldly that evening months ago, somehow I managed to find you."

Ukifune picked up the brush, which was still wet with ink, and wrote her reply:

If life were the only uncertain thing

If life was the only uncertain thing

*In this world of woe, who then would lament
With plaintive sighs a lover's fickle heart*

He found it so adorable that she should be bitterly complaining already about infidelities he had yet to commit that he could hardly control his feelings. “Tell me,” he said with a smile, “who, exactly, has been so unfaithful as to make you write that?” Curious to know what happened at the time Kaoru first brought her to the Uji villa, he questioned her repeatedly.

With a pained expression, she replied, “How can you ask me something I cannot talk to you about?” Even her reproachful expression had an innocent quality.

Never mind, Niou told himself. *The story will inevitably come out by and by*. Still, it was unbearably cruel of him to want to have the young lady tell him herself.

That evening, Tokikata, who had taken Niou’s message to the capital, returned and reported to Ukon. “Her Majesty sent a messenger to Nijō. The man informed me that evidently the Minister was extremely annoyed, complaining about how thoughtless it was of his son-in-law to go off on a trip without informing anyone and warning that if something untoward happened, it might damage the prestige of the imperial household. The Minister also worried what His Majesty would think if he heard about this escapade. After delivering this harsh rebuke, the messenger returned to the palace. Still, I did as I was ordered and had the man take back the reply that my lord was off to see a holy man in the eastern hills of the capital.” After relating his story, Tokikata added, “Women are deeply sinful creatures—leading astray a retainer like myself who has nothing at all to do with this and having him lie on their behalf!”

“How nice of you to refer to my mistress as a holy man,” Ukon retorted. “I’m sure that by doing so you’ve atoned for your sin of lying. In all sincerity, your lord certainly has a peculiar disposition, and though what you say about my mistress leading him astray may be true, how was it that he came by such deplorable habits? Had he informed us ahead of time that he was coming here like this, we might have been able to devise a proper reception for such a dauntingly distinguished young nobleman. Instead, we got this reckless, clandestine visit.”

Ukon went to Niou and informed him of what she had learned. *Yes, indeed*, he thought, *they must be worried about me in the capital*. “It is miserable, being so constrained by my circumstances,” he said to Ukifune. “If only I could be one of those carefree courtiers ... even for a short time. What am I to do? I can’t be

expected to always go about feeling inhibited, mindful of the watchful eyes of those I must treat deferentially. And how will Kaoru react? We've naturally always had close ties as relatives,¹⁰ but in truth, we've been on preternaturally close terms as friends since childhood, and I shudder in embarrassment just thinking about that moment when he learns how I betrayed him with our secret affair. And that's not the only thing that concerns me. They say it's common for a man to discount his own neglect of a woman he has kept waiting, and instead blame her when she is drawn to another. I would hate that to happen to you. I want to take you far away from here to a place that no one could ever find, not even in their dreams."

He couldn't possibly spend another day hidden away with her like this, and so he prepared to leave. Still, he felt as though he had left his spirit behind, lingering within her sleeves.¹¹

His men were coughing and clearing their throats, warning Niou that it was time to be off, since they needed to return before dawn fully broke. Ukifune accompanied him to the hinged double doors in the corner of her chambers. He could not bring himself to leave her.

*Wandering lost in the night, confused by feelings
I've never known in this world, I must take a road
Darkened by tears that have set out ahead of me*

Ukifune was moved beyond measure.

*If these sleeves of mine are inadequate¹²
To hold back my tears, could someone like me
Ever hope to keep you from departing*

In the predawn darkness, when the wind was rustling violently in the trees and a deep frost had settled, it felt as though both of their robes¹³ had grown cold in the raw chill. When he mounted his horse, he felt the cruel shock of parting and wanted to turn back. His escort, however, feeling that this was no time for games, simply set off in a great rush, and so Niou, who was dazed and bewildered, had to leave with them.

The two men in the escort who were of the fifth rank—the Master Scrivener and Tokikata—were leading Niou's horse by its reins. Only after the party had traversed the steep, rugged mountain path did they mount their own horses. The crackling of the icy frost beneath the hooves of the horses as they passed along the riverside sounded lonely and sad. Because he had only ever traveled over this

road as a path of love, even in the old days when he went to see his Uji Princess, the karmic ties that bound him to that villa struck Niou as wondrously strange.

When he arrived back at the Nijō villa, he decided to retire to the comfort of his own chambers in the main hall rather than go to his Uji Princess, for he was bitter over how insensitively she had behaved by concealing the whereabouts of the young lady. However, he was unable to sleep, and overwhelmed by loneliness, he meekly gave in and went over to the west hall.

She was there, all innocent, unsuspecting, and lovely. Though the young lady at Uji had been unusually captivating in his eyes, she was no match for the Princess, whose superior beauty and refinement were rare in this world. Still, for all that, he could feel his chest tightening as he recalled just how closely the two women resembled one another. Looking sad and pensive, he withdrew inside the curtains surrounding her bed on the dais. She went in with him.

"I'm not feeling well," he told her. "It makes me wretched to think what might become of me. Although you are very dear to me, if I were to die, your feelings would no doubt change very rapidly, and Kaoru would finally get what he has desired all along."

What an outrageous thing to say, she thought. And apparently he's quite serious!

"It would be horrid if Kaoru were ever to hear the atrocious things you're saying and get the wrong idea, wondering what sort of stories I've been telling you. For someone like me, whose circumstances are so trying, such baseless, flippant accusations are unbearable." She turned away from him.

Niou's expression turned serious. "What would you think if I really *did* have cause to think you unkind? Have I ever been neglectful or behaved irresponsibly toward you? Certain people have even criticized me for showing you special favor. Yet apparently you think less of me than you do of Kaoru. I've resigned myself to that—you and he clearly share a bond from a previous life, so what can I do? Still, it hurts me very much to know that in your heart you keep secrets from me." As he pondered the extraordinary destiny he shared with the young lady at Uji—a bond that had led him to seek her out—his eyes filled with tears.

He looked so sincere that the Uji Princess, misinterpreting his tears, felt sorry for him. Wondering what sort of gossip Niou might have heard about her relationship with Kaoru, she was startled and could find no response. *It was all a lark for him when he first came to Uji, and he must have considered me an easy conquest, for now he takes me lightly, assuming that everything I do is suspect. It was a mistake from the beginning to have relied on Kaoru and to have been moved by his kindness. After all, he has no real ties to my family. No wonder Niou looks down on me.*

As these thoughts coursed through her mind, everything took on a melancholy cast. Her doleful expression seemed sweeter than ever to Niou. He did not want to tell her that he had found the young lady—at least not for a while—and so he let her think that his resentment was due to something else she had done. The Uji Princess concluded that either Niou was simply telling her what he really thought about her relationship with Kaoru, or that he had taken seriously falsehoods someone had spread about her. So long as she was uncertain about the cause of Niou’s displeasure, she would be embarrassed to show herself to him.

He was startled when a letter arrived for him from his mother, the Akashi Empress, but he kept up the pretense of his displeasure, maintaining an angry scowl as he left for his own quarters. The letter read in part: “We were anxious about you yesterday. Since you went to see a holy man, we assumed that you were not feeling well. If you are better, please come to the palace. We have not seen you in some time.” It bothered him to think that he might be upsetting her, but in fact he was not feeling well, and did not go to the palace that day. A large number of senior officials called on him, but he stayed inside his blinds.

That evening, Kaoru arrived. “Show him in,” Niou said; he received him in dishabille.

“Her Majesty is anxious about you, since you don’t seem to be feeling well,” Kaoru said. “What’s wrong?”

Seeing Kaoru in person made the turmoil in Niou’s heart all the more intense, and so he kept his responses brief. *Look at him, always putting on airs as if he were a saintly hermit, when at heart he’s like one of those eccentric priests who wander the mountains! How can he just abandon a woman as lovely as that, with no sense of urgency to see her, and keep her sadly waiting days and months for him to call on her?*

Niou was always irritated by Kaoru’s penchant for seizing even the slightest opportunity to polish his reputation as an earnest young man, and normally he would tease him at every turn. Curious to see how the sanctimonious Major Captain would respond when informed that his secret affair had been uncovered, he was tempted to taunt Kaoru today as well, but he simply wasn’t up to it—especially not on *that* subject. Indeed, Niou was in serious discomfort.

“This is most worrisome. You may dismiss your condition as trifling, but if this goes on for several days it can turn quite serious. Do take care of yourself,” Kaoru said, expressing heartfelt concern for Niou as he left.

He has a way of always making one feel inferior. I wonder how I compare to him in the eyes of the young lady at Uji? Everything seemed to bring her to mind, for Niou could think of nothing else.

Now that the trip to Ishiyama had been canceled, life at the Uji villa was extremely tedious. Niou sent a letter to Ukifune filled with jottings on various matters of great significance. He was nervous about having such a letter delivered, however, and so he had a retainer who served Tokikata—a man who knew nothing about the situation—act as messenger for him. When the man arrived at the Uji villa, Ukon explained his presence to the other attendants, saying, “He’s a man I’ve known for a long time. He found me again while he was serving in the Major Captain’s escort, and said that he wanted to start seeing me just like the old days.” She had by now become practiced at concocting lies for any occasion.

The second month arrived. Despite his obsessive yearning for the young lady, it was extremely difficult to go to Uji. Assailed by feelings of loneliness, he sighed, convinced that he would not be able to live much longer if he went on suffering like this.

Meanwhile, at about the time when the busy season of New Year festivities was winding down a little, Kaoru made his way to Uji in secret, as was his wont. He went to the new temple there to pray to the Buddha. That evening, after rewarding the monks whom he had commissioned to read sutras aloud, he went to the villa. Although he traveled discreetly, unlike Niou, he had not gone out of his way to disguise himself. He looked every bit the ideal court gentleman as he entered dressed in his court cap and cloak, and he had given such special care to his appearance that Ukifune felt small and diffident in his presence.

How can I face him? Frightened and guilty, as if the eyes of Heaven itself were on her, Ukifune suddenly recalled the rash, passionate figure of Niou, and when she did, the very thought of seeing this man¹⁴ again made her feel utterly wretched.

“Now that I’ve met you, my affection for all the other women I’ve known over the years must surely fade and be replaced by my love for you, and you alone,” Niou had whispered to her, and it seemed he was telling the truth, for she had heard that he fell ill soon after their tryst, that he was no longer going out to various places the way he normally did, and that people were making a great fuss over him by commissioning healing rites and the like. It was too painful to even imagine what he might think if he knew Kaoru was with her at this moment.

And yet, Kaoru too was extraordinary—calm, thoughtful, sensitive. Even when he apologized for having been away for such a long time, he did so with only a few words, eschewing florid assurances of his longing sorrow and keeping his emotions in check. His temperament gave him an air of elegance that anyone who heard him speak in his refined, appealing way of the pain of longing

he had suffered all the time he was apart from Ukifune would have found his words more poignantly moving than any passionate outpouring of eloquent phrases.¹⁵

Kaoru was alluringly handsome, to be sure, but more than that, he was a man of superior character whom she could rely upon to look after her long into the future. It would certainly be a difficult, horrid moment if word of her unexpected, thoughtless change of heart were to leak out. It was odd how strongly attracted Ukifune was to a man so impetuously obsessed with her, but their affair was improper and frivolous. The loneliness she felt when confronting the prospect that Kaoru might now be displeased and abandon her altogether had permeated the very core of her being. As a result, her thoughts and emotions were in chaos.

Seeing how troubled she looked, Kaoru assumed that over the past few months she had come to a markedly greater understanding of human emotions and had matured as a woman. The tedium of living in this villa left her so much idle time that she had brooded constantly on her sorrows. Stirred to compassion, he spoke to Ukifune with greater intimacy and warmth than usual.

"The house I'm building for you is gradually coming along very nicely," he said, sharing his plans with her. "I went to see it the other day. The river there is gentler, more approachable than the rapids here, and the garden is filled with flowers for you to gaze on. It's close to my Sanjō residence as well. That means, of course, that we'll no longer have to worry day and night about being apart. I would like you to move there sometime this spring ... if it's not inconvenient for you."

Prince Niou told me in his letter yesterday that he too was planning to move me someplace where he could see me at his leisure. It seems that he made that promise unaware of the Major Captain's plans. While moved to pity for Niou, she was also thinking that she must never yield herself to him ... until, that is, she conjured in her mind an image of him. How wonderful he had looked when he was with her! In her heart she knew that she wouldn't be able to resist him. Contemplating her desperate situation, she burst into tears.

"I was happier and more relaxed when you were not troubled as you are now. Has someone said something to you about me? Would a man in my position go to the trouble of coming here over those treacherous roads if he had even the slightest intention of neglecting you?"

Kaoru went out near the edge of the veranda and lay down, gazing up at the thin crescent of the first-day moon in the evening sky. They were both sunk in thought—the man recalling the sorrows of the past, the woman sighing over the woeful destiny that would be her future.

The scene before them of hills obscured by mist and crowned herons flocking together on a chill-looking sandbar¹⁶ was sublime. The span of the Uji Bridge receded into the distance, while boats laden with bundles of brush gathered for kindling passed one another, moving up and down the river. All sorts of things that Kaoru would not normally see elsewhere were gathered in that vista, and each time he looked out upon it, he felt as if he were reliving the past in the present moment. Even if he were not exchanging glances with this incomparable woman, the setting was enough to call forth the inexhaustible beauty and sadness of that uncommon relationship he once shared with his lost love. Moreover, in comparing Ukifune to the late Princess, whom she so closely resembled, Kaoru sensed that there was no longer such a great difference between them. Indeed, in his eyes, she was lovelier than ever, for she was gradually acquiring a greater sensitivity to matters of the heart and becoming more refined and courtly in her manners. Still, he could find no way to comfort her, to stem the flood of tears called forth by the sorrows that had accumulated in her heart. At a loss, he composed the following:

*Like long Uji Bridge the vows I made to you
Will stretch on forever and never crumble
So let not your heart be fraught, afraid to cross*

“You will understand the depth of my devotion soon enough.”

She replied:

*I may trust that your vows are like Uji Bridge
And will never crumble ... so you assure me
But that fearful span is known for gaping holes*

He found it harder than ever to abandon her and wanted to stay a while longer, but concerned about the difficulties gossip at the court might cause, he concluded that, for now, it would be foolish to stay on. After all, he would be able to spend time with her at his ease once he had moved her to the new house. With that thought in mind, he decided to return to the capital at dawn.

What a fine, mature woman she's become! He now had even more poignant memories of the place than before.

At around the tenth day of the second month, His Majesty summoned the court to a banquet to compose poetry in Chinese. Both Niou and Kaoru were in attendance. The musical instruments were tuned to a mode appropriate to the spring season, and Niou’s voice was wonderfully sonorous as he sang the

saibara “A Branch of Plum.”¹⁷ He was in every respect superior to all the other men there, and yet his propensity for losing himself in trivial amorous affairs was deeply sinful.

A sudden snowstorm and heavy winds forced an early end to the musical performances. Courtiers withdrew to Niou’s palace chambers. Food and drinks were brought in, and everyone rested there. Kaoru moved out closer to the edge of the veranda, as though he wanted to speak to someone and have him take a message for him. The snow, which was slowly piling up, glimmered ever so faintly in the starlight. His ethereal scent, which brought to mind the line “The darkness of a spring night tries in vain to obscure things,”¹⁸ and the figure he cut as he murmured a snatch of verse, “Will she wait for me this night as well,”¹⁹ was indescribably sublime, since he possessed a gravitas that gave even his most trivial, playful utterances a mysteriously poignant affect.

Couldn’t he have chosen a different verse? Niou, who was pretending to sleep, was restless, his heart seething with jealous vexation. *It seems clear that Kaoru is serious about the young lady. And here I was, sure I was the only one whose sympathies were turned toward her, imagining her spreading out her robes to sleep alone. How sad that he feels the same way! And how bitterly cruel! With a man like Kaoru as her first love, how could she possibly think more fondly of me?*

Early the next morning, with snow piled deeply all around, Niou appeared before His Majesty during the formal presentation of Chinese poems. He was radiantly handsome, a young man at the very peak of masculine beauty. Kaoru was approximately the same age, but he seemed a little more mature in looks and bearing—was it because he was two or three years older?²⁰ He was a paragon of courtly virtue, a gentleman whose maturity endowed him with a special air of dignity and grace. The courtiers were justified in their opinion that His Majesty had absolutely no cause to feel dissatisfied having the Major Captain as a son-in-law. In terms of his learning and his command of public affairs, Kaoru was definitely superior to all others.

Following the presentation of the poems, everyone withdrew from His Majesty’s presence. Niou’s offering had been judged superior to the others, and the courtiers were intoning his verse as they left. Niou, however, was oblivious to such praise. Distracted, his thoughts elsewhere, he wondered what, exactly, was the mind-set of people who took such pleasure in this sort of trivial diversion.

After observing Kaoru’s demeanor that snowy evening—behavior that revealed the strength of his feelings for the young lady—Niou grew increasingly

agitated. He devised a daring scheme and set off for Uji. In the capital, patches of snow lingered as if waiting there like welcoming companions,²¹ but as the party traveled further into the mountain recesses, the snow gradually grew deeper. Making their way along that narrow path, which was even more difficult and deserted than usual, the men of Niou's escort were on the verge of tears, frightened and anxious about the terrible consequences they might face if their lord's illicit affair were exposed. The Master Scrivener, who was acting as guide, was also a Junior Assistant Minister of Ceremonials. Both of his positions demanded dignified behavior, and so it made for an amusing sight to see this bookish official with the hems of his trousers rolled up in a fashion appropriate for an amorous escapade.

A message had been sent to Uji informing them of Niou's plans. However, given the heavy snowfall, they had not taken it seriously and were caught off guard when, late that night, a note arrived for Ukon. Ukifune was as startled and moved as her attendant. Ukon was already troubled, worrying about how this affair would turn out in the end, but on this particular evening she had to set aside her misgivings about what others might think, for she had no means to send Niou away at this point. She therefore decided to confide in Jijū, a sensible young attendant who was also very close to their mistress.

"This is unbearably reckless. The two of us must act together to keep his visit concealed."

The two attendants showed Niou into the villa. The overpowering fragrance of his perfumed robes, which were damp from the journey, might well have been a problem, but he was so like Kaoru in appearance that they were able to deceive the other attendants.

If he had to head back to the capital before the night was over, then it would have been better not to have come at all, since a brief, unfulfilling visit would have only intensified his longing. Still, he had to be mindful of the eyes of the other attendants here, and so he consulted with his man Tokikata, and they hit upon the idea of taking the young lady to the house of a certain person across the river. Tokikata set out first to make the arrangements, returning late that night.

"Everything is ready, my lord," he reported.

What are they planning to do with my mistress? Ukon was extremely apprehensive, and even though she felt groggy, having just awakened from her slumbers, her body trembled and she looked miserable. She was shivering just like a page girl playing in the snow. Before she could utter even a single word of protest, Niou had swept up her mistress in his arms and set off. Ukon had Jijū accompany them, while she stayed behind to look after Ukifune's quarters.

They boarded one of those small boats that she had gazed out on every day,

morning to night, moved by how fragile and vulnerable they seemed. As they were crossing the river, she felt isolated and lonely, as if she were being separated from everything, rowing away toward some remote, far-off shore. She clung fast to Niou, and as he embraced her, he thought her sweet and adorable. At dawn the twentieth-day moon rose clear and high, its beams reflecting off the pellucid surface of the water.

“This is the Isle of Tachibana,”²² the oarsman informed them, drawing the boat up to the shore and stopping there a few moments for them to view the scenery. The island was shaped like an enormous rock, and the lush foliage of the elegant-looking evergreens cast deep shadows.

“Just look at them,” Niou exclaimed. “They may look fragile, but their rich green will surely last for a thousand years!”

*Never will this heart that plights its troth to you
At the tip of the Isle of Tachibana
Change its color, though a thousand years may pass*

Ukifune was astonished at the curious path they were following:

*Perhaps it will not fade, the color of the trees
On the Isle of Tachibana ... what is unknown
Is the destination of a boat cast adrift*

Given the circumstances of the moment and the young lady’s beauty, Niou found everything, including her poem, captivating.

They reached the other shore and disembarked. Niou was reluctant to let someone else carry the young lady, and since it would have been deplorable to let her walk, he kept her in his arms and, assisted by his men, took her inside himself. The people of the house looked on in amazement: *This is most irregular! What sort of woman is she, that our lord would make such a tremendous fuss over her like this?*

Evidently the house, which was small and humble, had been constructed on a manor belonging to Tokikata’s uncle, the Governor of Inaba. It was still quite rough and incomplete, and it was furnished with items that Niou had never seen before, such as rustic wickerwork screens and the like that did almost nothing to keep the wind out. Even as patches of snow were melting around the base of the fence, clouds had gathered and new snow was now drifting down.

When the sun came out, the icicles hanging from the eaves glistened, and Niou looked more magnificent than ever to Ukifune. He, pressured by the need

to travel incognito over difficult roads, had dressed lightly in a hunting cloak and trousers cinched at the ankles. She, having revealed the slender contours of her figure by removing her outer robe, looked truly ravishing. *How embarrassing, she thought, to be in this intimate setting face-to-face with a dazzlingly handsome nobleman ... and I'm not even properly dressed!* There was, however, no way for her to hide from his gaze.

She wore five layers of white robes that had grown softly rumpled with use. Their subtle, subdued sheen, which extended right to the edges of the sleeves and hems, created a delightful effect that layered robes of many hues could not have matched. He was unaccustomed to seeing any woman dressed quite this casually—not even those he saw in intimate settings all the time—and he found her figure, even in those plain robes, marvelous and seductive.

Ukifune was unbearably ashamed to be exposed to the gaze of her attendant as well. Jijū herself was a very attractive young woman. “Who is she?” Niou had asked Ukifune. “Whoever she is, you must not mention my name.”²³ Jijū, upon hearing him enjoin her mistress to keep his identity secret, thought him incredibly dashing.

The man who resided in this house as custodian assumed that Tokikata must be the person in charge, and so he ran around doing all he could to make sure his exalted guest was properly looked after. As a result, Tokikata found himself, to his great pride and satisfaction, lodging in the room next to Niou’s, separated only by a plain sliding door. The custodian, his voice tense, could be heard speaking deferentially to Tokikata, who, taking pleasure in being mistaken for the master of the party, refused to answer any questions about his lord, Prince Niou, and thereby disabuse the man of his error.

“Because of a prohibition imposed on me by an ominous prophecy, I must avoid the capital at all costs. Let no one come near this place,” Tokikata commanded.

With no prying eyes to observe him, Niou was able to spend the day with the young lady in leisurely conversation. It occurred to him that she must behave exactly the same way with Kaoru as she was now behaving with him, and the thought made him insanely jealous. He told her all about the Fujitsubo Princess and how Kaoru held his imperial bride in the highest regard. It was, of course, despicable of him not to mention the poem he had overheard Kaoru murmur that snowy evening.

When he saw that it was Tokikata who was bringing them a light repast and water for washing up, he teasingly admonished his retainer: “A distinguished guest such as yourself must take care not to be seen doing menial tasks.” Jijū, a young woman of amorous inclinations, was thrilled by this tryst and passed the

day in conversation with Tokikata.

Looking out over the snowy landscape in the direction of the capital, all that Niou could see through breaks in the mist were the tops of the trees at the Uji villa. The mountainside glinted, sparkling like a mirror in the evening sun. Niou related the hardships he had encountered on the journey to Uji the previous evening, embellishing his account with many poignant details.

*Trudging here over snowy peaks and icy banks
Never did I lose my bearings along the path
That my heart follows, lost in wild longing for you*

Pulling a crudely made inkstone over next to him, he scribbled a line as if to practice his calligraphy: “Though I have a horse at the village of Kohata ...”²⁴

Ukifune wrote out a reply that parried his verse:

*I must surely melt away in midair
More fleeting than even the flurried snow
That settles frozen on these riverbanks*

Niou took exception to her choice of the word “midair,” for the image of snowflakes disappearing between sky and earth made her seem indecisive in his eyes, as if she were wavering between him and Kaoru. Ukifune, recognizing the justice of his complaint, was abashed and tore up the paper with the offending verse. It wasn’t only his alluringly resplendent figure that had taken possession of Ukifune’s heart, but also his ineffably seductive words and gentle demeanor, which he employed with all his charming wiles to stir in her ever more passionate yearning for him.

Because Niou had informed people in the capital that he would be in retreat for two days to observe a prohibition, he and the young lady were able to spend that intimate time together at their ease, their sweet affection for one another growing ever deeper. Ukon came up with all sorts of excuses to cover for them, and she even managed to send over a change of clothing. On this, the second day, Ukifune had her tangled tresses combed out and she donned a pale plum red robe woven of scarlet and white silk threads over a singlet of dark purple—a lovely color combination that, as she sat there, seemed to suit her perfectly. Jijū removed the shabby apron she had been wearing and changed into brighter robes. Niou took the apron and had Ukifune put it on when she brought him water for his morning ablutions.

If I were to send her into service for the First Princess, he mused as he

watched Ukifune, *she would certainly be treasured as a prize lady-in-waiting. My sister has many distinguished women in attendance, but it's hard to imagine that any of them are as beautiful as this young lady of mine.*

Niou spent the entire day in passionate, playful dalliance with his lover, which proved awkward for the others in the house. He swore over and over that he would secretly take her away and hide her somewhere. “You are not to receive Kaoru if he comes to see you,” he insisted, trying to get her to make absurdly unreasonable promises to him. However, as he watched her weep, unwilling to respond to him, Niou came to a bitter, heartbreaking realization: *It appears that even when she's with me, right before my eyes, she cannot abandon her feelings for Kaoru.*

He opened up to her about all of his resentments and tearful sorrows,²⁵ and it was late that night when he finally took her back to the villa at Uji. As before, he carried her in his arms. “That other man you seem to care for so much would never do this sort of thing for you,” he said. “You do realize that, don't you?” She was sweetly beguiling as she sat there nodding, acknowledging the truth of his words. Presently they arrived, and Ukon unlatched the hinged double doors to let Ukifune into her chambers. Niou set off immediately for the capital, feeling dissatisfied and despondent.

As he always did when returning from this sort of amorous excursion, Niou chose to go back to his Nijō villa. He was in fact feeling quite ill, and he refused to eat anything at all. Over the next few days he grew thin and pale, and the change in his appearance was cause for alarm for everyone in court society, but especially for his family at the palace. Because the people around him were so concerned about his condition, they made a tremendous fuss over him, and the lack of private moments made it all but impossible for him to send to Ukifune a letter that was detailed enough to fully express his feelings.

Even if Niou had been able to get off a long letter, Ukifune would not have been able to read it at her ease. Her irascible nurse had left the Uji villa temporarily to visit the residence of her own daughter, who gave birth to a child. Now, however, she was back and as strictly watchful as ever. Meanwhile, Chūjō no kimi had taken comfort in the certain expectation that the Major Captain would look after her daughter from now on, despite the wretched circumstances Ukifune faced at that strange, isolated villa. To be sure, Kaoru was still keeping his plans secret, but he *did* intend to move his young lady to the capital in the near future. As a result, Chūjō no kimi was happy just imagining how wonderful her daughter's life would soon be, and she gradually began seeking out attendants and attractive page girls and sending them off to serve at Uji.

In her heart, Ukifune accepted that her relationship with Kaoru was destined

to be, and so she had been waiting from the beginning of their affair for him to take her to the capital. Yet Niou's dashing, impetuous figure kept reappearing in her mind. The image of him complaining resentfully or whispering seductively would suddenly arise as a vision in her dreams whenever she fell asleep—even when she dozed off for just a moment. She found this terribly cruel and unpleasant.

Spring rains began to fall, continuing day after day. To his unbearable sorrow, Niou realized that he had to give up all thoughts of crossing over that mountain path²⁶ to Uji, and he felt as constrained as a silkworm confined to a cocoon of its parents' making.²⁷ Given how concerned Their Majesties were over his illness, such a sentiment on his part was deplorably disrespectful. He wrote out a ceaseless stream of thoughts and emotions, including the following:

*The melancholy of this season that darkens
The very sky obscures the clouds as I gaze out
In your direction amidst these unending rains*

When Niou wildly scribbled out words like this, letting his brush run freely, his calligraphy took on a captivating air. For a youthful heart as lacking in mature sensibility and discernment as Ukifune's, his fervent expressions of love were enough to intensify her passionate yearnings.

Yet what about the one who had exchanged vows with her earlier? Kaoru was deeply thoughtful ... a man of dazzlingly splendid character. Wasn't it through him that she had come to know the ways of men and women for the first time?

What would become of me in this world if he were to hear of my sordid behavior and turn against me? If that happened, my mother, who's always fretting about me, wondering when I'll be brought to the capital, will surely be stunned and incapable of dealing with such a shocking development.

I've heard that the man whose impatient heart is aflame with passion for me is by nature fickle and untrustworthy, and while he seems devoted to me at the moment, who knows how he'll feel about me later? And even if he proves true to his vows by hiding me away somewhere in the capital and continuing always to count me among those dear to him, what would the Uji Princess think of me then? Nothing remains a secret forever in this world—just look at how Niou was able to find me after our brief, strange encounter that evening. No matter which one hides me away in the capital, Niou or Kaoru, is it reasonable to expect that the other would not eventually discover where I am?

Just as she was turning these thoughts over in her mind, her heart tormented

by the terrifying prospect that Kaoru might be estranged from her as a result of her own shameful indiscretion, a messenger arrived with a letter from him.

It was much too painful for her to look at the two letters side by side, so she took Niou's longer missive and lay down with it. Ukon and Jijū exchanged glances as if to say: *Just as we thought, her affections have shifted.*

"It makes sense, really," Jijū said. "When I first observed the Major Captain, I was convinced that no other man could compare to him in looks. But Prince Niou is so strikingly handsome that he's in a different class altogether. If only you could have experienced the charm he exudes when he's in a relaxed, playful mood! If I were in our mistress's place, I could never stand being apart from him like this, seeing how much he cares for me. I'd even go into Her Majesty's service just so that I could see him every day."

"Your attitude is disturbing," Ukon retorted. "Can you really say that any man is more splendid than our lord, the Major Captain? Looks are one thing, but a man's character and his demeanor are what really count. Continuing this illicit affair with Prince Niou will be disastrous. Whatever will become of our young lady?"

The two attendants discussed the situation with one another. Ukon was relieved to have a confidante, for she would no longer have to make up lies and excuses on her own to cover up the affair.

In his letter, Kaoru wrote the following: "Although I've been missing you all along, I've been remiss, letting the days go by without sending a letter. How wonderful it would be to receive a message from you now and then. I wonder ... have you decided that I'm not serious about you?" He had added a verse along the margins:

*Gazing off in melancholy mood through endless rains
How does she fare, my beloved at that distant village
Where river waters rise in this season of dark skies*

"My longing to be near you is greater than ever," he added. The note was written on nondescript white paper and formally folded. The calligraphy lacked the flourishes that would have given it an alluring charm, but the style of writing was graceful and dignified. In contrast, the wording of Niou's message was expansive, and his letter had been folded up into the small, tight knot characteristic of a discreet love note. Still, both missives were elegant in their own way.

"You must answer Prince Niou's letter first," Jijū told her mistress. "Do it while no one is around to see you."

“I couldn’t possibly do it today,” Ukifune replied. Abashed at her attendant’s suggestion, she wrote the following instead, as if practicing her calligraphy:

*Having realized that this villa’s name describes
My woeful destiny, it feels more wretched still
To live near Uji in Yamashiro Province*

Every so often she would look at the illustrations that Niou had drawn and cry. She mulled over various aspects of her relationship with each man and told herself that Niou’s infatuation would never last. Yet she couldn’t help feeling miserable and sorry for Niou. After all, if she were secreted away to some other place where he couldn’t find her, it would end their relationship. She sent him this reply:

*Fated to pass through this uncertain world adrift
I wish to transform myself into those rain clouds
That shroud mountain peaks like the dark robes of a nun²⁸*

“If I mingled to disappear ... ,”²⁹ she added.

Niou sobbed uncontrollably when he read it. *She may be in a dark mood, but it seems clear that she loves me*, he concluded. A vision of the young lady sitting in her chambers lost in pensive thought came floating up before his eyes.

Kaoru, the one who was steady and true, was calmly reading Ukifune’s reply. *How sad it is that she should be so depressed*, he thought, moved to compassion by the verse she sent him:

*Knowing my lonely, idle state, the rains fall
Without cease and waters rise ever higher
To wet these sleeves already soaked with my tears³⁰*

He ached with fierce longing to be with her. He read her poem over and over, unable to put it down.

Kaoru took the opportunity provided by a conversation he had with his wife, the Fujitsubo Princess, to broach the subject of Ukifune. “I hesitate to bring up a matter that may offend you,” he said, “and yet I must speak to you about a certain woman, someone I’ve known for many years. I left her behind in a strange villa and, pained by the thought of how wretched her life is, I’m thinking that I’d like to bring her somewhere closer to me. For as long as I can remember

I've had an unusually religious disposition, and I've longed to live not as men typically do, concerned with worldly affairs like marriage and children, but free of all attachments. Yet here I am, blessed like this, having you as my wife, and it's now impossible for me to turn my back on the world. That's why I'm tormented by guilt—not only for failing to live up to my ideals, but also for the way I've treated a woman whose relationship with me I've never disclosed to anyone until this moment."

"I don't understand why this is something that should offend me," the Fujitsubo Princess replied.

"Yes, but there are some who might speak maliciously about this to His Majesty. The rumors spread by people at the court can be terribly spiteful and vicious. The woman I mentioned is not of such important status that she deserves *that* kind of attention."

Kaoru was determined to move Ukifune to the new house he was having built, but he was uncomfortable, worried that people would talk openly, saying things like, "Oh, so *that's* why he built the place." Thus, he commissioned in strictest secrecy the installation of the sliding doors and other fittings, conveying his orders through one of his closest, most trusted retainers, Nakanobu, a Senior Assistant Minister of the Treasury who also happened to be the father-in-law of the Master Scrivener—the very man who had guided Niou to Uji.

The Master Scrivener divulged everything he learned about Kaoru's plans to Niou: "To complete the paintings on the door panels, the Major Captain has selected skilled artists from among the most trusted retainers in his escort. It seems clear that even though the place is just a hideaway, he's paying considerable attention to all the details."

Upon hearing this report, Niou became increasingly frantic and contacted a former nurse of his, a woman who had married a provincial governor and would soon be leaving the capital for a distant posting. She had a house in one of the lower wards of the capital.

"I've been secretly meeting a woman and would like to hide her away for a while," he told her.

The Governor had his suspicions, wondering just what sort of woman she was. Nonetheless, he could hardly refuse to do something Prince Niou considered this important, and so he replied, "As you wish, my lord." Work was begun to ready his house as a hideaway, which allowed Niou to feel a bit more relaxed.

Because the Governor was scheduled to set out from the capital at the end of the month, Niou made plans to move Ukifune on the very day of his party's departure. He then sent a series of messages to Uji: "These are my plans. Be very, very discreet." It was out of the question for him to make the journey to Uji

himself, and in any case he was told that the watchfulness of Ukifune's meddling old nurse might prove troublesome for him.

Meanwhile, Kaoru had decided that the move to the house he was having prepared would take place on the tenth day of the fourth month. Ukifune was not inclined to go there, even if there had been beckoning waters.³¹ Pondering her fate, the exceedingly strange dilemma she did not know how to resolve, she felt as if she were floating, cast adrift, which made her long to go to her mother's house for a while and spend some time figuring out what she should do. She couldn't go there, however, because her younger half sister—the one who had married the Lesser Captain—was expecting a child and was nearing the time when she would give birth. The place would be filled constantly with the bustle and clamor of sutra readings and prayers for a safe birth. She couldn't set out on a pilgrimage to Ishiyama either, and so her mother went to Uji.

The old nurse came out to receive Chūjō no kimi and proceeded to chatter on noisily. "The Major Captain has kindly seen to all the details regarding the clothing for the attendants who will accompany your daughter to the capital. I was thinking, if somehow I could arrange everything as well as he does—but then again, left to her own devices, old Nana would likely just make a mess of things!"

As Ukifune was watching her nurse, who seemed to be in such a pleasant mood, she felt ill and had to lie down, her mind full of troubled thoughts. *If my sordid affair is exposed and I become a laughingstock, what will everyone think of me then? And the man who speaks to me with such impetuous fervor? Even if I were to hide myself away in mountains covered in eightfold white clouds,*³² *he would no doubt find me, and the two of us will surely suffer the ruinous consequences.*³³ *Just today he sent another of his notes, telling me to be prepared to go into hiding so that we will no longer be constrained. What should I do?*

"What's wrong with you? You look so thin and pale—not at all yourself." Chūjō no kimi was startled.

"She hasn't been at all well of late," the nurse explained. "She's not eating much of anything, and she seems to be sick all the time."

Chūjō no kimi thought this strange indeed and wondered if it might be a malignant spirit afflicting her daughter. "I was thinking that Ukifune might be suffering from morning sickness, but then I remembered that she canceled the pilgrimage to Ishiyama because of her menstrual period."

Ashamed, Ukifune lowered her head and averted her eyes.

Evening came on, and the moon was dazzling. It was more difficult than ever for Ukifune to hold back her tears as she recalled how clear the moon had looked

on that dawn when she crossed the river with Niou. At the same time, she was appalled by her own scandalous desires.

Her mother called for the old nun, Bennokimi, to join them, and they talked about the old days. Bennokimi described the older Princess who had died—how kind and sensitive she had been, and how, while preoccupied with worries about doing the proper thing, she had faded away right before her eyes. “If only she had lived,” Bennokimi said, “she would have ended up like her younger sister, and the two of them, who had once been so forlorn and isolated, would have been able to exchange intimate messages and together enjoy unparalleled happiness.”

And is my own daughter a complete stranger to the Uji Princesses? If Ukifune’s destiny with the Major Captain works out as I hope it will, then her prospects will be just as glorious as theirs. With these thoughts running through her mind, Chūjō no kimi replied, “My own daughter has been a constant source of anxiety for me, but now that her circumstances are improving, I can relax a little. This means that she’ll have to move to the capital, and when that happens, I certainly won’t have reason to visit you here. A pity, really ... since every time we meet, I find myself wanting to quietly exchange stories about the past with you.”

“I’ve witnessed so much misfortune in my life,” Bennokimi said, “that I’m painfully aware of the bad luck I seem to bring to others. That’s why I’ve been reluctant to call on your daughter or speak to her very much. Of course, after she moves away and abandons me, I shall be very lonely, but still, I’m delighted for her anyway, since I’ve observed just how worrisome an isolated villa like this can be. I told her that having a man of such rare dignity and prudence as the Major Captain call on her as he does shows that his feelings are anything but commonplace. That’s hardly frivolous, wouldn’t you agree?”

“No one knows what the future holds,” Chūjō no kimi said, “though for now I’m grateful to you for introducing her to him, since he has said that he will never abandon her. Even the Uji Princess deigned to take pity on her, which is more than we deserved, but then that lamentable incident occurred, a delicate situation that we had to handle cautiously, and I was reminded yet again just how precarious and constrained Ukifune’s position in the world is.”

The old nun laughed. “Yes, yes, Prince Niou’s amorous ways are certainly a nuisance. It seems that proper young women of refined temperament are disinclined to serve at Nijō for that reason. He’s an extraordinary man, no doubt, but Taifu’s daughter³⁴ tells me that it’s unbearably pathetic having to watch her mistress be so insulted by that *habit* of his.”

If my half sister is insulted by his affairs with her attendants, then how much

more offended will she be when she finds out about me? Ukifune continued to lie prostrate, tormented by these thoughts.

“How terrible it must be for her,” Chūjō no kimi said. “Although the Major Captain has enjoyed the honor of receiving His Majesty’s daughter in marriage, the Fujitsubo Princess has no family connection to my daughter, unlike the Uji Princess, and so, while it may be presumptuous of me, I think that if the Major Captain wants Ukifune, there’s not much I can do about it, no matter how things turn out, good or bad. If my daughter were ever caught up in an illicit affair, she would be dead to me and I would never see her again, no matter how much sorrow and misery that might cause me.”

The more her mother went on talking with Bennokimi, the more Ukifune felt as if her very soul was being torn asunder. *How I long to cast off this body and die! Word of my contemptible behavior is bound to come out in the end.* As this thought was occurring to her, the roar of the nearby rapids took on a ominous tone.

“Some streams aren’t as terrifying as the river here. Obviously, the Major Captain couldn’t help but take pity on my daughter, who has had to spend all these months in a wild, desolate place unlike anywhere else in the world,” Chūjō no kimi remarked, sitting there with a slightly smug expression on her face.

Several of the attendants were talking together in response to the comments by Ukifune’s mother. One noted that the current of the Uji River had been swift and terrifying since ancient times.

“Just recently,” added another, “the grandchild of the ferryman lost his grip on the oar and fell into the river.”

“Yes, yes, so many people have drowned in these waters.”

If it happened that I were to go missing, Ukifune mused, imagining the future, *all those around me would probably be stunned and grief-stricken for a while, but eventually they would get over it. On the other hand, if I live on and become an object of scorn and derision, would there ever be an end to my sorrows?*

There was certainly nothing to hinder her from taking her own life, and she felt that she would purge all her sins and cares by doing so. Yet her death would also leave great sadness in its wake. Pretending to be asleep as she listened to her mother prattling on about all the plans she was making, Ukifune was sunk in a welter of dark, desperate thoughts.

Chūjō no kimi mentioned how sickly and thin Ukifune looked and ordered the nurse to commission the appropriate Buddhist healing prayers and to arrange for a ritual purification at a Shinto shrine. Unaware that her daughter was feeling that she wanted to be cleansed of her love at a purification stream,³⁵ she continued to chatter noisily about all sorts of things.

"It seems there are too few attendants here. Do find some suitable women who come from proper families. Oh, and when my daughter moves, leave behind the attendants who are new arrivals. As for relations with the Major Captain's distinguished wife ... well, the Fujitsubo Princess will probably be magnanimous and not consider Ukifune a threat to her, but if something untoward were to happen between them, it would certainly mean trouble. Be circumspect and inconspicuous when you make these arrangements," she said, giving detailed instructions to cover every contingency. "I really must be off now," she added, as she prepared to return. "My other daughter will give birth soon, and I'm concerned about her."

Depressed and utterly forlorn, Ukifune was seized by a premonition that she would never see her mother again. She clung to Chūjō no kimi, pleading, "I'm not feeling well, and I'm anxious when I'm not with you. I want to go home with you and stay there for a while."

"I'd like to take you with me, but everything at the Governor's residence is in an uproar just now. Besides, the quarters there are so cramped that your attendants wouldn't be able to do the least bit of work to get ready for your move to the capital. You must know that I'd go in secret to visit you anywhere, even if you were to move to distant Takefu.³⁶ But my status is so low that I find myself constrained like this, and it makes me feel bad that I cannot help you." She broke down and wept as she spoke.

That same day, a letter arrived from Kaoru. He had heard that Ukifune was not well and sent a message asking after her health: "I wanted to ask in person, but alas, I have many unavoidable demands on me that prevent me from going to you. How vexing it is to have to live like this, passing day after long, tedious day waiting impatiently for you to move to the capital."

Niou, who had received no reply to his message from the previous day, sent another letter, which was much longer than Kaoru's. In it, he wrote: "Why are you vacillating? I am increasingly distracted, gazing out in melancholy reverie, worried that you are drifting off in an unforeseen direction."³⁷

Now, it just so happened that Niou's and Kaoru's messengers, who had crossed paths at Uji one other time when they were delivering those notes their lords had written during the spring rains, encountered each other again that day. Kaoru's retainer, a guard who served in his escort, had seen Niou's messenger from time to time at the house of the Master Scrivener, and so he asked, "What business brings you here so often?"

"I've come on a personal matter ... to call on a certain woman."

"A personal matter? Then why are you carrying such an elaborately elegant letter? This is very peculiar. What are you trying to hide?"

"Oh, all right ... the truth is, this is a letter from my lord, Tokikata, Acting Governor of Izumo. I'm to give it to one of the ladies-in-waiting."

Kaoru's man found this sudden change in the messenger's story very suspicious, but this was not the time and place to sort out the matter, since it was not the task he was charged with just then. Thus, the two messengers left, each going their separate ways. Still, Kaoru's retainer was quick-witted, and he pointed out the messenger to a pageboy.

"I want you to follow that man," he ordered, "but you must keep a low profile. Find out if he's *really* going to Lord Tokikata's house."

Some time later, the page reported back. "He went to Prince Niou's villa and handed the reply letter to a man there ... the Master Scrivener who works in the Ministry of Ceremonials."

Niou's messenger, who was a lowly menial, never imagined that anyone would go that far to find out what he had been up to. Moreover, he had no real understanding of the situation and the nature of his task. The regrettable consequence of his incompetence was that the affair between Niou and Ukifune would now be exposed.

Kaoru's retainer arrived back at the Sanjō villa and delivered the reply from Uji just as his lord was about to set off. Kaoru, who was attired in a formal cloak, was leaving for the Rokujō estate, where the Akashi Empress had withdrawn at that moment. Since he wasn't going to the palace, his escort was small and unostentatious.

Just as Kaoru was stepping out of his quarters, he overheard his messenger speaking with the lady-in-waiting to whom he had handed over the reply letter earlier. "I was late getting back here," the man explained, "because I saw something suspicious and decided to investigate."

"And what did you find out?" Kaoru asked him.

Unwilling to say anything in the presence of the lady-in-waiting, the retainer merely bowed deferentially and remained silent. Kaoru, observing his messenger's demeanor, guessed the reason why the man was reluctant to speak up and departed for the Rokujō estate without pressing him further.

Hearing that the Akashi Empress was evidently suffering from something that was not her usual malady, all the imperial princes had gathered at Rokujō. Many high-ranking officials had also arrived and the place was bustling with activity, even though Her Majesty's condition was not really all that serious. The Master Scrivener, who had been detained at the palace preparing documents for the Council of State, arrived later than the others. He had brought Ukifune's reply with him. Niou, who was waiting in the living quarters of the ladies-in-waiting on the north side of the main hall, summoned him to the entrance to receive the

packet. Kaoru was just withdrawing from an audience with Her Majesty when he caught a sidelong glimpse of the exchange. He stood there watching in amused fascination. *It's a special letter indeed that commands such rapt attention from Niou.*

Niou unwrapped the letter and read. It appeared to be long and detailed, written in a delicate hand on fine, pale crimson paper. Niou was so absorbed in his reading that he never turned toward Kaoru, even though Kaoru was close by. Just then, Genji's son, the Minister, emerged from Her Majesty's quarters and was making his way out. Kaoru stepped out through a sliding door and, as he did so, he cleared his throat to alert Niou of the Minister's presence. Niou finished putting the letter away just as the Minister peeked in on him. Startled, Niou adjusted the cords of his cloak.

The Minister bowed down to him on one knee. "I'm afraid I must withdraw now. Her Majesty's affliction seemed to have been in remission for some time, so this latest bout is most alarming. I'm going to send a message to the abbot at Mount Hiei and ask for his assistance." So saying, he hurried away.

The evening grew late, and everyone withdrew from Her Majesty's presence. With Niou leading the way, the Minister followed, accompanied by his many sons and a host of high officials and princes, and they made their way over to the residence in the northeast quadrant.³⁸ Kaoru left later. He thought the expression on his messenger's face, which he had seen earlier in the evening, had been strangely suggestive, as if the man had something he wanted to say. Thus, when Kaoru's escort went out into the front garden to light torches in preparation for the return to Sanjō, he summoned the messenger.

"You had something you wanted to tell me?"

"Yes, my lord. This morning, at the Uji villa, I ran into a man who was acting as a messenger for Lord Tokikata, the Acting Governor of Izumo. He was bringing a letter written on fine purple paper affixed to a branch of cherry blossoms. I saw him approach the double doors at the corner of the west hall and deliver the letter to one of the ladies-in-waiting there. However, when I questioned him about it, he kept changing his story, and spoke in a manner that suggested he was dissembling. I asked myself why he would do such a thing, and told a page to follow him and find out what was going on. It turns out that the messenger went back to Prince Niou's villa at Nijō and gave the reply to Lord Michisada, the Master Scrivener in the Ministry of Ceremonials."

His suspicions aroused, Kaoru questioned his retainer further. "The reply letter ... who gave it to the messenger at Uji? And what did it look like?"

"I didn't see that. The man received it from an entrance on the other side of the villa. However, the page saw the letter when it was delivered, and according

to him, it was exceptionally beautiful, written on thin, pale crimson paper."

Upon hearing this report, Kaoru immediately made the connection to the letter Niou had been reading, and there could be no doubt about what was going on. He thought that his retainer was extremely clever to have discovered this much with certainty, but he couldn't ask for more details because the other men in the escort had come closer and might overhear.

On the way back to his Sanjō villa, Kaoru mulled over what he had learned. *Niou is certainly artful ... it's frightening, the way that no woman escapes his attention. Still, by what chance did he find out that she was at Uji? And how is it possible that he could have contacted and courted her? I was recklessly naive to think that by hiding her in the countryside I'd be able to prevent anything like this from happening. Even so, it's one thing for him to carry on his amorous affairs with women who have no connection with me, but Ukifune is my woman. How could he do such a thing to someone who's been close to him since childhood, who, out of an unusually powerful bond of friendship,³⁹ even went so far as to be his guide when he took the younger Uji Princess? Shouldn't he feel guilty?* He was in an unpleasant, rancorous mood.

All these years I've been especially careful to suppress my fervent longings for the Uji Princess ... and I've done so even though my feelings aren't disreputable in the least. My love for her isn't some passing caprice that just stirred inside me today. It grows out of a long-standing bond and shared experiences. Yet I controlled myself, worried that such feelings would cloud my heart and become an attachment that would bring only the pain of a guilty conscience. How foolish I've been!

Niou's been ill recently, and thus he's had more people attending him than normal. So how did he manage to send a letter off to Uji? Has he already been with her? It's certainly a long road to travel for an affair. But come to think of it, I've heard that there are days when people are searching all over for him. That's suspicious. What's more, that malady of his is probably the result of turmoil in a lovelorn heart. Back when he was courting the Uji Princess, I remember just how pitiful he looked as he sighed and lamented that he could not go to her as often as he wished.

Reflecting on these observations, everything began to fall into place, and he understood the reason why Ukifune had been so depressed and distracted when he last saw her. This realization was an unbearably cruel blow.

How intricate are the workings of the heart! Ukifune looks adorable, so passive and delicate, and yet she's capable of showing passionate desire as well. In that respect, I suppose she's an ideal match for Niou.

He was feeling that he should bow out, that he ought to yield Ukifune to Niou,

when darker, unattractive thoughts strayed into his heart.

Why should I give her up? If at the beginning I had considered her a woman whose pedigree was distinguished enough to justify taking her as a wife, then I would have done so. No, no ... I think I'll just hide her away and keep our relationship as it is. After all, I'm sure I'd miss her if I were to suddenly stop seeing her now.

If I were to grow bored with Ukifune and abandon her, I have no doubt that Niou would call her to him. But given his careless ways, he probably wouldn't be all that considerate regarding her future. I've heard that he sent two or three other women to serve as attendants to the First Princess once his passion for them cooled. It would be a pity to hear that he'd done the same to Ukifune.

In the end, he could not give her up and, wanting to learn more about her situation, he sent her a letter. He once again summoned the retainer he regularly used as his messenger and spoke with the man directly when there was no one else around.

“The Master Scrivener, Lord Michisada, is still calling on the daughter of Nakanobu?”

“Yes, that’s correct, my lord.”

“Do you know if he regularly sends to Uji that messenger you saw the other day? If there’s a lonely, isolated woman living out there, then he must secretly be courting her, no?” Kaoru’s voice sounded strained. “Make sure that no one sees you when you go out there. I’d look like a complete fool if people thought I was competing for a woman with a man of *his* status.”

The retainer bowed in deference. It now dawned on him why the Master Scrivener was always asking about his lord’s schedule—when he would be going to Uji and the like—and inquiring about the villa out there as well, but he couldn’t bring himself to mention this to Kaoru because he might seem overly familiar, as if he didn’t know his place. For his part, Kaoru did not want to divulge details of his private life to a retainer, and so he did not question the man any further.

More messengers than usual were arriving at Uji, bringing with them more worries for Ukifune. The letter delivered by Kaoru’s messenger contained only the following poem:

*I was convinced that you were waiting for me
Like pines waiting on Mount Suenomatsu
Unaware that waves have broken over it⁴⁰*

“Don’t make me a laughingstock.”

This is very peculiar, Ukifune thought. She could feel her chest tightening. She wanted to avoid replying in a manner that might suggest to Kaoru that she understood the reason for his accusation, and since any reply would be strange if Kaoru's letter had somehow been sent to her by mistake, she refolded the letter just as it had been when she received it and added a note of her own: "This seems to have been delivered to the wrong house. I'm not feeling myself right now, and cannot write anything to you."

Kaoru smiled when he read her response. *Very adroit. She's showing a side of her character I've never seen before.* Apparently, when all was said and done, he found it impossible to hold a grudge against her.

Although Kaoru had not made an explicit accusation, Ukifune's anxiety was heightened by the tone of his note, which suggested that he had found out about her affair with Niou. She was all the more convinced that she was destined in the end to leave behind a reputation as a thoughtless, immoral woman. Just then, Ukon came into her chambers.

"Why did you return the Major Captain's letter? You shouldn't do that ... it's bad luck."

"I thought it was a mistake, that it was intended for some other place."

This seemed suspicious to Ukon. As she was taking the letter back to the messenger, she unfolded it and read the poem. Such was the deplorable way she handled matters like this.

"Ahh, this is terrible! It's going to be very trying for you both. The Major Captain must have caught on to your affair," Ukon told her mistress, failing to mention that she had read the letter.

Ukifune blushed in shame and did not respond. Since she did not know that Ukon had read the letter, she assumed that her attendant had heard from someone who had observed the expression on Kaoru's face while he was composing the poem. Still, she couldn't bring herself to ask Ukon to identify the person. She was mortified, imagining how she must look in her attendants' eyes and what they must be thinking of her. *I was not the one who desired this, who started our affair. All the same, this is my woeful destiny.* She lay there, brooding over her predicament, listening to the opinions of the women who had served her most intimately.

"When we were in Hitachi," Ukon said, "my older sister was being courted by two men. You see, people of any social rank can be caught up in a love triangle, and both gentlemen were equally sincere suitors. Though my sister felt lost, unable to make up her mind, she began to show a slight preference for the second lover. That drove her first lover, who was fired by jealous hatred, to kill his rival. After that, he stopped seeing my sister. The man who was murdered

was a good warrior, and his death was a serious loss for the provincial government. The murderer was also a capable retainer, but of course he was exiled from the province. After all, how could the Governor keep in his service a man who had committed such a heinous act? Everyone blamed my sister for all of this trouble, and so she too could no longer stay in service at the Governor's household. She left Hitachi and settled in the Eastern Provinces. Even now, Nana misses her and cries over what happened. By causing our nurse such grief, which will surely be an impediment to the old woman's salvation, my sister only deepened the sin she committed with her lovers.

"Though it may seem like an inauspicious moment to talk about such matters," Ukon continued, "when people get emotionally entangled in a sordid affair like this, whether they are highborn or low, no good ever comes of it. Of course, neither of our lords' lives is in danger, but this love triangle could damage their reputation and their status. For noblemen of the highest rank, experiencing shame can be worse than death. You must make up your mind and choose one of them. If Prince Niou is more passionate than the Major Captain and sounds more sincere in his devotion, then do as he says, yield to him, and stop lamenting your cruel predicament. It serves absolutely no purpose to let yourself waste away. Though now that Prince Niou is insisting that you come to him before the Major Captain takes you, I feel sorry for your mother, who's going to all this trouble to look after you. I also feel bad for Nana, who's been so busy, dedicating herself to preparations for your move."

Jijū, who favored Niou, having been seduced by his extraordinary allure, strenuously objected. "You mustn't frighten our lady like that! No matter what you say, Prince Niou seems to share with our lady a bond from a previous existence. If, in her heart, she has even the slightest preference for one of them, then she has no choice but to take that feeling as a sign of her destiny and decide accordingly. In any case, Prince Niou's passionate devotion honors her far more than her station in life deserves. That's why our lady's heart is not drawn toward the prospect of the move that the Major Captain is hurriedly pressing her to make. In my opinion, she should give herself to the man whose feelings for her are stronger, even if she has to go into hiding for a while."

"Well, who knows how things will turn out?" Ukon retorted. "But whichever man is chosen, I for one will keep praying to the Kannon at Hatsuse and Ishiyama, asking that our lady be granted a life without misfortune. After all, the men who oversee the Major Captain's manors are an uncouth, violent bunch, and this villa is full of their relatives. In fact, just about all the men at the estates owned by the Major Captain in Yamashiro and Yamato provinces are related to the majordomo⁴¹ of this villa, who gets his son-in-law, the Assistant Commander

of the Right Palace Guards, to carry out all of the Major Captain's orders. Aristocratic peers would never even consider behaving callously toward one another, but the men who take turns serving as watchmen here are a different matter. They're brutish, insensitive provincials, always strictly following orders, just hoping to get through their time on duty without incident. That's why it was so unnerving when Prince Niou took our lady across the river that night. He wanted to avoid drawing attention, so he had no escort to speak of, and he dressed in clothing that disguised his rank. What if one of those watchmen had seen him? The consequences are too disturbing to contemplate."

As Ukifune listened to Ukon ramble on and on, her conflicted mind was filled with troubled thoughts. *It makes me cringe to hear Ukon and Jijū talk like this. Obviously they think I've given my heart to Niou, but in truth, I don't favor one man over the other. It's just that I feel lost, as if I'm in a dream and don't know which way to turn. I'm grateful to Prince Niou, though I don't understand why he's so passionately obsessed with someone unworthy of his affections. Yet at the same time, I can't bring myself to leave Kaoru, the steady support I've leaned on for so long. This indecision is agony to my heart. What if Ukon is right, and something terrible were to happen to Niou? What should I do then?*

"Ahh, if only I were dead! What a bizarre, tragic destiny," she lamented, as she lay prostrate. "Has there ever been a case, even among the vulgar classes, of a woman who has had to face this sort of woeful situation?"

"You mustn't think that way," Ukon replied. "I was simply trying to put your mind at ease by telling you that love triangles are not all that uncommon. It baffles me that you used to be so calm and unperturbed about things that ought to have worried you, but now, after this affair with Prince Niou, you're distracted and fretful."

The women who were aware of the situation were all in a panic; but the old nurse, who had no idea what was happening, was in good spirits as she sat occupying herself with the task of dyeing robes. As she was calling over a lovely page girl—one of the new arrivals—she said with a sigh to Ukifune, "Please look on this child as a companion to divert you. I think it's queer that all you do of late is lie around and mope. It makes me wonder if there isn't some spirit at work trying to ruin the happiness that awaits you."

Several days passed, but there was no response from Kaoru. Then the threatening figure of the majordomo arrived. He was exactly as Ukon had described him, a rough-looking, stout old man with a gruff, gravely voice. Even so, his commanding appearance suggested that he was no ordinary retainer.

"I'd like to speak to one of the ladies-in-waiting," he said.

Ukon came out to receive him.

"I was summoned to the capital by my lord, the Major Captain," he continued, "and went there this morning. I've just now returned. While my lord was giving me instructions on various matters, he mentioned that, during the time your mistress has been in residence at Uji, he has not bothered to send any of his escort to guard her, thinking that he already had watchmen posted during the nighttime and at dawn. However, he told me that recently he heard a rumor about some men from an unidentified household coming in and going out of the attendants' quarters here. He questioned me about this rumor, saying that it was troubling and insisting that the men on watch must have been in on the secret. After all, how could they have been on duty and *not* known anything? I assured him that I knew nothing. I'd been seriously ill and unable to serve on watch myself for several months, and so couldn't possibly have been privy to any secret information. The men I assigned to the watch are all suitable for the task, and I exhorted them to be vigilant. They would certainly have informed me had anything out of the ordinary occurred. Still, the Major Captain gave me strict orders to take precautions and be attentive, or else I would face severe punishment. I have no idea what prompted this outburst, but I was shaken by it."

Ukon found his words more terrifying than the ominous hooting of an owl. Without replying to the majordomo, she went back to Ukifune. "So it's true," she lamented. "I've just heard some things that confirm exactly what I told you. Apparently, the Major Captain has found out about the affair. No wonder he stopped writing."

The nurse, who overheard only snatches of the conversation between Ukon and her mistress, rejoiced. "I'm very happy to hear of the Major Captain's orders. There are many thieves in this area, and we don't have nearly as many watchmen as we did when we first arrived. On top of that, they post nothing but incompetent menials here ... and they call themselves 'replacements.' Why, they can't even carry out their nighttime rounds properly."

It's just like the story Ukon told me, Ukifune thought. *It would seem that soon now my life must end in ruin.*

At that moment, an insistent message from Niou arrived: "How are you doing ... how are you doing?" She was bothered by the complaint he made, saying that his heart was broken up like patches of moss on a pine tree,⁴² and that he could not stand the pain of waiting for her.

No matter which way I choose, one of them is going to be cruelly hurt by me. It would be best for everyone if I were to die. There are examples from ancient times of women who, troubled by the inability to decide between lovers, threw themselves into a river and drowned.⁴³ Why should I feel any regrets over my death, if by living on in this world I will know only misfortune and unhappiness.

My mother will mourn me for a while, but she has many other children to look after and will, in due course, pluck the grasses of forgetfulness. Suffering disgrace, lost and wandering adrift as an object of ridicule while I'm still alive, would be a much worse fate than death.

Her languid, childlike innocence made her appear weak and yielding, but Ukifune was probably driven a little to these desperate, violent thoughts because she had been raised in a place where very few had a grasp of courtly sensibilities and the ways of the world.

She tore up all incriminating letters and scraps of paper, but rather than disposing of them all at once and thereby attracting attention, she got rid of them little by little, either by burning them in a lantern or by having them tossed into the river. The attendants, who had no idea of their mistress's true intent, assumed that Ukifune, as part of her preparations for the upcoming move to the capital, was simply destroying unimportant scraps used for calligraphy practice that had accumulated over the months and days of tedious idleness.

When Jijū discovered what her mistress was up to, she protested. "Why are you doing this? I understand that you don't want anyone else reading letters in which you and Prince Niou expressed your deep, abiding love for one another. But there are times when it can be a very poignant experience to take out letters you've hidden away in the bottom of some box and read them again. Prince Niou's choice of paper is so magnificent, and his writing is so eloquent ... it would be cruel of you to destroy them!"

"Cruel? Why would it be cruel? I don't have long to live, and if I leave them behind, they might fall into someone else's hands. It would be a pity if that proved troublesome for Prince Niou. Not only that, I'd be mortified if he found out that I had furtively hidden them away."

Ukifune felt forsaken as she continued to contemplate the prospect of suicide. She had doubts as well, wondering if she would be able to go through with it. She recalled having heard somewhere that it was a grave sin to precede one's parents in death.

The twentieth day of the month had passed. The Governor whose house was going to be used as a hideaway was set to leave the capital on the twenty-eighth day. Niou sent Ukifune a message: "I will definitely send for you that evening. Take care to act as if nothing is out of the ordinary and do not give your servants any indication of my plans. I've not said a word about this to anyone, not even in my dreams. You must not doubt me."

If Niou were to come in disguise, as his letter suggested he would, she would not be able to receive him at all, since the watchmen would be strictly guarding the villa. Out of concern for his being discovered, she would have to ask him to

return to the capital—and to make matters worse, she wouldn't even be able to have him come inside to rest for a few minutes. Imagining that he would go back angry and resentful that his journey had come to naught, his image, which was always with her, floated up before her again, making her unbearably sad. Ukifune pressed his letter to her face and struggled for a while to control her emotions, but her misery was overwhelming, and she broke down in tears.

"My dear lady," Ukon said, "if you carry on like this, the other attendants are sure to see you and finally figure things out. As it is, they appear to be growing suspicious. Instead of constantly tormenting yourself this way, I beg you, just reply to Prince Niou telling him that you'll go with him, if that's what your heart truly desires. So long as Ukon is with you, I'll come up with some scheme or other so that Prince Niou will be able to take you away, even if he has to carry your slender little body off through the skies!"

Ukifune calmed herself for a moment. "It makes me feel wretched to hear you go on and on like this, as if I've made up my mind to choose Prince Niou. If I felt that going with him was the right thing to do, don't you think I'd have decided already? But I know all too well that it's wrong. Yet still he pressures me unreasonably, speaking in a way that suggests *I'm* the one throwing myself at him, pleading with him to take me away. It's a miserable fate being so powerless, wondering what he intends to do with me."

In the end, she did not answer the letter.

With no indication that Ukifune was assenting to his request, Niou was concerned. *She's no longer replying as often as she used to. No doubt Kaoru, with his proper, sensible demeanor, has succeeded in winning her over, and she's decided to go with the man who will bring her a little more peace of mind. Not an unreasonable choice, really.* So he told himself, but he continued to seethe with resentment and jealousy. *No matter what he says to her, I know for sure that I'm the one she loves. I haven't been able to see her for a while, and I'm sure that during my absence those women of hers convinced her that Kaoru was the better choice.* Gazing out, lost in these melancholy thoughts, he felt as though his love, having no place to go, would fill the vast, empty skies.⁴⁴ Impulsive as ever, he made a rash decision and set off for Uji.

Unlike his earlier visits, voices rang out sharply as if in warning as soon as his escort approached the gap in the reed fence: "Who goes there!" The party withdrew, and Niou sent in a man who was on intimate terms with one of the women in the villa. However, this man was questioned as well. The atmosphere was not at all like previous visits. Faced with this vexing situation, the man said, "But I have an urgent letter from the capital." He then called out the name of one of Ukon's maids, and was allowed to go inside to meet the woman.

Ukon found the situation awkward beyond endurance. She sent out a servant to speak with the man. “Tonight is absolutely out of the question. Please tell your lord that we are terribly sorry and mean no disrespect.”

Why would Ukifune be keeping her distance from me like this? Niou wondered. Impatient to gauge her true feelings, he sent Tokikata as his messenger. “Enter the villa and meet with Jijū. The two of you must figure out some way for me to get inside.”

Being a quick-witted man, Tokikata fashioned some plausible excuse and managed to inveigle the watchmen to let him in, whereupon he sought out Jijū and met with her.

“Something must have happened, for the watchmen tell me that the Major Captain has given them specific orders, and they have been absurdly vigilant of late,” Jijū explained. “We really don’t know what to do. Our mistress is anxious and depressed, and I feel bad seeing how upset she is that Prince Niou might take offense over this. Still, tonight really is impossible. And matters will only get worse if your lord is discovered. For now, please tell him that we are secretly making plans for moving to the capital on the evening of the twenty-eighth, just as he instructed.” She also told him about the difficulty posed by Ukifune’s watchful nurse.

“Do you have any idea how extraordinarily difficult it is for my lord to make this journey here? And how awkward it would be for me to have to tell him that he’s come all this way, risking everything, for nothing? All right, then, if that’s the way it is,” Tokikata said, “you come with me and explain everything to him.”

Jijū refused. “I couldn’t possibly do that! It’s ridiculous.”

The two of them argued back and forth late into the night.

All this time, Niou was waiting on horseback a short distance away. Suddenly, wild-sounding dogs came rushing out. Their ferocious growling and howling was terrifying. Niou’s escort was small, and because he was suspiciously disguised for his secret excursion, his men were all on edge, anxious about what would become of their lord should some of those brutish watchmen suddenly leap out and accost them.

“Enough is enough. You’re coming with me this instant,” Tokikata finally insisted and escorted Jijū to Niou. Pulling her long tresses around her side, draping them under and then over her arm, she cut a gorgeous figure. Tokikata tried to get her to ride on a horse, but she wouldn’t hear of it, and so he picked up the hems of her long robes and walked along with her. He had her wear his own shoes, while he himself put on a rough-looking pair he took from one of his servants.

When they reached Niou, Tokikata began to explain the situation. However, because they could not really discuss matters with Niou sitting on horseback out in the open, they moved over beneath the shade of a weed-tangled hedge enclosing a peasant's hut. Tokikata took a fleece saddle blanket,⁴⁵ spread it out on the ground and helped Niou dismount.

What a scandalous situation I'm in! It seems that I'm fated to be ruined by this romantic journey and that my life and aspirations will all come to naught. Preoccupied with these thoughts, he could not help but cry.

As she gazed at Niou's weeping figure, Jijū, who was by nature sentimental and flighty, was moved to even greater sorrow. He was so magnificent-looking that even if he had been a mortal enemy transformed into the figure of a demon, she would not have been able to abandon him.

When Niou regained control of his emotions, he spoke to her. "Will I not be permitted even a word with the young lady? What has changed her attitude like this ... why can't I see her? You women must have turned her against me!"

Jijū explained the situation as fully as she could, then added, "I beg you, my lord, please keep to your plan and do all you can to make sure that no one finds out about the date you have chosen to move my mistress to the capital. I am humbled and ashamed when I see how you've honored us by coming all this way, and I want to do everything I can to help you, even if I have to sacrifice my life."

Niou was aware of the dire consequences of being discovered, and thus he had no reason to resent Jijū's determination to exercise caution. Though the night was growing late, the barking of the dogs, which seemed to rebuke him for being there, continued unabated. And just as the men of his escort finally succeeded in chasing them off, the vulgar voices of watchmen, who were loudly plucking the strings on their bows, could be heard shouting: "Watch out for fires!" It goes without saying that when Niou began his journey back, he was under extreme duress, as if he were being chased off.

*Not knowing where to discard my wearisome life
My tears flow on endlessly as I make my way
Through mountains that are ever shrouded by white clouds⁴⁶*

"Farewell, then. You must make haste ... ,” he told Jijū, sending her back. She was moved to pity by Niou's youthful grace, beauty, and the ineffable scent of his robes, which were drenched by the late night dew. She returned to the villa, weeping.

As Ukon was recounting to her mistress how she had in no uncertain terms

dismissed Prince Niou's request to enter, Ukifune lay prostrate, feeling increasingly desperate and overwhelmed by her many tribulations. Just then Jijū arrived and told her story. With her face buried in a pillow that was about to drift slowly away on a flood of tears, Ukifune did not respond, once again embarrassed to think how she must look to her attendants.

She remained in bed the following morning, worried that her puffy eyes might raise suspicions. With a desultory air she loosely fastened her robes with a *kake-obi*⁴⁷ and read sutras. She prayed only that she be forgiven the sin of preceding her mother in death. She took out the illustrations that Niou had drawn and looked at them again. An image of Niou—the movements of his hand as he painted, the lambent beauty of his face—floated up in her mind's eye so vividly that it seemed as if he was sitting right across from her. The anguish and heartache she suffered was further intensified by the fact that the two of them had been kept from exchanging even a single word the previous night.

What will Kaoru think? He said that he wanted us to be able to meet somewhere quiet and peaceful and swore that his devotion to me would last forever. She felt sorry for him. She also burned with shame at the thought that some people would criticize her after she was gone. Still, she thought such criticism was preferable to having Kaoru hear people ridicule her as a frivolous, presumptuous woman. Mulling over these considerations, she composed the following:

*With sighs of regret I cast away life
Knowing that after death my woeful name
Will flow onward, drifting in the shadows*

Yearning for her mother, she even longed for her unattractive stepsisters and stepbrothers, to whom she normally didn't give a thought. Then the Uji Princess came to mind—there were so many people she wanted to see one last time. Her attendants were all busy dyeing cloth in preparation for the move to the capital. They chattered on about this and that, but Ukifune paid no attention to them. When evening came, she couldn't sleep as she considered ways to slip out of the residence without being spotted. She was in a bad mood and the distress was making her ill. When dawn broke, she gazed out in the direction of the river, feeling like a sheep being taken to slaughter.⁴⁸

A note came from Niou in which he said all sorts of cruel and hurtful things. Even at a moment like this, she was mindful of prying eyes and could not write all that she longed to say to him. Thus, by way of reply, she sent only the following:

*If I die and leave behind in this woeful world
No trace of my mortal remains, where would you go
To seek my grave and pour out your complaints to me⁴⁹*

Ukifune wanted to write to Kaoru as well to share with him her feelings during her final hours, but if she sent messages to him in addition to Niou, no doubt the two of them, being close companions, would eventually compare what she had written, and that was a prospect too painful for her to contemplate. No, she concluded, *I'd rather end things without explaining my motives to anyone. Just leave them to wonder what became of me.*

A letter arrived from the capital. It was from her mother:

I had a dream about you while I was sleeping last night. You looked so troubled that I commissioned sutra readings for you at several temples. I couldn't go back to sleep after that, and I suppose because I was drowsy, I dozed off just now and had another dream about you. This time you were ill, which is an ominous sign—a portent of death, as you know. I was so alarmed that I had to write to you. You must be on your guard. You live in such an isolated place, and I'm frightened by the wife of the Major Captain, who visits you from time to time. I'm nervous about everything, having had this sort of dream at exactly the time when you haven't been feeling well. I want to go to you so very much, but my daughter here, the Lesser Captain's wife, is still in a fragile state and seems to be suffering from the presence of a malign spirit. As a result, I've been told in no uncertain terms that I'm not to leave the house, not even for a moment. You should have sutras read at that temple near you.

The note included a separate letter addressed to the Uji Temple, as well as offerings and gifts for the priests there. It seemed infinitely sad to Ukifune that Chūjō no kimi should have expressed such concerns unaware that her daughter was already resigned to ending her life.

Ukifune wrote the reply to her mother while her messengers were off to the temple. There were so many things she wanted to say, but she felt constrained and sent only this poem:

*I want you to pray that we should meet again
In the world after, our hearts no longer lost
In the illusory dream that is this world*

The sound of the bell that accompanied the reading of sutras could be heard, carried down the mountain on a breeze. Ukifune lay there listening, lost in her thoughts.

*Tell Mother I have quit this world of endless night
Having joined to the fading reverberations
Of the temple bell the sound of my weeping voice*

She wrote this poem on a piece of paper containing a list of the sutras that had been read at the temple. The priests had prepared the list and sent it to Ukifune, who in turn intended to send it on to her mother. However, when the messenger told her, “I won’t be going back to the capital tonight,” she tied the paper to the branch of a tree and left it there.

“Strange, but I feel so uneasy that my heart’s pounding,” the nurse said. “And our mistress’s mother is troubled by ominous dreams. Tell the watchmen to be extra vigilant tonight.”

As she lay there, Ukifune was distressed to hear the old woman say these things.

“You haven’t eaten a thing. That won’t do ... it’s very odd,” the nurse added. “Won’t you at least have some gruel?”

My Nana means well, and her mind is still sharp, but she’s so old and unattractive ... what will become of her, where will she go once I’m gone? Ukifune was deeply affected by this poignant question. She wondered if she shouldn’t at least give some indication, however vague, that she was facing a crisis that made it impossible to go on living in this world. But again, she felt constrained, knowing that any such suggestion would only cause alarm and bring a flood of tears. In the end, she remained silent.

Ukon lay down close to her mistress. “You’ve been so anxious and unsettled by all that’s happened of late, and sometimes the living spirit of a person whose heart is troubled leaves the body and goes wandering. I’m sure that’s why your mother saw you in those dreams that disturbed her. You really must make up your mind! Choose one of them and, come what may, let your destiny run its course.”

Ukon sighed.

Ukifune simply lay there, pressing her soft sleeves to her face.

¹ *Tales of Ise*, section 71: “If you long for me so, then come—the august gods have placed no prohibition

on travelling the road here.”

² The plant mentioned in the text is *yamatachibana*; the modern Japanese name is *yabukōji*. Common English names for plants in this genus (ardisia) include Japanese ardisia, marlberry, spearflower, and coralberry. The plant resembles holly, but ardisia is not Japanese holly, which belongs to a different genus.

³ Ukifune’s poem contains two wordplays: *mataburi* (“forked branch”)/*madafurinu* (“not yet grown old”) and the conventional *matsu* (“pine tree” and “to pine/long for”). As symbols of long life, an artificial pine seedling was an auspicious gift for a child during the New Year season.

⁴ This man is identified by his position as *Dainaiki* in the Central Affairs Ministry (*Nakatsukasashō*).

⁵ This temple, mentioned in the previous chapter during Kaoru’s journey with Ukifune out to Uji, ironically echoes the ties that bind the two men.

⁶ The time is not clearly indicated in the text. The Master Scrivener estimated that Niou would arrive roughly between 11 p.m. and 1 a.m. The phrase “past the early hours of the evening” suggests something on the order of 9:30 or 10 p.m. This may seem a trivial matter, but the vagueness in pinpointing the time indicates that Murasaki Shikibu was aware of establishing plausible narrative time, for by having Niou arrive early, she provides him with the opportunity to eavesdrop and observe.

⁷ This man is the father-in-law of the Master Scrivener. His relationship to Kaoru will be explained later in the narrative.

⁸ The resemblance between the two men is noted earlier, in the *Agemaki* chapter, when Kaoru and the younger Uji Princess exchange poems and she is struck by how much his manner puts her in mind of her cruel lover, Niou.

⁹ *Kokinshū* 684 (Ki no Tomonori): “I cannot sate my desire to gaze at the cherry trees blooming on the mountain sides amidst wispy lines of spring haze ... and I never tire of gazing at you.”

¹⁰ The secret of Kaoru’s birth has not been exposed within the world of the narrative.

¹¹ *Kokinshū* 992 (Michinoku): “It must be lingering within those sleeves that are endlessly dear to me, for I feel as if my spirit is no longer with me.”

¹² Ukifune’s use of the image of sleeves not only echoes the allusion to *Kokinshū* 992 (immediately above), but also indicates that she is fully aware of her social inferiority.

¹³ *Kokinshū* 637 (Anonymous): “When the faint rays of dawn begin to spread across the eastern sky, how sorrowful are both our robes!”

¹⁴ The meaning of this sentence is not clear. “This man” (*kono hito*) most likely (in my opinion) refers to Kaoru, since he is in her presence at that moment. However, since the narrative is situating the reader in Ukifune’s point of view (i.e., her memory of Niou), the sentence could mean that she doesn’t want to see Niou ever again—an interpretation that is in keeping with her feelings of guilt. This may seem like a minor point, but as the story progresses, Ukifune’s emotional confusion will take on greater significance, which makes the ambiguity here noteworthy.

¹⁵ *Kokin rokujō* 2648 (Anonymous): “These indescribable longings that overflow my heart like water gushing from an underground spring are more poignantly expressed without words” (alluded to earlier in the *Yokobue* chapter).

¹⁶ *Wakan rōei shū* 604 (Chang Tu): “The clearing of dull patches of misty rain begins / An egret stands on the chill sandy shore / Through breaks in the heavy banks of mountain fog / As evening falls monks return to their temple.”

¹⁷ This song is mentioned earlier in the *Umegae* chapter: “The warbler who comes to the branch of plum will sing throughout the spring, yes, throughout the spring, though for now the snow still falls ... how lovely it is, the snow that still falls!”

¹⁸ *Kokinshū* 41 (Ōshikōchi no Mitsune): “The darkness of a spring night tries in vain to obscure things ... for while we may not see the color of the plum blossoms, can their fragrance be hidden?” (alluded to earlier in the *Wakana* chapter, Part 1).

¹⁹ *Kokinshū* 689 (Anonymous): “Will she wait for me this night as well, my divine princess at Uji Bridge, with her single robe spread out alone on her rush matting?” This poem is alluded to earlier in the *Hashihime* chapter. Niou’s thoughts following Kaoru’s recitation of this line allude to this poem as well, as if capping a

verse.

20 Niou was born several months before Kaoru, so this is a mistake. The embedded clause is a question, and the intended meaning may have been that Kaoru's maturity made him *seem* two or three years older. It is possible that the error crept into the text as a result of the vagaries of copying, though of course Murasaki Shikibu herself may have been confused about this detail.

21 *Yakamochi shū* 284 (Ōtomo no Yakamochi): "On branches of plum, indistinguishable from the whiteness of the blossoms, patches of snow linger as if waiting for those flowers like welcoming companions" (alluded to earlier in the *Wakana* chapter, Part 1).

22 *Tachibana* is the name of a species of evergreen orange tree (a mandarin orange). *Kokinshū* 121 (Anonymous): "They must now be blooming in fragrant profusion, the mountain roses that grow at the tip of the Islet of Tachibana." Mandarin orange blossoms are associated not only with longevity, but also with longing memories of past loves. They are thus symbols of faithfulness—an association that figures prominently in the *Hanachirusato* chapter.

23 *Kokinshū* 1108 (unnamed Emperor): "The Isayagawa River that flows beneath the sacred Toko mountain tells us 'say nothing'—*isaya*—do not mention my name." This poem is alluded to earlier in the *Momiji no ga* chapter.

24 *Shūishū* 1243 [based on *Man'yōshū* 2425] (Kakinomoto Hitomaro): "Though I have a horse at the village of Kohata in Yamashina, because I love you I shall come on foot." Kaoru alludes to this same poem earlier in the *Agemaki* chapter, when he is advising Niou on the best way to travel to Uji to meet the younger Princess there.

25 *Kokinshū* 814 (Fujiwara no Okikaze): "If not for the image that I see in the mirror, I would have no one to speak to about all my resentments and tearful sorrows."

26 The words "mountain path" (*yamaji*) echo the phrasing of a poem by Kakinomoto Hitomaro, whose work is alluded to directly immediately below. *Man'yōshū* 212 (on the death of his wife): "When I go along the mountain path, having placed my beloved wife in her grave among the hills of Hikite, I feel as if I too am not among the living." This poem contains a phrase, *fusamaji (w)o*, that I have not translated because the meaning is uncertain. It may be a "pillow word" modifying the place name Hikite.

27 *Shūishū* 895 (Kakinomoto Hitomaro): "How constricting it is to be confined like a silkworm in a cocoon of its parent's making. Alas, I cannot meet my beloved!"

28 Ukifune's poem plays on the element *ama* in the word *amagumo*. Although the primary meaning ("rain clouds") is made explicit by the use of the characters 雨雲, *ama* phonetically can also mean "nun". I have kept that play in my rendering of the poem in part because it hearkens back to earlier statements by Ukifune's mother that she would rather send her daughter off to be a nun if it meant saving her reputation in the world. This echo is one of a number of contrapuntal elements in this poem and in the ones immediately preceding it that create a kind of fugue in this section of the text.

29 Several possible sources for this line have been identified. *Shinchokusen* 941 (Anonymous): "If I mingled to disappear among the waves where no passing boat leaves its wake, where none come to visit, would anyone see me as foam on the water?" *Kokinshū* 447 (Taira no Atsuyuki): "O cuckoo ... have you mingled to disappear among the clouds at the mountain's peak? I hear by your song that you are there, but see you not." A third source, cited by later commentary but never definitively identified, is this poem: "If I mingled to disappear amidst skies overcast with white clouds, where would you go to seek after them?" As these different sources indicate, this added phrase has several possible implications. Ukifune could be hinting that she will be lost to Niou because she will become a nun, will take her own life, or will be taken away by Kaoru.

30 Ukifune's poem alludes to an exchange between Fujiwara no Toshiyuki and Ariwara no Narihira (composed on behalf of a lady in his household whom Toshiyuki is courting) that is recorded in *Tales of Ise*, section 107. The three poems in section 107 are all included in the *Kokinshū* as well, but the two relevant verses are as follows. *Kokinshū* 617 (Toshiyuki): "Unable to find an excuse to meet you, I gaze out in melancholy reverie during this idle time, my sleeves drenched in a river of tears swollen by these endless

rains.” And *Kokinshū* 705 (Narihira): “Because it is so hard for me to query every little thing, wondering does he love me or love me not, the rain, which knows my fate, pours down on me all the heavier.”

31 *Kokinshū* 938 (Ono no Komachi, in reply to an invitation by Fun’ya no Yasuhide to visit him in Mikawa): “Lamenting my loneliness, I liken my fate to drifting grasses with their roots severed ... and if there be beckoning waters, I long to go where they will take me.”

32 The source of this allusion has not been conclusively identified. A later commentary gives the following poem as the source: “Even if I were to hide away in mountains covered in eightfold white clouds, would you not find me still, if you so resolved?”

33 The original phrase that I have rendered “surely suffer the ruinous consequences” is *itazura ni narinubeshi*. Another meaning for the phrase *itazura ni naru* is “to die.” This second meaning does not seem quite right in the context of Ukifune’s thoughts at this point, but the choice of this phrase is important to note here, because it provides a striking indication of just how fragile her emotional state is.

34 This character, Ukon, appears in the *Azumaya* chapter. Although Taifu’s daughter is not the same character as the Ukon who appears in this chapter, the narrative is a little unclear on this point. It is highly unlikely that the Uji Princess’s attendant would have left to serve Ukifune, but that leaves open the question as to how Bennokimi would have been able to talk with Taifu’s daughter (the verb used here, *kataru*, suggests that they spoke).

35 *Kokinshū* 501 [also *Tales of Ise*, section 65] (Anonymous): “Alas, the gods do not accept the offerings I made at the purification stream and will not answer my prayer to be cleansed of my love for you” (alluded to in the previous two chapters as well as earlier in the *Asagao* chapter).

36 Takefu was the seat of government for the province of Echizen (modern-day Fukui prefecture). Murasaki Shikibu accompanied her father when he was posted there as governor, so her mention of Takefu in this context may well reflect her personal experience of living far from the capital. However, Chūjō no kimi’s statement is more likely an allusion to a *saibara*, “The Entrance to the Road” (*Michi no kuchi*): “O breezes that join our hearts / Tell my parents ‘I am here’ / In distant Takefu / At the entrance to the road.” The phrase “entrance to the road” refers to the starting point of a road leading away from the capital into a province, and so it carries with it a strong sense of separation and distance. This *saibara* ends with the phrase *sakimudachiya*, which could mean something like “O noble lords” and would act in tandem with “O breezes” in the song. However, it is more probable that the phrase is a *hayashi kotoba*, a set of syllables used in songs (most often at the end) to maintain the metric rhythm of the performance. That is how I have understood the phrase here.

37 *Kokinshū* 708 [also *Tales of Ise*, section 112] (Anonymous): “Buffeted by a powerful wind, the smoke from the salt-making fire of a fisherwoman of Suma has drifted off in an unforeseen direction” (alluded to earlier, in the *Makibashira* chapter).

38 This is the residence in the Rokujō estate where Hanachirusato looked after Genji’s son. The main residence in the southeast quadrant (the one occupied by Genji and Murasaki—and by the Third Princess) was naturally ceded to the Minister’s sister, the Akashi Empress, because of her exalted rank and political importance.

39 It is worth noting that the phrasing of Kaoru’s inner monologue echoes the guilty thoughts Niou has earlier in this chapter when he first goes to Ukifune. In particular, the phrase *ayashiki made* is striking. Here, in Kaoru’s thoughts, the phrase literally means that he acted as a guide (or pander) to “an unusually strange” degree. In the context of Niou’s thoughts, the phrase points to “an unusually (strong)” bond of friendship. I have chosen to emphasize the context provided by Niou in Kaoru’s echoing phrase in order to emphasize the profound sense of betrayal he feels.

40 *Kokinshū* 1093 (Anonymous, a Michinokuni song): “If I ever possess a fickle heart and abandon you, may waves break over Mount Suenomatsu.” The poem uses the well-worn play on the word *matsu* (“to wait/to pine/pine tree”). This poem, a vow of faithfulness that makes Kaoru’s accusation clear, is alluded to earlier in the *Akashi* chapter.

41 The character’s official title is *udoneri*, an inner palace attendant appointed to the Central Affairs Ministry. These positions (approximately ninety when the position was established) were originally drawn

from men of the fourth or fifth rank, and they served as bodyguards and escorts for high-ranking nobility. Eventually, however, the men who held this position came to take on other responsibilities for their lords, especially business outside the capital. As a result, there are several possible ways to translate this term, each suggesting the various roles associated with the position: equerry (since the escorts were sometimes mounted), steward, or (later) constable. In this case, where the man (the *udoneri*) performs a number of duties on behalf of an absent lord (Kaoru), “majordomo” seems appropriate, since it suggests both the closeness of a guard/escort and the more general role of steward.

42 *Shinchokusenshū* 734 (Anonymous): “Of late I long for you, my heart confused, broken up like patches of moss on a pine tree as I wait and wonder when will I see you again.” *Kokin rokujō* 3962 is almost identical to this poem.

43 Two famous literary examples of young women who kill themselves because they cannot choose among lovers are Tegona from the village of Mama (in *Man'yōshū* 431–33, 1807–08, and 3386–87) and Unai (in *Man'yōshū* 1809–11 and *Tales of Yamato*, section 147).

44 *Kokinshū* 488 (Anonymous): “It seems that this feeling of love will fill the vastness of the sky itself, and though I try to drive it out of my mind, it has no place to go.” This poem is alluded to in the previous chapter.

45 This blanket (*afuri / aori* 障泥) was used not so much to make the horse comfortable as to keep the rider from being splattered with mud (as the characters for the word suggest).

46 *Shūishū* 1217 (Anonymous): “I think there are no mountains that are not completely shrouded in unsettled white clouds.” Niou’s poem plays on the element *shira*, as in *shirakumo* (“white clouds”) and *shira(zu)* (“not know”). It also plays on the word *naku*, which is repeated in the poem: *kakaranu yama naku* (“there are no mountains not shrouded”) and *naku naku* (“to weep and weep”).

47 A *kake-obi* was a sash that hung over or around the shoulders (unlike an *obi*, which is tied around the waist) to loosely fasten a kimono or, in some cases, a shawl covering the head. In more formal dress, this type of sash was also used to help fasten a train (*kake-obi no mo*).

48 This appears to be an allusion to a passage in the *Nirvana Sutra*: “The wise person has already practiced the image of not seeking worldly pleasures. Next, he practices the image of death. He sees this life. He sees that it is ever bound to innumerable enmities. Every moment sees a decrease, nothing increasing. It is like a mountain, where the rushing water cannot find any place to rest, or the morning frost that cannot long remain. It ever proceeds to the marketplace of the prison house, only leading one to death. It is like taking a cow or sheep to where death awaits them.” Assuming that this allusion is correctly identified (Ukifune has been reading sutras, after all), the meditation on death in this context takes on an ominous tone.

49 *Gosenshū* 640 (Chūjō no Kōi): “If this day passes with no letter from you, would that I might die. And if I did, would you ask after my grave, even in your dreams, and seek it out?”

LII

Kagerō

Ephemerids

UKIFUNE WAS missing. Her women were in a panic as they tried to find her, but their efforts were all in vain. I'll refrain from describing in detail the chaos at the Uji villa that morning, since it resembled so closely accounts one finds in old tales of the commotion that follows the abduction of a young princess.

Because the messenger Ukifune's desperate mother had sent to Uji the day before had not yet returned, she dispatched another.

"I set out while the cocks were still crowing," the man announced upon his arrival.

The attendants were all utterly dazed and flustered—most especially the old nurse—and thus had no idea how they should receive him. Those women who were not privy to the situation could do nothing but nervously fuss and fidget, while those in the know, like Ukon and Jijū, recalled how depressed their mistress had been and concluded that Ukifune had thrown herself into the river. In tears, they opened the letter from Chūjō no kimi:

I'm so worried about you that I cannot sleep, which means that tonight I won't have the comfort of seeing you in my dreams. Instead, I feel oppressed, as if a spirit was assaulting me, and I'm terrified by strange, unpleasant premonitions. I know that you will be moving to the capital in the near future, but in the meantime I want to send for you. It's raining today, so you can't come right away, but still ...

Ukon opened Ukifune's reply to her mother's earlier message that she had written the night before. As soon as she read it, she broke down, weeping uncontrollably. *So it's true, then ... she really did throw herself into the river. She told her mother how forlorn she felt. Why didn't she say anything to me?*

We've been together since childhood, and in all that time not once did she ever act constrained toward me, nor did I ever keep anything from her. Yet despite our close relationship, she gave not the slightest hint that she was setting out along the path of death on her own, leaving me behind. How cruel!

Wailing and stamping her feet, Ukon was behaving like a little girl. For several days she had observed how depressed her mistress looked. Still, there had been no indication that Ukifune was temperamentally capable of even contemplating, let alone carrying out, something as drastic and terrifying as suicide. Ukon was distraught and heartbroken, wondering what, exactly, had happened.

The old nurse was on the verge of collapse, unable to do anything more than murmur over and over, "What should we do? What should we do?"

Niou was troubled that Ukifune's final reply to him appeared to be completely out of character. *What could she have been thinking? She certainly seemed enamored of me, but did her doubts that my feelings for her were only a passing whim cause her to go off in hiding somewhere?* He too sent a messenger to Uji.

Niou's man arrived to find everyone weeping and too upset to receive him. Unable to deliver the letter, he was finally forced to turn to a menial servant and ask, "What's going on?"

"Our mistress passed away suddenly last night," the woman replied, "and all the attendants are out of their minds with grief. Our lord isn't here, and those in service are at a loss and don't know how to handle the situation."

The messenger, who knew nothing about the relationship between Niou and Ukifune, returned to Nijō without making any further inquiries.

Upon hearing the man's report, Niou felt as though he must be dreaming. *This is very queer! No one mentioned anything about her being seriously ill. They said only that she'd been indisposed of late. Her reply suggested nothing all that serious ... indeed, it had a rather quirky charm about it.* Unable to make sense of the news, he summoned Tokikata.

"Go to Uji and check on the situation. Ask around and find out for certain what's become of the young lady there."

"The Major Captain must have heard rumors of some sort, my lord, for he evidently admonished his watchmen severely for failing to be vigilant. Since then, they've been very aggressive, questioning anyone who comes and goes there, even the lowest servants. If the Major Captain were to find out that a man like myself showed up without good reason ... well, he would likely figure everything out, would he not? On top of that, do I need to mention that a place where someone has suddenly passed away is going to be bedlam, with throngs of people coming and going?"

"You may be right, but do you expect me to just remain in this anxious, uncertain state? Make up some plausible excuse as you always do and figure out a way to meet Jijū or one of the other attendants who knows what's happening. Find out the truth. The man I sent earlier was able to speak only to some menial, and you know you can't trust those sorts of people to get things straight."

Seeing how pathetic Niou looked, Tokikata felt embarrassed that he had expressed doubts about the wisdom of visiting Uji. He set off that evening. The rain had let up a little, but he anticipated a difficult journey and dressed accordingly in humble-looking garb. Because he needed no retinue and could travel lightly, he reached Uji very quickly.

When he arrived, he found the household crowded with people milling about and raising a terrible racket. He was shocked when he thought he heard someone say, "As things stand now, we have no choice but to go ahead and carry out the funeral services this evening." He sent in a message for Ukon, but she was unable to meet with him.

"At the moment I'm in shock and don't feel I can get up to receive you. Of course, I know that this evening may be the last time you come here and that I'll never have another chance to talk with you again ..."

"I understand how you feel, but how can I return to the capital not knowing exactly what happened? Is there no one else I can speak with?" He pressed her so urgently that a meeting with Jijū was arranged.

Jijū was weeping uncontrollably as she tried to explain things. "It's all so shocking! She died in a manner that your lord could never have anticipated. I don't have the words to tell you how devastated we are. It feels like a dream. Please convey to Prince Niou how lost and confused everyone feels. When I'm a little calmer, I'll describe to you how depressed and troubled my mistress seemed the past few days and how sorry she felt that night when the watchmen here prevented your lord from seeing her. Please come again once our period of confinement is over and you are no longer in any danger of defilement."

Tokikata could hear only the sound of wailing voices coming from inside the house. One of them must have been the old nurse's: "Oh, my sweet young lady ... where can you be? Please come back! How can I grieve properly without at least seeing your mortal remains? I never tired of being with you, mornings and nights, and I lived on in the hope that I would soon see you enjoying the blessings of good fortune. But now you've abandoned me without even bothering to tell me where you're going! No deity or demon could possibly take you away! Indra resurrects those who are too sorely lamented by others,¹ so whoever took my sweet young lady, be it man or demon, return her to me! At least let me see her mortal remains!"

The nurse rambled on and on, and Tokikata was perturbed by some of her incoherent mutterings. “Come, now, tell me the truth,” he said to Jijū. “Could some other lord have taken her off into hiding? Prince Niou wants to know for certain what happened to the young lady, and he sent me here in his place to find out. At this point, *why* she’s missing, whether she’s dead or gone into hiding, is not as important as the fact that she *has* disappeared. However, as my lord’s messenger, I would be at fault if the account I give him were to differ from other reports he might hear later on—reports that might allow him to glean the truth. In any case, can you really doubt the extraordinary feelings of Prince Niou, who ordered me to meet with you, hoping to hear that she’s not dead and trusting that you would not lie for her? There are many examples from ancient times, even at the court in China, of men who become obsessed with a woman and lose their way on the path of love, but it seems to me that the world has never witnessed devotion as passionate and sincere as my lord’s.”

Acknowledging the validity of Tokikata’s claims, Jijū was deeply moved that he had been sent here as Niou’s messenger. As much as she might want to cover up her mistress’s disappearance, she concluded that word of an incident as bizarre as this would get around eventually. And so, without going into explicit detail, she replied indirectly, hinting at what had actually occurred.

“Why would everyone here be so upset if they thought even for a moment that someone had taken our mistress away into hiding? Over the past few weeks she was terribly depressed about her situation, and then came a message from the Major Captain intimating something that caused her great distress. Our mistress’s mother and her old nurse—the woman whose wailing you heard just now—were hurriedly preparing to move her to a house being set up by the man who knew her first, and that must have driven her mad, since she secretly harbored a deep, humble affection for your gracious lord. Shocking though it may be, it appears that she willfully chose to do away with herself, and that’s why the women here are dazed and babbling the nonsense you heard.”

Tokikata still did not fully comprehend the situation. “If that’s the case, then I’ll come back again when things have calmed down. It’s all but impossible for me to get the full story from you while having to stand outside the whole time.² I imagine that Prince Niou will eventually call on you himself.”

“Ahh ... a visit from him would be an honor greater than we deserve! Now that my mistress is gone, having it known that Prince Niou bestowed his affection on her would certainly show that she was a woman of no common destiny. Still, my mistress did keep the affair secret, and I’m sure that, for her sake, it must be His Lordship’s kind intention to do the same.”

At this point, Jijū was just trying to keep up appearances, for the attendants

did not want to let anyone know that Ukifune had died in such a questionable manner. That was why Jijū urged Tokikata to go back to the capital immediately, for she assumed that a man as clever as he would soon figure out everything on his own.

Ukifune's mother made her way to Uji through the driving rain. There were no words to express how she felt. She was so upset that she could mutter only a few incoherent sentences: "The sorrow one experiences when a loved one passes away right before your eyes is terrible enough, but that's normally how we experience death in this world. Yet what about my daughter? What has become of her?"

Chūjō no kimi had no idea that a clandestine affair was the cause of her daughter's anxiety and depression, and so she never imagined that Ukifune might throw herself into the river. She recalled uncanny instances recounted in ancient tales of a young lady being devoured by a demon³ or bewitched by a fox spirit and taken away, and she thought it possible that the same thing had happened in this case. She even suspected the lower-ranking servants and attendants, wondering if there might be some vindictive person—perhaps a spiteful nurse previously in the service of a lady to be feared such as the Fujiitsubo Princess—who had been shocked to hear that the Major Captain was going to bring Ukifune to the capital and had conspired to have the young lady abducted.

"Are there any newcomers here ... any who might be of questionable character?" she asked.

One of the attendants replied, "Women who aren't used to serving in an isolated place like this usually don't stay very long. They return to the capital, swearing that they'll be coming back soon, but taking with them all the items they need to finish preparing for the move the Major Captain planned." Indeed, only a small number of the women who had been in residence from the beginning remained in service, and the villa was now practically deserted.

Jijū and the others recalled Ukifune's appearance over the last few days—the expression on her face each time she wept and the way she would sigh and murmur, "Ahh, how I long to die!" While looking over the letters she had written, they discovered under her inkstone the poem she had scribbled out: "... after death my woeful name/Will flow onward, drifting in the shadows." Turning their gaze in the direction of the river, the loud roar of the rapids seemed eerily ominous and sad.

"There are always maddening rumors about a person who dies that way," said Jijū, conferring with Ukon, "and I feel sorry for those few—her mother, the Major Captain, Prince Niou—who'll be left to wonder what became of her."

"Even though their affair was a secret," Ukon replied, "our mistress wasn't the one who sought it out. Besides, Prince Niou is a man of such high status that even if Chūjō no kimi should hear rumors, there's nothing to make her waste away in shame now that her daughter is gone. That's why we should tell her exactly what happened, for at the very least it will help ease her shock and grief, which is worse than normal because of these anxious uncertainties she feels. It's customary when a person dies to lay her body out and conduct funeral services, but the circumstances in this case are extraordinary, and as time passes, we probably won't be able to keep them secret. So for the time being, let's tell her the truth and go through the formalities in order to keep up appearances and protect our mistress's reputation."

They privately explained to Chūjō no kimi what had really taken place, but as they were speaking, they felt faint and couldn't finish their sentences. As she listened to their account, Ukifune's mother was confused and agitated. *If what they're saying is true, then my daughter died by drowning in those turbulent waters that I always dreaded.* Now more than ever, she felt as if she too should throw herself into that river.

"Well, then, we must search for her body and at least give her a proper funeral."

"That wouldn't do any good at this point," Ukon replied. "By this time her body has likely drifted out to sea and would be impossible to find. And any search we make would only give rise to hateful gossip."

Imagining all the possible places where Ukifune's body might have ended up, Chūjō no kimi felt a choking sensation as her chest tightened. Not knowing what else to do, how she should handle the situation, she ordered Ukon and Jijū to call for her carriage. She then had them gather up her daughter's furnishings and everyday personal effects, as well as the bedclothes and covers she had taken off and discarded, and load everything into the carriage, which was then sent off, trimmed in a manner appropriate for bearing a body to a funeral pyre. The only people accompanying the carriage were the priests who were expected to be in retreat during the period of mourning. Their party included the nurse's son and his uncle, who happened to be the old ascetic at the mountain temple, several disciples of the ascetic who were familiar with the Uji villa, and a few older monks who had been at Uji from the time when Hachinomiya first moved there. Ukifune's mother and the nurse had collapsed in grief, and their weeping was dreadfully inauspicious.

The Assistant Commander of the Right Palace Guards and his father-in-law, the majordomo, arrived with several other men in tow. They exuded an intimidating air as they spoke to the attendants. "You must inform the Major

Captain about these funeral plans so that he can decide on the proper day and have it conducted with dignity.”

“But these are extraordinary circumstances,” Ukon said, resisting their order, “and we must carry it out before the night is through. We have good reasons to deal with this matter discreetly.”

The carriage was drawn to a field at the foot of a mountain across from the villa. The priests, who were in on the scheme, did not allow anyone to come near as they set the carriage ablaze. It was over in an instant, the smoke drifting off into the sky.

The locals who served at the villa always took care to conduct such rites in a proper, solemn style and to abstain from saying anything that might be inauspicious at a time like this. Thus, some of them felt they had good cause to criticize what was taking place.

“This is really peculiar. That’s not the way to hold a funeral. They’re rushing through it carelessly, as if the young lady had been some menial servant!”

“Well ... you may be right, but I’ve heard that this is how they handle things in the capital when a nobleman who has a principle wife loses one of his mistresses.”

And so, on they gossiped, making all sorts of troubling comments.

Now we have to worry about what these rustics are thinking and saying, Ukon and Jijū told themselves. If anything, gossip spreads more quickly through court society, and the Major Captain is sure to hear rumors that our mistress has disappeared and her body has yet to be found. No doubt, he’ll be suspicious and assume that Prince Niou is hiding her somewhere. Of course, the two men are related, and so even if the Major Captain does suspect that she’s secretly staying with Prince Niou, he’ll eventually learn the truth and turn his suspicions elsewhere, imagining that some other man must have taken her away. Our mistress’s destiny may have been glorious in her lifetime, but as she said in her poem, with her death she’ll leave behind a dubious reputation drifting in the shadows.

Mulling over these thoughts, Ukon and Jijū had those servants who had witnessed the frantic commotion that morning take a vow to keep the matter secret. They also devised a scheme to make sure that those who were not in the know heard nothing more about what had occurred.

“After sufficient time passes and everyone calms down, we’ll tell the others,” they agreed. “In the meantime, however, it would be a great pity if the Major Captain suddenly heard something that would cool his ardor toward our mistress and distract him from his grief.”

Suffering the pangs of a guilty conscience, the two attendants did all they

could to protect their secret.

It was a hectic period for Kaoru. His mother, the Third Princess, was ill, and he had gone into retreat at the temple in Ishiyama to pray for her recovery. During his stay there, his anxiety over the situation with Ukifune only intensified. Given the enormity of what had just taken place at Uji, the attendants there were expecting to hear from the Major Captain. However, they had failed to inform him right away of their mistress's death, and so of course he sent no word to them. The women interpreted his silence as a cruel, shameful rebuke. Finally, a steward from one of his manors arrived and told him everything.

Kaoru was stunned and immediately dispatched his close retainer, Nakanobu, the Senior Assistant Minister of the Treasury, with the following message:

I would have gone straight to Uji myself as soon as I heard the horrific news, but my mother is ill, and for caution's sake I'm reluctant to leave and will stay in retreat for the prescribed number of days. I understand that you carried out the funeral last night. Why didn't you let me know? Why, instead of postponing it, were you in such a hurry to go ahead with an undignified, haphazard ceremony? What's done is done, I suppose, and there's no help for it now, but it pains me to hear that even the peasants out there are criticizing the way her last rites were conducted.

As soon as Nakanobu arrived the next morning, the wailing of the attendants grew louder than ever. Since there were things about their mistress's death that they simply could not explain, they used their tears as a pretext for not responding to him.

Later, as Kaoru listened to Nakanobu's report, he couldn't help but be struck at how terribly sudden and unfortunate Ukifune's death had been. *Uji is truly a tragic place! Do demons reside there? Why did I leave her in that isolated villa for so long? It was wrong of me to assume that another man could never possibly find her, and to show so little concern about neglecting her the way I did. It's my own fault that Niou had the opportunity to seduce her.*

Kaoru was heartbroken and filled with remorse over that abnormal tendency of his to treat worldly matters so carelessly. Still, his mother was ill, and it would not do to torment himself with troubled, confused thoughts. He decided to return to the capital, but he did not drop by the residence of his wife, the Fujitsubo Princess. Instead, he sent her a message: "I have just heard tragic news about someone who was close to me, and while I do not want to make too much of the situation, I'm so upset that I think it best to withdraw and avoid meeting you for now, since my presence may be inauspicious."

It grieved him to think that all his love relationships proved fleeting and always ended unhappily. His longing to see Ukifune's lovely figure again, just as she was, with her endearing warmth and enchanting demeanor, caused him terrible anguish, and he asked himself why he had so heedlessly let the time slip away, why he had failed to pay more attention to her while she was alive. Now that she was gone, he had no means to calm the chaos in his heart, and his regrets were too numerous to count.

I'm destined to know only loss and misery when it comes to those I love. I wanted to be different from others, to pursue the path to religious truth, but against my own wishes I've ended up just like everyone else. When the gods and the Buddha look on my failures and hypocrisy, do they not hold me in contempt? Perhaps the Buddha is withholding his mercy from me, ordaining this sorrow of mine as an expedient lesson to move my heart closer to the truth that all things are impermanent and that I should let them go. Kaoru couldn't get such thoughts out of his mind as he fervently practiced his devotions.

Niou was even more distraught. For two or three days he was unable to think straight and was so overcome with grief that his condition caused a stir, with people at the court fearing that a spirit had possessed him. Gradually, however, his tears ceased and he regained control of his emotions, remembering with a poignant sense of yearning how beautiful Ukifune had been. Not wanting to let his foolish, tearful expression give him away, Niou thought to cleverly cover up the true reason for his troubles by outwardly pretending that he was suffering from a serious illness. Nonetheless, to those around him, it was obvious what was wrong. Some even wondered aloud, "What sort of an affair could have caused him to grieve like this and fall into a depression severe enough to threaten his life?"

Kaoru heard about Niou's condition. *That proves it, then. His affair with Ukifune was much more than a simple exchange of letters. After all, she was the kind of woman who would have completely enthralled him once he had seen her. Given my relationship to him, their affair would have made me look even more foolish than the usual spurned lover had she lived.* This thought tempered somewhat the passion that burned in his chest.

Not a day went by without some visitor calling on Niou to wish him a speedy recovery. *With the court in such an uproar over his illness, Kaoru reasoned, I'll certainly be criticized if I don't pay my respects, but remain in retreat instead to mourn someone who was inconsequential.* With those calculations in mind, he went to see Niou.

Kaoru's uncle—a half brother of Genji who once served as the Minister of Ceremonials—had passed away at around that time, and so Kaoru was dressed in

light gray robes when he called on Niou. In his heart, however, he secretly thought it more fitting to consider those somber clothes a sign of his sorrow over the loss of Ukifune. His face had grown a little thin and drawn from the rigors of his devotions, but that merely accentuated his youthful grace.

He arrived at Niou's residence in the evening, when everyone else had withdrawn and the place was perfectly still. Niou, who felt he shouldn't just lie about and mope, happened to be up at that moment. He had been refusing to receive people who were not close to him, but he could hardly turn away Kaoru, who was an intimate accustomed to entering inside his blinds. All the same, Niou was reluctant to meet him, for the very sight of his rival would make it that much harder to hold back his tears.

"My condition isn't all that serious," he said, straining to control himself, "but everyone around me keeps acting as if it is, telling me I have to be cautious. It's especially troubling to see my father and mother so worried and upset, and it makes me forlorn to realize the truth that life really *is* fleeting ... as you're so fond of reminding me."

He attempted to hide his tears by brushing them away, but soon they were flowing unstopped. This was an extremely awkward display of emotion, but Niou reassured himself that Kaoru would never understand the real reason for his grief, and merely take his tears as proof that he was weak-willed and womanish.

Kaoru, however, understood all too well. *So it's true! All these tears are for Ukifune. How long must their affair have been going on? For how many months did he mock me as an abject fool?* He forgot all about his own sorrow.

Niou was startled to see the look of grief so suddenly disappear from Kaoru's face. *How extraordinarily coldhearted! Whenever I'm keenly moved in some way, even over some trivial matter, the mere sound of birds migrating through the sky in spring or autumn can stir in me a profound melancholy. Kaoru is hardly insensitive to the sadness of this world, and now that he can see how hard it is for my fragile heart to stay these tears, he must know the reason why I grieve. Yet he remains dispassionate. Such coldness must be a sign of how thoroughly he has assimilated the truth of the world's evanescence.*

Simultaneously fascinated by Kaoru and envious of him, Niou was also touched to think that his rival had been Ukifune's support—the cypress pillar that she had leaned upon. He gazed intently at the Major Captain, conjuring up a momentary image of him sitting next to the young lady. Just then it occurred to him: *He is my sole memento of her!*

The two men gradually opened up and began to discuss events at the court. Kaoru, however, was in no mood to keep the matter of Ukifune locked away in

his heart any longer. “Ever since our childhood all those years ago, I’ve been uncomfortable keeping secrets from you for any length of time. But now that I’ve been granted a prominent position at the court and you have attained a glorious station in life that leaves you with very little time for yourself, we rarely have a moment’s peace to meet at our leisure. I’m so preoccupied with my duties that I’m unable to attend you as I once did—unless, of course, I have some compelling reason—and that’s why I never seem to have the opportunity to speak with you ... though there is something I very much want to say.

“You see, I heard about a young lady who was the half sister of my late beloved, the Princess at Uji—you know, at the villa that you visited several times some years ago. Anyway, this young lady was living in a place where I never expected to find her, and I thought that I should call on her from time to time. It was awkward for me to do so, however, because I had just married the Fujitsubo Princess. Knowing that people would criticize me if I started seeing another woman so soon after the ceremony, I decided it was best to have the young lady reside in that strange, isolated villa ... but that meant, of course, that I couldn’t go to see her very often.

“As time passed, I came to discover that she was not content to rely upon my support alone, but was meeting someone else as well. Since I never intended to formally take her as a wife, as I might have done had she been a more distinguished woman, I did not fault her for pursuing that relationship ... and in any case, looking after her involved no great hardship or commitment on my part. She remained a comfort to me, someone sweet and dear ... and then she suddenly passed away. Reflecting on how her death exemplifies the universal truth that all things must pass, I’m filled with remorse and sorrow. No doubt you have heard vague reports about this matter?”

As soon as these words passed his lips, Kaoru broke down and wept. *I don’t want Niou to see me like this ... to see how foolish I am!* So he thought, but once his tears began to fall, he found it impossible to stop them.

Niou was at once shocked and moved to compassion at this show of emotional distress by the normally stoic Kaoru. Even so, he managed to maintain his composure and respond in an aloof tone: “I’m very touched to hear about this. I was thinking that I really should ask you about it, but then I heard that you were trying to keep the matter confidential, and so ...” Niou was trying to maintain a pretense of indifference, but under the circumstances it was difficult for him to bear up, and so he kept his comments to a minimum.

“She was a woman I was hoping to have you meet ... someone you could look after and support,” Kaoru continued. “But no doubt you probably met her at some point. After all, she had good reason to visit your Uji Princess.” The

insinuation was clear, and by broaching the subject of Ukifune this way, Kaoru was gradually making his true feelings known. “I know it’s presumptuous of me to bother you with trivial, vulgar matters when you’re not feeling well. Please do take care of yourself.” And with that, he took his leave.

How passionately he loved her, Kaoru mused. Her life was all too fleeting, but she was a woman of noble destiny. Niou is a prince of the blood, the favorite child of Their Majesties, a man who, in looks and fortune, seems to have no equal in the present generation at court. The two women he has taken for his wives are both distinguished beyond measure, and yet he gave his heart so completely to Ukifune that his passionate obsession made him ill. The courtiers are all in a panic, frantically commissioning rites, prayers, sutra readings, and purification ceremonies to restore him to health. But was I, a man of high station in life who was blessed to receive His Majesty’s daughter, any less enamored of her? Now that she’s gone, I find myself aching, unable to comfort my heart. It’s folly to remain so attached to her ... I must let go! He tried to repress his grief, but his heart was in turmoil as he lay prone, murmuring a line of verse: “No man is an insensate piece of wood or rock, all have feelings.”⁴

How did the Uji Princess react when she heard that the funeral rites had been conducted in such careless haste? The question made Kaoru feel sorry and defeated at the same time. Had the funeral been kept plain and simple because Chūjō no kimi was afraid that, as a woman of low pedigree, people would criticize her for being presumptuous and for ignoring her responsibilities to Ukifune’s surviving siblings? Kaoru found that possibility extremely distasteful. There was so much he still didn’t understand that he desperately wanted to go off to Uji and personally ask the attendants what had happened. However, he couldn’t think of any way to make the trip that wouldn’t prove inconvenient, for he knew that if he went there, he would have to go into confinement for a period of purification. Given his responsibilities, that was out of the question. On the other hand, it would be too painful for him to go all the way out there only to turn around and come back right away.

The fourth month arrived. On the evening of the tenth, the realization that this was the date when he had planned to bring Ukifune to the capital affected him most keenly. The scent of the nearby mandarin orange tree in his garden gave rise to warm nostalgia. Just then, a cuckoo making its way across the sky sang out twice. “If you travel to her abode,”⁵ he whispered to himself, but the sentiment of the poem brought him no solace. Niou had gone to his Nijō residence that same day, and so Kaoru plucked a stem of orange blossoms and sent it to his rival with the following:

*Do you also cry out in secret grief
When in vain your heart looks for the master
Of rice paddies in the realm of the dead⁶*

At the very moment this poem was delivered, Niou was gazing at his Uji Princess and sadly marveling at her resemblance to the young lady he had lost. They were both sunk in a pensive mood. Upon reading Kaoru's poem, Niou recognized its awkward implications and wrote this reply:

*At an abode redolent with orange blossoms
Whose fragrance evokes sad memories, the cuckoo
Must be mindful, for its cry too calls up the past⁷*

"It is a delicate matter."

The Uji Princess knew all about Niou's affair. *How sad that both my sister and Ukifune lived such lamentably brief lives. They were each too sensitive to cope with the anxieties they suffered. I'm the only one who never faced such tribulations. Is that why I've survived all this time? I wonder how much longer I'll live?* This train of thought made her utterly desolate.

Now that the affair was out in the open, Niou believed that avoiding any discussion of it with his Uji Princess would prove painfully awkward for both of them. Thus, he told her about his relationship with Ukifune—though he altered or left out potentially hurtful details so as not to cast himself in a bad light. At one point, as he was speaking with her, he remarked amidst both laughter and tears, "I resented you for hiding her from me." He was moved to greater compassion and closeness to the Uji Princess than perhaps he might have been were she unrelated to Ukifune. Over at Roku no kimi's grand, stiffly formal residence, everyone had fussed over him because of his illness, an endless stream of well-wishers had called, and the gratuitous solicitude of the Minister and his sons had been relentlessly annoying. The Nijō residence was a far more serene, relaxing place, and its warm atmosphere made it hard for Niou to leave.

The affair now seemed like a dream to him, and he was depressed and puzzled at how suddenly the young lady had passed away. He summoned Tokikata and a few other men who had served as his escort on those earlier visits and sent them to Uji with a request that Ukon come to speak with him.

Ukifune's mother couldn't bear to linger at Uji. The roar of the rapids made it impossible to find release from her anguish—indeed, it gave rise to a powerful urge to throw herself in the river and die as her daughter had. She chose to return to the capital, and by the time Niou's men arrived, the villa was almost

completely deserted except for the few priests who had remained behind to chant the Holy Name. The watchmen who had once so boldly and abruptly challenged them offered no objections this time. Recalling how unkind these uncouth men had been in refusing entry to Niou on that final trip, Tokikata and the others were moved to pity for their lord. Previously, they had looked askance at his outrageous obsession with the young lady, but coming here again reminded them of the figure he had cut on those nights when he ventured to Uji. How handsome and dashing he had looked when he swept the young lady up in his arms and took her off in that boat! These memories profoundly affected even the most hardened men in the party.

Ukon met them and understandably broke down when she heard the reason for their visit.

“... and so that is what my lord wanted me to convey to you,” Tokikata said, concluding Niou’s message. “I’ve come on his orders to escort you to him.”

“At this point I’m reluctant to do anything that might arouse suspicions and cause people to gossip,” Ukon replied, refusing the request. “Even if I were to go, I don’t believe that I’d be able to explain things clearly enough so that your lord would understand. Perhaps when our period of confinement is over I can come up with a plausible excuse to make the trip to the capital. It would be more appropriate to wait until then. I never expected to outlive my mistress, but rest assured that, when I’m feeling more myself, I promise that I’ll go and meet Prince Niou—and I won’t need an order to do so. So many things have happened that seem like a dream to me, and I want to tell him everything.”

There was no hope of persuading her to come with them that day. Tokikata was weeping. “I knew nothing, really, about the particulars of the affair. But while I was unable to comprehend the nature of their feelings for one another, I did observe the uncommon devotion that my lord demonstrated to the young lady. That’s why I did not try to draw closer to you more quickly, for I assumed that eventually I would have the opportunity to be at your service. This irrevocable tragedy has only strengthened my resolve to treat you with every consideration. Still, we *have* gone to the trouble of bringing a carriage all the way out here, and it would be a shame not to make use of it. Might another attendant who knew of the affair be available to go in your place?”

Ukon called for Jijū. “Under the circumstances,” she explained, “perhaps it would be best for you to go.”

“What would I tell him that you couldn’t?” Jijū balked. “And how can I go when we’re still in mourning? Wouldn’t my defilement bring bad luck to your lord?”

“He’s been ill recently and has had all sorts of rites and prayers performed for

him as a precaution,” Tokikata reassured her. “He doesn’t appear to be at all concerned about any defilement that might result from your mistress’s death. They shared such a close bond that he’s likely to go into retreat for her. In any case, there are only a few days left in your period of mourning. At least one of you must come with me.”

Tokikata was insistent, and Jijū, who was always recalling the rapturous splendor of Niou’s appearance, was inclined to agree to his request. *If not now, then when would I ever be able to gaze on that noble figure again?* She departed for the capital looking exquisite, dressed in dark robes and properly done up. However, following the death of her mistress, she had not been dressing formally and was lacking a train of an appropriate color. Just before she set off, then, she had another attendant bring her one that was dyed a pale purple.

Had my mistress lived, she would have secretly traveled this road. Deep in her heart, this was the path that she truly desired. Such musings made her sad, and she wept all the way to Nijo.

Niou was touched to hear that Jijū had arrived. Mindful of the feelings of his Uji Princess, who might have been upset by the presence of such a visitor, he went over to the main hall and had the attendant alight from her carriage there.

In response to his request for more details, Jijū described for him how Ukifune had suffered an agony of indecision during her final days, and how she had wept the night of her disappearance. “She was always so strangely quiet and reserved by nature, so helpless and distracted, and she found it difficult to confide in anyone or tell others about her troubles, even when she was in terrible anguish. Because she always kept things to herself, she left nothing behind to explain her reasons. Never in my wildest dreams or fancies did I imagine that she was capable of considering something as drastic as suicide.”

Jijū described the situation at such length that Niou, who finally understood exactly how Ukifune had died, experienced even greater paroxysms of grief. *It would be one thing, he thought, if she had been destined to die from some natural cause. But how tormented must she have been to brood over her situation until she was driven to drown herself in those waters? If only I had discovered her plans in time to stop her!* He felt powerful emotions welling up inside his chest.

“How could we have failed to understand what she was planning to do after watching her burn all her letters and personal items?” Jijū lamented. She talked with Niou until the break of day, telling him about the final note Ukifune had written to her mother on the list of sutras that had been read for her benefit.

Niou had not previously looked upon Jijū as a woman worthy of his attention, but she had been very close to Ukifune, and so he felt an intimate bond with her.

“You must come into my service. It’s not as if you have no connection at all to the lady who resides in the west hall.”

“Even if I were to accept your gracious offer, I would be overburdened by sorrow. Perhaps I can move here once the period of mourning is finished.”

“You must come again,” Niou replied, though he did not feel satisfied letting her go. As she prepared to return to Uji at dawn, he presented her with a set of comb boxes and a chest filled with robes—gifts that he had intended for Ukifune. He had prepared many other items as well, but it would have seemed inappropriately extravagant to present them all to a woman like Jijū.

How will the other women at Uji react when they see these gifts? I had no expectations when I went to meet Prince Niou, and now it’s going to be difficult explaining his unexpected generosity. Jijū was bothered, but she couldn’t possibly have refused the items. Since she and Ukon had time on their hands, they examined them at their leisure. They wept bitterly when they saw how finely crafted and dazzlingly beautiful the gifts were. The robes in the chest were also splendidly fashioned. Unsure about what to do with all these presents, the two women agreed to put them away, saying, “We should hide them until the mourning period is over.”

Still wracked by doubts, his mind filled with unanswered questions, Kaoru finally went to the Uji villa. All along the way he gathered memories and reflected on the past: *What bond from a former life could have brought me to Hachinomiya in the first place? I have known only longing and heartache looking after his daughters ... including the youngest, who met such an unexpected, untimely end. I came to a place where a man lived a truly noble, virtuous life and, guided by the teachings of the Buddha, I vowed to devote myself solely to the life to come. Yet in the end I defiled my heart by the sin of attachment to worldly love. It seems that all the sorrow I’ve experienced has been the Buddha’s way of teaching me the truth that desire is folly.*

Kaoru summoned Ukon. “I’ve never had a clear explanation about the young lady’s state of mind just before she died. Since there are only a few days left in your period of mourning, I had thought to wait until it was over to come here and find out. But because I’m so intensely shocked by her death, I’m unable to calm myself and couldn’t wait any longer. So tell me, what illness could have taken her so quickly?”

Ukon had been planning to cover up the affair with Niou, but several of the women, including the old nun, Bennokimi, had observed Ukifune’s behavior and knew what was wrong. If Kaoru heard from them an account that differed from her own, then her lies would be exposed. Moreover, she was deeply touched as she listened, face-to-face, to Kaoru’s sincere, heartfelt plea. She forgot all the

excuses she had prepared and simply told him exactly how events had unfolded, figuring that, in the end, it would be too complicated and bothersome to do otherwise.

Hearing the stunning, deplorable details, Kaoru was momentarily struck speechless. *I never imagined that such a thing could happen! She was always oddly quiet and reserved, even about matters that people normally have no problem discussing. How could she possibly have conceived of doing such a fearful thing to herself? And to what extent did the women here lie in order to cover up for her?*

His heart was in greater pain and confusion than ever. Still, it was clear that Niou's grief was as genuine as his own. Moreover, his arrival at the villa had prompted an outburst of tears and wailing from all the women, high and low. He took their reaction as proof that their grief was genuine, since he would have seen right through any pretense on their part.

"Did no one else disappear along with her? Tell me exactly what took place. I don't believe she would have rejected the world because she thought that I didn't care for her. What sort of predicament could she have suddenly confronted that led her to do such a thing? And why was it so dire that she could speak to no one about it? It's simply not credible to me."

Ukon felt sorry for him, but she was also perturbed. *It's just as I feared ... he knows.*

"I expect that you've already heard things," she began. "My mistress, who from the beginning had been raised in circumstances not at all to her liking, seemed to have grown despondent at some point after moving to this isolated residence. Although your visits were infrequent, she eagerly looked forward to them. She never spoke directly about it, but it seemed that she was fervently anticipating the time when she would live in comfort and ease at a place closer to you ... a place where she could see you occasionally and find solace for the sorrows of her unfortunate destiny.

"Knowing that her most cherished wish was soon to be realized, those of us who attended her were happily rushing about, getting everything ready for her move. Chūjō no kimi, the wife of the Vice Governor of Hitachi, was also diligently making preparations for the move to the capital, overjoyed that all the dreams she had long held for her daughter were about to come true.

"But then you sent that baffling note to my mistress. At the same time, the watchmen told us that you had severely reprimanded them, apparently for failing to keep an eye on some attendants who were behaving improperly. Those rough, insensitive provincials dealt harshly with us over and over, as if we were under suspicion. After that, we had no word from you for the longest time.

“My mistress was always feeling anxious, convinced from the time she was a child that hers would be a woeful lot in life. She worried that if her relationship with you came to naught and she became an object of ridicule, her mother, who had done everything to make her worthy of respect, would be devastated. Other than that, I can think of no other reason why she considered taking her own life. Had a demon taken her, there would have been at least some trace left behind, but as it is ...” Ukon was now weeping so piteously that Kaoru’s doubts waned, and he was unable to stop the flow of his own tears.

“The prominent place I hold in society,” Kaoru replied, “means that everything I do is in the public eye, making it impossible for me to behave as I would like. Thus, I kept my feelings in check, even at those times when I was most anxious about Ukifune. I thought that once I brought her to a residence closer to me and set her up so that she could live comfortably and not have to pay any heed to what others might think, I could look forward to a long future together with her. She, however, must have taken my cautious behavior as an indication that I did not truly care for her, and I think that she may have grown distant from me and that her affections were divided.

“I did not want to broach the subject at this time, but since there’s no one around who might overhear me, I shall. Her affair with Prince Niou ... when did it begin? When it comes to such liaisons, no matter how outrageous they might be, Niou has a flair for beguiling women and captivating their hearts. It makes me wonder ... did she kill herself in despair because she could not be with him all the time? Speak up. Keep nothing from me.”

Realizing that Kaoru had learned the truth, Ukon felt sorry for all concerned. “No doubt you have heard some cruel rumors, but let me assure you that I, Ukon, was always at my mistress’s side, and so ...” She paused and fell silent, briefly gazing out in reflection.

“I suppose it was inevitable that you would hear about the affair,” she continued. “My mistress had gone into retreat in the Nijō residence of her half sister, the Uji Princess. We were shocked and surprised when Prince Niou barged into her quarters, but we chastised him so severely that he withdrew. Nonetheless, she was frightened by the incident and moved to that peculiar little house on Sanjō where you found her. After that, she figured that Prince Niou would probably hear nothing more about her, and assumed that was the end of it. But somehow he learned of her whereabouts, and during the second month of this year he began corresponding with her. He wrote frequently, but she never gave his letters more than a cursory glance. I and the other attendants told her that she should feel honored by his attentions and that it would be ungracious of her not to respond, and so I believe she sent him a reply once or twice. Apart

from that, I witnessed nothing else."

Kaoru had expected this sort of evasive response, but he felt it would be heartless to interrogate Ukon any further. He sank deep into his own thoughts. *Even though Ukifune found Niou's charms irresistible, it doesn't mean that she necessarily thought of me as inferior. No ... she simply didn't know how to deal with her dilemma. Given her temperament, she was easily susceptible and, under the spell of these nearby waters, drawn to the idea of taking her own life. No matter how difficult or sorrowful her situation, would she ever have sought to cast herself into a deep chasm had I not left her in a place as forsaken as this?*⁸

A tragic destiny bound him to these uncanny waters, and the abhorrence he felt for the river was profound. For years he had traveled back and forth over rugged mountain paths to the abode of the sisters he had loved so dearly. Now, however, the place was synonymous with misery. Even hearing the sound of its name was unbearable.

How ominous it had seemed when the Uji Princess first mentioned Ukifune to him, for she had likened the young lady to a purification doll that one casts away in a river. Still, he remained convinced that Ukifune had died solely because of his own errors in judgment. He was disgruntled that her mother, apparently mindful of her own lowly station in life, had done so little to ensure that the proper rites had been carried out. Now that he had heard the details of Ukifune's last days, he felt sorry for Chūjō no kimi. *How must she be feeling? After all, her daughter, the child of a prince of the blood, was exceptionally well favored. Since she knows nothing about the secret affair with Niou, she likely suspects that an incident occurred between Ukifune and someone close to me—my wife or some relative.*

Ukifune had not died in the villa, and so there was no danger of defilement. Nonetheless, Kaoru had decided that he should not go inside, since the men of his escort, who were unaware of what had happened, would see him and think it odd that he was risking defilement. Instead, he had one of the stands used to prop up the shafts of his carriage brought to him and was sitting on it outside the hinged double doors at the corner of the residence. That did not look very dignified, however, and after a while he moved over to a mat that had been spread out on some moss growing in the shade of a thick grove of trees. He glanced around at the scene. *From now on, whenever I come here, I will know only pain and misery.*

*If I too abandon and let fall to ruin
This tragic old abode, who will remember it
Or yearn for the shade of trees entwined in ivy*

The old ascetic at the mountain temple, having mastered the rules of discipline, had risen to the third rank of priesthood and attained the title of Risshī.⁹ Kaoru summoned him and gave instructions for the memorial services. He also commissioned additional priests to invoke the Holy Name. Concerned that Ukifune had committed a grave sin by taking her own life, Kaoru thought that he must do something to lighten the burden on her soul. He therefore ordered that sutra scrolls and images of the Buddha be dedicated in her memory every seven days. He specified all of this in great detail, and it was dark by the time he set off to return to the capital. At that moment, a thought occurred to him: *If she were still alive, would I be going back tonight?*

Kaoru had a message taken in to Bennokimi, but the old nun would not come out to receive him. She sent back this reply: “Brooding over my sinister fate and loathsome figure, I have grown increasingly feeble-minded and no longer capable of good judgment. I shall just remain here, lying facedown.”¹⁰ Kaoru respected her feelings and did not draw near her quarters to press the matter.

All along the way back to the capital he was filled with remorse that he had not sent for Ukifune much sooner. For as long as the churning rapids were within earshot, those waters roiled his heart. *Such a shocking end ... and no one even searched for her remains. What has become of her? Does she now lie amidst empty shells in some watery depths?*¹¹ He felt helpless.

Chūjō no kimi, who had been defiled by Ukifune’s death, had to exercise extreme caution with the daughter who was about to give birth back in the capital. She couldn’t return to her husband’s home where she normally resided, and so she stayed in temporary lodgings. She found not a moment’s comfort there, however, for she fretted that something terrible might befall her younger child as well. Despite these anxieties, the baby was safely delivered. Still, she could not go to see her grandchild, since it might bring misfortune, and thus she passed the time lost in a daze, giving not a thought to any of her other surviving children.

It was during this tedious period that she received a private letter from Kaoru. Though she was distracted and bewildered, his kind gesture moved her to both joy and sorrow.

I had wanted to send my condolences as soon as I heard about that recent shocking event, but I was so upset that everything seemed dark before my eyes and I couldn’t think straight. Then I realized how you must feel, since you are lost in the much deeper darkness of a parent’s heart. How quickly the days have passed by while I’ve been in this disoriented state. Confronted with the truth of the ephemeral nature of life in this world, I

find myself increasingly unable to find respite from my grief. But if I should survive longer than I expect, you must look upon me as a memento of your daughter and never hesitate to call on me if there is anything I can do for you.

Kaoru's trusted man, Nakanobu, the Senior Assistant Minister of the Treasury, delivered the letter, which was long and detailed. Nakanobu verbally relayed a second message as well: "While I was taking such an easygoing attitude about everything, the New Year arrived, and during that time you must have had difficulty discerning my true intentions toward your daughter. Nonetheless, you may rest assured that from this moment on, I shall never neglect you in any way. In your heart, you may be confident that I will keep that vow. You have other children, and I shall definitely give them my support when they go into service at the palace."

Because she had not had direct contact with the death, she was not required to undergo such a strict period of confinement. Thus, she insisted that Nakanobu at least step inside her temporary abode. "I have not suffered a grave defilement," she reassured him. She then composed her response, weeping as she did:

I lamented the cruelty of having to live on after such a great tragedy, but now I see that there was a reason for having survived. Was it not that I might have these words of comfort from you? Observing my daughter's unhappy situation over the years, I came to accept that the fault lay with my own low status. But then your gracious promise to take my daughter to the capital gave me hope that she would be looked after and her future secured once and for all. Alas, my dreams proved illusory—that they came to naught must be the working of that woeful destiny associated with the villa at Uji. I rejoiced at your kind words, which have extended my life, and when I consider that from now on I must continue to rely upon you, my tears fall in plain sight¹² so that I can no longer see to write any more.

Although the normal sort of reward would have been inappropriate at a time like that, Chūjō no kimi felt that she had to give the messenger something. She placed in a large pouch an exceptionally fine obi sash studded with mottled rhinoceros horn¹³ and a beautifully crafted sword—items that she had originally intended to send with Ukifune as presents to Kaoru on the occasion of the move to the capital—and presented them to Nakanobu just as he was getting into his carriage. She sent a message with the pouch: "It's what my late daughter would have wanted."

"How touching. But she really shouldn't have done it. What good are they now?" Kaoru remarked when he saw the gifts.

"Chūjō no kimi received me in person," Nakanobu reported. "She wept pitifully as we talked about various things. She expressed her deepest gratitude for the kind words you had for her young children, though she seemed rather embarrassed by your offer to help them, since their family lineage is not terribly distinguished. She also wanted to reassure you that she would not say a word about your reason for supporting them, but that she *will* send them to serve you, unworthy though they are. That's the gist of what she told me."

It's true, Kaoru reflected. Treating her children as if they have some special connection to me is not an appealing prospect. Even so, daughters of men as low in status as the Vice Governor of Hitachi have been presented to emperors in the past, have they not? So long as the relationship is destined by karma and the Emperor has true regard for the young woman, has anyone ever censured such an arrangement? There have also been many cases of commoners taking to wife a lowborn woman or a woman who has been married before. People may gossip about Ukifune being the daughter of a Vice Governor, but I knew the truth about her real father from the beginning, and there was certainly nothing in my dealings with her that would have besmirched my reputation. Chūjō no kimi, who is grieving over the loss of her child, should be able to take some solace in the honor bestowed on Ukifune by our relationship. I must make sure she understands that, and I intend to demonstrate my devotion to her daughter by keeping my word to support her other children.

The Vice Governor called on his wife at her temporary abode. He spoke to her while standing outside in order to avoid defilement.

"Why are you staying here at a time like this?" He sounded quite angry. For nearly a year he had been told nothing about where Ukifune was staying or how she was getting along, and so he simply assumed that she was living a miserable existence somewhere. Chūjō no kimi had been planning to inform him as soon as the Major Captain moved Ukifune to the capital. "You see," she was going to crow, "I told you that she would find success in the world!" Now that her life had taken this tragic turn, however, there was no longer any point in keeping the truth from her husband. Weeping and distraught, she explained everything, concluding her account by showing Kaoru's note to him.

The Vice Governor, an obsequious provincial who admired aristocrats and fawned over them, was startled and awestruck by the letter, which he read over and over.

"What a glorious destiny was lost when she died," he remarked at last. "I was once a retainer in the Major Captain's household, but he was such a great and

distinguished nobleman that I was never called to serve in his immediate presence. How wonderful that he should promise to help our children!"

Observing his joy, Chūjō no kimi collapsed in tears, thinking sadly how much brighter their future might have been had Ukifune lived. At that moment, even her husband shed a tear.

Of course, had the young lady lived, the Vice Governor subsequently calculated, it was unlikely that the Major Captain would have treated her as especially dear or important to him. No doubt he feels bad since it was his fault that Ukifune died. I suspect, however, that he's just trying to make amends to console my wife. Truth be told, in this case he probably doesn't care all that much if people at the court criticize him.

As the final memorial rites on the forty-ninth day approached, Kaoru was contemplating Ukifune's fate. Regardless of what she had done, it was no sin to hold services for her, and so he discreetly asked the Risshi to perform them at the temple above the Uji villa. He also had magnificent offerings prepared for the sixty priests who would be taking part. Chūjō no kimi would attend, and she commissioned additional devotions.

Niou made an offering of a silver urn filled with gold. Since it wouldn't do for him to present such an ostentatious gift directly—after all, people would be sure to notice and look askance at it—he sent it to Ukon and had her pretend that she was the one giving the urn. This left people who were not in the know puzzled and talking: "How could she afford to make such a spectacular gift?"

Kaoru sent only his most intimate retainers to assist with the services—though that still made for a large contingent. Even now there were many in his household who were caught off guard by this show of respect.

"How strange," some of them murmured.

"Who could she have been?"

"Why would our lord arrange such impressive last rites for someone we've never even heard of before?"

The Vice Governor attended, acting as the putative father of the deceased and putting on airs as if *he* was the one in charge. People looked on his behavior as bizarre beyond all comprehension.

Now that his favorite daughter had given birth to the Lesser Captain's child, the Vice Governor was absorbed in planning an extraordinary celebration. Sparing no expense, there were very few items that he did not have prepared for the event. He even went to the trouble of providing decorative furnishings from China and Korea. Of course, there are limits to what a man of the Vice Governor's station in life is capable of doing, and it was said that, for all the lavish arrangements he made, the aesthetic effect was jarringly peculiar. Indeed,

when the Vice Governor saw the splendor of the memorial rites that Kaoru had commissioned—services, one must remember, that were planned as a private occasion—he realized that, had Ukifune lived, she would have been destined to occupy a place in society far superior to his own.

The Uji Princess commissioned sutra readings and furnished the meals for the seven priests who served as lectors. By this time, even His Majesty had heard about the relationship between Kaoru and Ukifune, and he thought it a pity that his son-in-law, out of deference to the Fujitsubo Princess, should have kept someone who meant so much to him hidden away from the world.

The sorrow that had overwhelmed both Kaoru and Niou did not fade with time. The loss of Ukifune was especially hard on Niou because it ended their illicit affair at the very moment when his passion was at its most intense. Still, his fickle, capricious nature being what it was, he gradually began to turn to other women to see if he could assuage his grief. Kaoru, on the other hand, lived up to his responsibilities, just as he had promised, and showed every consideration to those Ukifune had left behind. He found it impossible to forget her—though of course he knew it was useless to lament her passing.

Now, the Akashi Empress happened to be at the Rokujō estate at that time. She was dressing in light gray in observance of a period of mourning for her late uncle.¹⁴ Her son, the Second Prince, had been chosen to replace this uncle as the Minister of Ceremonials, and the burdens of his position were so heavy that he was no longer able to visit his mother as regularly as he once had. Her third son, Niou, was feeling sad and bereft, and he had chosen to seek respite at the salon of his older sister, the First Princess, where many lovely noblewomen were in service. Niou harbored a lingering discontent that he had not been able to gaze upon a number of these ladies to his heart's content.

As it so happened, Kaoru had finally managed, after much effort, to initiate a highly secret liaison with one of the First Princess's ladies-in-waiting, a woman of exceptionally lovely features and refined, modest demeanor named Kosaishō. Kaoru considered her an extraordinarily accomplished woman, one who possessed superior talents. Whether plucking a thirteen-string koto or strumming a *biwa* lute with a plectrum, whether writing a letter or speaking in conversation, she always added her own distinctively stylish flair to everything she did.

For several years, Kosaishō had been an object of Niou's desire. He regarded her as a very attractive prospect and, as was his deplorable habit, spoke disparagingly of Kaoru at every opportunity in order to turn Kosaishō against him. She, however, was strong of will and would not give in to his blandishments. Indeed, she was repulsed by Niou's behavior: *Does he really think that I'll just fall head over heels for him like all his other women?*

The sincere, earnest Kaoru couldn't help but take notice. *There's certainly nothing ordinary about her. She's a little different from the others ... special.*

Having observed Kaoru's grief, Kosaishō realized how affected he had been by Ukifune's passing. Unable to contain her overpowering sympathy, she chose a sheet of exceptionally elegant paper and wrote the following:

*Though my heart no less than others' is sensitive
To life's vicissitudes, as one who knows her place
I dare not speak, but in deference fade away*

"If only I could have died in her place ..."

Kaoru was impressed and not at all displeased that she had so accurately gauged what she assumed he must have been feeling in the quiet solitude of a melancholy evening. He replied:

*It has been my wretched fate to be so often
Witness to the truth that nothing lasts in this world
But have I sighed so much that others know as well*

He called on her afterwards to say, among other things, just how happy and grateful he had been to receive her kind words of condolence, which were all the more poignant for having arrived at a moment of sorrow. She was terribly embarrassed to be receiving Kaoru in her private quarters, which were much too humble for a man of such formidable dignity and stature. The partitioned space she was using as her room was narrow and shallow—not at all appropriate for a distinguished visitor, who was forced to sit leaning against a rather shabby-looking door.¹⁵ Nonetheless, she avoided any obsequious behavior that might make herself look too abject, responding to him in a most enchantingly reserved manner.

She certainly has qualities that are superior to Ukifune, Kaoru reflected. *But why would a respectable woman like Kosaishō come into service like this as a lady-in-waiting? I really ought to look after her myself.* Despite these musings, he gave absolutely no outward indication of his private desires.

The Akashi Empress had arranged for the Rite of the Eight Lectures to be held just when the lotus blossoms were at their peak. She had sutra scrolls and images of the Buddha dedicated over the course of five days: the first day in memory of her father, Genji, the second in memory of her adoptive mother, Murasaki, and so on. It was a grand, solemn occasion. Because the most highly revered fifth scroll of the *Lotus Sutra* was read on the evening of the third day,¹⁶ the rites that

night were most spectacular. The chapel was thronged with people, since anyone who had any connection to Her Majesty's ladies-in-waiting attended.

At the conclusion of the final reading on the morning of the fifth day, the sliding doors leading out to the aisle room on the north side of the main hall were removed so that the decorations might be taken down from the chapel and the furnishings replaced. Servants were bustling in and out in order to clean up the rooms, and so the First Princess moved to temporary lodgings in the west passageway. In the interim, her ladies-in-waiting retired to rest after listening to several exhausting days of sermons. This left only a few women to attend the First Princess in the twilight hours.

During the interlude following the rites, Kaoru changed to a less formal outer robe. He had some business he wanted to discuss with the priests who had conducted the ceremony, and so he strolled out toward the fishing pavilion to meet them before they departed. By that time, however, the priests had already withdrawn. Seeing that they were gone, Kaoru decided to move over to the pond to cool himself.

With so few people about, Kosaishō and the others had, for the time being, used only standing curtains in the west passageway to partition off spaces where they might rest while attending their mistress.

Hearing the rustle of silk robes, Kaoru wondered if the First Princess might be in the gallery. He moved closer to a narrow opening between the sliding door panels on the long passageway and furtively peeped inside. What he observed was not at all what one would have expected of the quarters of ladies-in-waiting in service to an imperial princess. The space was bright and open, since the furnishings had all been cleared away, and the standing curtains had been arranged not in a straight line, but at an angle to each other, creating a gap that allowed him to see more or less directly into the interior. Several women—at least three attendants and several page girls—were sitting around some sort of tray on which they had placed a block of ice that they were noisily trying to crack into pieces. They were dressed in a relaxed manner. The page girls had removed their formal outer robes, and the attendants were not wearing the Chinese-style coats normally considered de rigueur when in the presence of someone as distinguished as the First Princess. Yet, to his surprise, the First Princess was there. She had changed into a single white robe of sheer gauze and was holding a piece of ice in her hand, smiling faintly at the fuss her women were making. Her features were beautiful beyond description. It was unbearably hot and uncomfortable that day, and so she had had her luxuriant, cascading hair swept back on the side that happened to be facing toward Kaoru, revealing her profile to him. He had never before seen a face as lovely as hers.

I've seen many beautiful women in my life, he thought, *but none compare to the First Princess.* In her presence, the complexions of the attendants around her came to seem dusky, as though they were made of mud.¹⁷ Fighting to control his passions, he turned his gaze toward the ladies-in-waiting, and one woman in particular caught his eye. Dressed in a diaphanous yellow singlet of raw silk and a pale purple train, she was sitting and fanning herself. He was struck by her elegant figure: *Now that's a woman of exquisite sensibility!*

"You seem to be making yourselves more uncomfortable by struggling with the ice in this heat," this woman said, smiling. "Just leave it ... you have enough already." Her smile in turn gave her eyes an alluring expression. The instant he heard her voice, he knew it was Kosaishō, the woman who had piqued his interest.

With some effort and persistence, the attendants finally managed to break the ice into pieces. Kaoru's attention had been focused on the First Princess and he wasn't really looking at the other women, but at a glance he noticed that some of them had applied pieces of ice to their heads or breasts in a most unsightly manner. In contrast, his special lady, Kosaishō, delicately wrapped some ice in paper and set it before her mistress. The First Princess, however, did not pick it up, but instead held out her pretty, dainty hand and had one of the attendants wipe it off for her.

"I'd rather not hold any more ice," she said. "The piece I have is dripping and getting everything wet." Her voice was so low that it was barely audible to Kaoru, but all the same he was thrilled no end.

Once, when she was still very, very young, he reminisced, and I myself was still naive and inexperienced in the ways of the world, there was an occasion when I caught a glimpse of her.¹⁸ I remember thinking at the time what a radiantly lovely child she is. Since then, I've never heard even the slightest sound that might indicate her presence. By what divine dispensation have I been permitted this view of her now? Are the gods and the Buddha treating me as they always do, arousing desires just to unsettle my heart?

While he quietly stood there, berating himself in this way, his heart in chaos, a lower-ranking attendant who resided on the north side of the west hall came hurrying toward him. She had withdrawn from the First Princess's quarters earlier to take care of some duties that had suddenly arisen and had rushed off without properly closing the sliding doors. Remembering her mistake, she was now in a panic as she imagined the uproar that would ensue if her mistress were exposed to the view of some man. Her heart raced when she spotted Kaoru's informal cloak. Wondering who the man might be, she came straight across the veranda toward him, oblivious to the fact that she was fully exposing herself to

view.

Seeing her approach, Kaoru quickly slipped away to hide: *I'd better not let anyone see me here. Otherwise, I might gain a reputation as a lecher.*

The low-ranking attendant reached the spot where Kaoru had been standing and was distressed by what she saw. *What a disaster! The standing curtains have been set up so that everything is open to view. That man must have been one of the Minister's sons, since a total stranger could hardly have made it this far inside the residence. If word of this gets around, someone is bound to ask who left the doors open, and I'll be in for it. Then again, maybe it'll be all right. His robe and trousers were raw silk and didn't rustle, so it's unlikely that anyone heard him.*

Meanwhile, "That man" was in a state of agitation, engaged in his usual obsessive self-reflection: *Though I wanted to move steadily along the path of devotion and become a holy man, my attachment to my lost beloved led me astray, and I find myself tormented by desire for one lady after another. Had I turned my back on the world long ago when I was calling on Hachinomiya, I'd now be living somewhere deep in the mountains and would never have known this sort of wretched turmoil. Why, after yearning in vain for the First Princess all these years, did I think that it would make any difference if I could see her again? Her status is so lofty that my desire is futile and will bring me only torment and frustration.*

Early the following morning, when the Fujitsubo Princess arose, she seemed especially enchanting to Kaoru. As he gazed at his wife, he was curious, wondering if the First Princess was necessarily superior to her. *They don't really look all that much alike*, he mused. *The First Princess possesses an ineffable radiance that is breathtaking ... but perhaps that's the working of my imagination. Or maybe it's merely an effect of the moment I spied on her.*

"It's certain to be hot today," Kaoru remarked. "You really should try on something cooler. Depending on the occasion, it can be quite elegant to change into something you don't normally wear." Turning to one of the attendants, he added, "Go and tell Daini to prepare a gossamer singlet for your mistress."

The attendants who served the Fujitsubo Princess were delighted that the Major Captain should want to show off his wife, who was just then at the prime of her beauty.

As was his custom, Kaoru retired to his own quarters to perform his devotions. When he returned at noon, he saw that the gauze singlet he had ordered had been draped over the frame of a standing curtain.

"Why haven't you tried it on? I realize that it might be vulgar to wear something so sheer when people are around to see you, but it should be all right

today.”

So saying, Kaoru took the singlet and personally helped his wife put it on. The trousers she was wearing were the same shade of crimson as those worn by the First Princess the day before. Given the elegance of her luxuriant hair and the graceful draping of her robes, she was in no way inferior to her sister and yet, at the same time, there was no true resemblance—was it that women each have their own distinctive look? Disgruntled, Kaoru called for a block of ice and had the attendants break off pieces from it. He took secret delight in taking one and presenting it to his wife.

It's not as though I'm the only one who has ever thought of having a portrait of their love painted so that he could gaze on her, is it? he asked himself. *So how much better is it to have a woman whose relationship to the First Princess makes her the perfect compensation for my longing?* Even so, as he imagined mingling in the company of the women he had seen yesterday and gazing on the First Princess for as long as he wanted, he couldn't help sighing in lament that things weren't exactly as he might have wished.

“Do you ever write to your sister, the First Princess?” he asked.

“When I was residing at the palace, my father encouraged me to write to her,” the Fujitsubo Princess replied, “but I haven’t done so in a very long time.”

“She may have stopped writing because you married a commoner like me. If so, that’s cruel of her. Shall I complain to Her Majesty on your behalf? I’ll tell her that you’re hurt and resentful ...”

“But I’m not resentful! How can you say that? You’re being horrid ...”

“... and I’ll explain to her that you haven’t sent a letter yourself because you have seen how the First Princess looks down on you, as if you were some menial underling.”

Kaoru spent the rest of the day with the Fujitsubo Princess. He then went to the palace the next morning. As always, Niou was there, looking especially dashing in a pale green summer cloak that he wore over a gauze singlet dyed the color of rich clove. Fair of complexion, youthfully handsome, thinner than he had been before Ukifune’s death, Niou was no less alluring than his sister—a true delight to behold. Indeed, his resemblance to the First Princess was so close that it stirred powerful yearnings in Kaoru, whose struggle to control his indecent desire for a woman far above his station became more painful than ever.

Niou had brought with him a large number of illustrations. He had the ladies-in-waiting take most of them to his sister’s chambers and then repaired to her quarters himself.

Kaoru approached the Akashi Empress and spoke to her briefly, praising the

splendor of the Rite of the Eight Lectures and sharing memories of the past and the people they both once knew. As he was perusing the pictures that Niou had left behind, he took advantage of the moment to broach the subject that had brought him here.

“Lately, I’ve been feeling sorry for my Fujitsubo Princess. Having to live at my villa, separated from the lofty heights of the palace, has left her a little downhearted. She hasn’t had a word from the First Princess, and has concluded that your daughter has disowned her now that she’s married to a commoner the likes of me. She’s always moping and gloomy these days, and I think it might cheer her up if she were to receive pictures like these that she could look at from time to time. Of course, it wouldn’t do her much good if I were the one to present them to her ... but perhaps if the First Princess would deign to send them along ...”

“That’s very strange,” Her Majesty replied. “Why would my daughter have disowned your wife? From what I could tell, they apparently exchanged notes now and then when they were living close to one another here. But perhaps, as you say, they stopped communicating once they began living in separate places. In any case, I shall encourage the First Princess to write. That being said, I’m not sure why the Fujitsubo Princess could not send a note to her sister first.”

“How could my wife be the one to initiate an exchange of letters? It would be presumptuous of her. I know that originally you did not count my wife among your relatives, but as your younger brother¹⁹—someone who is permitted to serve in close proximity to you—I would remind you that she is now your sister-in-law, and it would make me very happy if you would consider her part of your family. It hurts me to think that my wife should be rejected on my account, especially since she and the First Princess were once familiar enough to exchange notes.”

In this way, Kaoru pleaded his case, and the Akashi Empress had no inkling of his lascivious ulterior motives. He took his leave and walked along the front veranda of the main hall toward the west side, planning to meet that lady, Kosaishō, with whom he had recently spent the night, and hoping that he might console himself by catching another glimpse of the First Princess. Hearing his approach, the ladies-in-waiting inside the blinds took special care as they prepared to receive him. He was, after all, a nobleman of genuinely magnificent bearing and a paragon of courtly manners.

Some of the Minister’s sons were sitting in the passageway on the west side, chatting about this and that, and so Kaoru sat down in front of the hinged double doors at the corner of the hall.

“I come to the Rokujō estate quite often,” he remarked to the women there,

"but I rarely see the First Princess's women in residence. I feel that somehow much time has passed and that I, unawares, have grown old. From now on, I'll try to work up the nerve to call on you more often." Glancing over at his nephews in the passageway, he added, "Apparently, the young men over there don't think it's appropriate for an old man like me to be pursuing affairs this way."

"If you plan to be on more familiar terms with us in the future," the women replied, "then that must mean you're actually growing younger!"

From what Kaoru could discern upon hearing the rustle of their robes and their witty banter, these women exhibited the same extraordinary sophistication and elegant charm that characterized their mistress. Although Kaoru had no particular reason to be there, he was inclined to tarry, and continued to sit quietly.

The First Princess moved over to the quarters of the Akashi Empress in the main hall.

"Isn't the Major Captain over in your quarters?" Her Majesty asked.

One of the First Princess's attendants, a lady called Dainagon, answered for her mistress. "Yes, I believe he had something he wanted to discuss with Kosaishō."

"When a man of serious disposition like the Major Captain is interested in a lady and wants to speak to her," Her Majesty said, "it can prove painfully awkward if she doesn't have her wits about her. He'll see through any pretense and recognize her true character. Of course, a woman like Kosaishō has nothing to worry about."

Even though Kaoru was her brother, he was so formidably proper that the Akashi Empress felt diffident in his presence and wanted her women to be on their best behavior around him.

"Well, your brother does seem to favor Kosaishō over the others," Dainagon noted. "From what I hear, he has called on her at her private quarters. They have met many times, talking on and on, and he always leaves late at night. Still, I wonder if their relationship is really as intimate as one might expect. Whatever the case, she certainly has a higher opinion of the Major Captain than she does of Prince Niou. In fact, she thinks your son is terribly insensitive and absolutely refuses to respond to his advances." She laughed, and then added, "What a waste! I'm sure not another lady here would pass up a chance to be seduced by him!"

Her Majesty smiled as well. "I, for one, admire Kosaishō for recognizing my son's reprehensible disposition ... though I do wish that somehow he could mend his amorous ways. It embarrasses me to talk about his behavior in front of all

these attendants.”

“Oh, that reminds me,” Dainagon continued. “I recently heard a bizarre story that involved your son. The Major Captain’s love interest—that young lady who just passed away—was evidently the younger sister of the wife Prince Niou keeps at his Nijō villa. Actually, they must have been half sisters, for the wife of the Vice Governor of Hitachi is said to be either her mother or her aunt, I’m not sure which. In any case, your son was evidently calling on this young lady as well, carrying on a clandestine affair with her. The Major Captain must have found out, for he suddenly increased the number of men on watch at the Uji villa in preparation for bringing his lover to the capital. He ordered the men to strictly guard the place and, as a result, Prince Niou was unable to enter the villa on his next secret visit. The story as I heard it is that he was forced to wait outside sitting on his horse and looking a proper fool until eventually he had no choice but to turn back. Soon after that, the young lady disappeared, leaving everyone to speculate that perhaps she really preferred your son. Whatever her reasons, they say she threw herself into the river at Uji. Her nurse and the other women there were left behind to grieve for her, utterly distraught and inconsolable.”

The Akashi Empress was stunned.

“Where did you hear such a story? What a tragic, wretched thing to have happened! Gossip about an incident as peculiar as that usually spreads quickly, but I’ve not heard a word from anyone until now. Even my brother has been silent. Though now that I think about it, he did mention something about how so many members of the family at Uji have passed away before their time, and how sad this fleeting, unpleasant world makes him feel.”

“I know that menial servants are not the most reliable source of information, but I heard the story from a page girl who had been in service at the Uji villa. After the young lady’s death, this girl moved into service at Kosaishō’s family home. Her manner suggested that she was absolutely confident about the accuracy of her story. She reported that the attendants at Uji were desperate to conceal the more disturbing aspects of their mistress’s disappearance, which they considered weirdly frightening. It’s certainly the kind of thing you’d want to keep secret, don’t you agree? It may be that you heard nothing about the incident because the attendants didn’t want to divulge all the details of what happened—not even to your brother, the Major Captain.”

“Tell the page girl that she is not to breathe a word about this matter to anyone else,” Her Majesty ordered. She was now extremely concerned. “That my son would risk ruining his position at court over a sordid love triangle like this ... why, if word got out, people would surely dismiss him as undignified and unworthy of respect.”

Some time later a letter addressed to the Fujitsubo Princess arrived from the First Princess. Kaoru was overjoyed at the sight of the accomplished calligraphy. *How nice it would have been to have received a letter from her much sooner*, he told himself.

At the same time, Her Majesty sent along a large number of fascinating pictures. In return, Kaoru gathered some from his own collection—pictures that were even more diverting than those he had received—and had them sent to the First Princess. One of the most delightfully executed works that he selected was an illustration of a scene from the story of Tōgimi, the son of the Serikawa Major Captain.²⁰ Tōgimi was depicted setting out on an autumn evening in a hopeless, melancholy mood, tormented by unrequited love for his own First Princess. No doubt Kaoru had selected this particular illustration because he saw Tōgimi's situation as analogous to his own.

If only my First Princess would bestow her affection on me the same way that Tōgimi's love did for him. Kaoru was disgruntled with his commoner status.

*At dusk the freezing autumn winds that blow
And bind drops of dew to the leaves of reeds
Pierce the very core of my lovelorn heart*

He wanted to write this poem on the illustration, but he knew that it would prove troublesome if people at the court found out about his affection for the First Princess. Thus constrained, he was unable to give her even the slightest hint of his true emotions.

And what was the end result of all these painful longings? Kaoru was being overwhelmed by the same old obsessions. *Had my beloved not died, would I have ever divided my affections and turned to another woman? Would I have been able to accept His Majesty's proposal when he offered his daughter to me? Would he have even made the offer in the first place had he known there was another woman I cared for so deeply? And when all is said and done, what has been the source of the sorrows and turmoil I've suffered? That Princess at the Uji Bridge.*

Quite apart from this most grievous loss, there was the matter of the younger Uji Princess and the role Kaoru had played in giving her to Niou. His lingering attachment to his rival's wife and the bitterness he felt over his own ill-advised actions were unbearable. They were also unreasonable. What was done was done. He couldn't change things now, and the regrets he felt struck him as completely foolish.

And then there was this recent incident that had brought with it yet another

heartache. Ukifune, whose death came as a dreadful shock to him, was childishly impulsive and thoughtless, and he had resented her shallow judgment and passive, indecisive nature. Yet her attendants told him that she had been distressed by her terrible dilemma and had suffered greatly from a guilty conscience when he stopped writing, as she assumed that his attitude toward her had changed. Still, with all these memories flooding back, she remained dear to him. Mind you, not the kind of woman he would have ever taken seriously as a wife, but one whom he could have considered at the very least a sweet, intimate companion—someone to speak to and pass the time with at his ease.

The moment these thoughts came to him, his resentment of Niou faded and he could no longer think ill of Ukifune either. He spent many, many hours lost in moody reflection: *No, it's not their fault. The blame lies with me ... with my abnormally careless attitude toward worldly affairs.*

Even a man of steady temperament and proper demeanor like Kaoru may be profoundly affected by the sort of relationship he had with Ukifune. For Niou, the suffering was even more intense. He was unable to find consolation, since he had no one who could serve as a memento of the young lady, nor anyone with whom he could speak about the sadness that would not leave him. There was, of course, his Uji Princess. She would commiserate with him, tell him how much the death of Ukifune had affected her. But how could she have had a close relationship with her half sister, since the two of them had met suddenly only a year or so earlier? To make matters worse, Niou felt constrained around his Uji Princess. He simply couldn't tell her everything he wanted to say—how much he yearned for the young lady who had died, or how hard it was to bear such a terrible loss. He once again sent someone to fetch Jijū so that he might unburden his heart.

All of the women at Uji had now scattered, going off to serve elsewhere and leaving Ukon, Jijū, and the old nurse on their own. These three had found it impossible to forget the special affection their late mistress had bestowed upon them. Jijū had come into service later than her two companions, and she was not related to them, but they had all been together for a long time. Throughout her service at Uji, Jijū had always taken comfort in the hope that the unworldly roar of the nearby rapids portended happier times ahead.²¹ Recently, however, that roar had come to sound merely woeful, cruel and frightening to her, and so she left Uji and moved to a strange, run-down residence in the capital.

Niou searched around, and when he found Jijū again, he sent her a message: "You must come into service here."

She appreciated his gracious offer, but in the end she chose to turn him down, worried about the uncomfortable gossip that would arise if she moved to a

household where both lord and lady had such a complicated relationship with her late mistress. She did, however, express an interest in waiting upon the Akashi Empress.

"That would be ideal," Niou responded. "I'll still be able to see you privately as often as I wish, and no one will be the wiser."

Thinking that such an arrangement might alleviate the loneliness and insecurity that assailed her, Jijū sought the help of an intermediary to secure an appointment at the palace. She was not unattractive, and though admittedly of lower status, was respectable enough to be in the imperial presence. Thus, no one complained or criticized the decision to grant Jijū permission to serve Her Majesty.

Kaoru naturally called on the Akashi Empress quite regularly, and each time Jijū saw him she was keenly affected. She had heard that all of the many noblewomen whom Her Majesty had brought to the palace came from the most distinguished families. However, as Jijū got over her initial dazzlement at the splendor of the court and was able to observe the women around her more closely, she concluded that none of them compared favorably to the beautiful young lady whom she had once attended.

While all of these events were taking place, a certain Princess, the daughter of the Minister of Ceremonials who had passed away in the spring, was having a difficult time with her stepmother, the late Minister's principal wife. This stepmother's older brother, a Director in the Imperial Stables, indicated his interest in taking the Princess as a wife. Unfortunately, the Director was a man of rather bland character and mediocre standing, and one would have thought that the stepmother might have been more sympathetic to the plight of a Princess faced with such an unattractive prospect. She, however, gave no consideration at all to what was best for her stepdaughter and promised to give the Princess to the Director.

When the Akashi Empress heard about this situation, she remarked, "What a pity! My late uncle took such care in raising her. Now it seems that all his efforts will go to waste."

The Princess was terribly forlorn and conveyed her distress to her brother, who was then serving His Majesty as a gentleman-in-Waiting. In response, he mentioned Her Majesty's gracious expression of concern and, soon after, arranged for the Princess to become a member of the Akashi Empress's staff. Given her royal lineage, this young lady was an ideal companion for the First Princess, and so she was shown special consideration as a person of high distinction. Of course, there were limits to how deferentially she could be treated, and her appointment as a lady-in-waiting, with the name Miya no kimi,²²

was a touching reminder of her precarious position. Still, she was not required to put on the Chinese-style jacket normally prescribed when serving in the imperial presence, but was permitted to wear only a train over her formal robes.

Even though Niou, who was Minister of War at the time, continued to grieve for Ukifune, he remained incapable of controlling his amorous proclivities and, intrigued by Miya no kimi, was wondering when he could meet the new arrival to his mother's salon. *She might resemble the young lady I lost*, he speculated. *After all, her father and Hachinomiya were brothers.*

Kaoru was more sensitive to Miya no kimi's plight than others at the court. *Having his daughter appointed lady-in-waiting isn't at all what my late uncle had in mind. Until recently, he had been hoping to give her to the Crown Prince. For that matter, he even considered giving her to me. When one observes the sad unpredictability of this world, it's hard to fault Ukifune for deciding to end her life by throwing herself into the depths of that river.*

The residence of the Akashi Empress at the Rokujō estate was much larger, more elegantly appointed and more comfortable than her quarters at the palace. Even those attendants who weren't in constant service to Her Majesty felt more at ease at Rokujō, and thus an enormous retinue would assemble there, filling up all the many far-flung halls, galleries and passageways. Genji's son, the Minister of the Left, spared absolutely no expense to care for everything and everyone at the estate so that the atmosphere was no less lively than in his father's day. If anything, the Minister's large and splendid family had prospered so greatly that the place was even more fashionably up-to-date.

Had Niou exhibited his usual behavior over the past few months, it's hard to say just how many dalliances he might have pursued. Instead, he had been remarkably subdued ... so much so, in fact, that observers wondered if he hadn't matured and mended his ways a little. With the recent arrival of Miya no kimi, however, he reverted to his old amorous inclinations, using all his wiles to win the Princess's affection.

As the cooler season of autumn approached, Her Majesty was considering a move back to the palace. Her younger attendants objected to the idea: "But the foliage in the gardens here will be at its peak, and we won't be able to view it!"

At that time, all of Her Majesty's attendants were gathered around her, enjoying endless diversions, such as boating on the garden ponds or admiring the harvest moon. The entertainments were more stylish and vibrant than usual, and Niou was especially appreciative of them. Even those women who were accustomed to being around him all the time, observing him mornings and evenings, found his appearance as fresh as the first flowers of the season. In contrast, they all felt shy and guarded around Kaoru, whom they weren't used to

seeing, since he rarely joined in their amusements.

One day, just as both men were making their regular appearance before the Akashi Empress, Jijū peeked out at them from behind the blinds. *If only my late mistress had lived, she would have had a glorious future with either one of these men. Her decision to take her own life was dreadfully rash and tragic.* Despite harboring such thoughts, Jijū never let on to anyone that she knew anything about the affairs at Uji. She kept her pain and lingering regrets locked away in her heart.

While Niou was reporting to his mother all that was going on at the palace, Kaoru decided to take his leave. Jijū did not want him to see her there, and so she remained hidden. She was concerned that he might consider her shallow and insensitive for leaving Uji before the period of mourning was over.

A large number of women had congregated just inside the open doors of the passageway leading off the east side of the main hall and were conversing quietly amongst themselves. Kaoru approached them.

“Shouldn’t you all be more intimate and trusting with a lowly man like me? I dare say that no one, not even your compatriots, is as easy to get along with as I am. And, being a man, I have many things to tell you that you might not otherwise learn. It would make me very happy if you could be more understanding and we could gradually become better acquainted.”

As the younger women struggled to come up with a reply, one of the more experienced ladies-in-waiting, Ben no omoto, responded: “That’s all fine and well, but isn’t it the case that the only women who could be unreserved and familiar toward you are those who have no reason to think of you in *intimate* terms, as you put it? At least it seems that’s the way things work in this world. On the other hand, as you see, I’m uninhibited and rather cheeky by nature, and I simply can’t resist your request for companionship ... though that doesn’t mean that I’m necessarily seeking an intimate relationship with you.”

“What a shame that you’ve decided there’s no reason to feel shy around me,” Kaoru retorted. Glancing inside the passageway, he could see that Ben no omoto was dressed casually. She had removed her Chinese-style jacket and pushed it aside—perhaps in preparation for practicing calligraphy at her leisure? She was apparently toying with some sprigs of flowers that were lying on the lid of her open writing box. Some of the women had retreated behind standing curtains, while others were sitting with their backs toward the doors so as not to expose their faces to view.

Kaoru looked around, delighted by the lovely contours of the women’s heads. He pulled an inkstone over and composed the following:

*Though I may mingle among the maidenflowers
That grow wild on the moors, they have yet to drench me
In those wanton dews that would ruin my good name*²³

He showed his poem to a woman sitting nearby with her back to the sliding doors. Calmly, without so much as shifting her position, she immediately replied to Kaoru:

*When people speak of blossoms, the maidenflower
Is known for wantonness, but would it lose itself
In passionate desire for any common dew*

Kaoru could see only a small portion of the poem the woman had written, but from what little he could see, her calligraphy had a noble refinement. He gazed at her, wondering who she was. Judging from her appearance, she must have been heading over to Her Majesty's quarters, but he was blocking her way by sitting outside the doors of the passageway.

"How uninteresting," Ben no omoto said to Kaoru. "Your poem sounds exactly like something an old man past his prime might have composed."

*Just once you ought to try sleeping out on the moors
Amidst maidenflowers in full bloom, to find out
Whether or not their hues might color your desires*

"Only then will we be able to judge just how upright a gentleman you really are!"

Kaoru replied:

*If you will but grant me lodging, I shall
Lie here this one night ... though my heart cannot
Be colored by any common blossom*

"Really now," Ben no omoto said, "you insult us. My allusion to 'the moors' was general and not meant to suggest anything else."

Although Kaoru was merely bantering, the women nonetheless wanted to hear more from him.

"I'm afraid I've imposed upon you by sitting here," he said. "I really should be going. From the look of things, your suitors will no doubt be arriving soon, and then all of you will have good reason to feel shy."

As he was leaving, some of the women were bothered, imagining that he must

have concluded that they were all as open and forward as Ben no omoto.

Kaoru went out to the veranda on the east side of the main hall and leaned against the railing. Bathed in the fading light of dusk, he looked around the garden at the clusters of grasses and flowers that were opening up in full bloom. Moved by the poignant scene before him, he quietly murmured a line from a poem by Bai Juyi: “It is the autumn sky that most stirs the soul to melancholy.”²⁴ At that moment, he heard the rustling of silk robes as the woman he had exchanged poems with a little earlier moved from the passageway through the sliding doors leading into the central chambers of the main hall.

Niou walked out onto the veranda as the woman was passing by.

“Who just entered the main hall?” he asked.

“That’s Chūjō no omoto, a lady in service to the First Princess,” one of the attendants answered.

Kaoru was annoyed and felt sorry for Chūjō no omoto. *It’s unpardonable for anyone to be so careless as to reveal the name of a lady to a man whose amorous interest is easily aroused.* He was also jealous that the attendants seemed to be on more intimate terms with Niou. *Women apparently have a weakness for his kind of passionate, impetuous behavior. It makes me sad to think that my relationship with him and his sister, the First Princess, has brought me only pain and misfortune.* How sweet it would be to seduce one of these extraordinary women, someone Niou, in his usual fashion, has fallen madly in love with, and have him suffer the same torments of longing that I’ve experienced! *Shouldn’t a lady who is truly prudent and sensitive be attracted more to me than to Niou? Yet how hard it is to find women of such refined sensibility!*

Of course, there’s the Uji Princess. She realizes that her husband’s behavior is inappropriate, and while she’s troubled that our awkward, increasingly close relationship might give rise to hurtful gossip, she still acknowledges me as someone she cannot abandon. Such tenderness is rare and deeply moving. Out of all the ladies here, is anyone as kindhearted as she is? Since I don’t have much experience coming to these quarters, I have no way of knowing. Perhaps if I tried to be a little more passionate and pursued a dalliance to fill those idle hours when I cannot sleep ... Such were his thoughts, but, for now, he could not bring himself to act on them.

Unaccountably, Kaoru went out of his way to go over to the passageway on the west side of the main hall, just as he did that earlier time when he caught a glimpse of the First Princess. Because she was spending the night in her mother’s quarters, it was an opportunity for her women to relax and chat in this passageway as they were ostensibly taking in a view of the moon. The warm

strains of a thirteen-string koto were inviting.

Kaoru abruptly drew near the blinds. "Why do you tease and tempt a man with your music and not show yourself?"

Although the women were startled, they made no effort to lower the blinds, which were partially raised. One of them came forward and replied, "Do you assume that I also have an older brother who resembles me?"²⁵ From the sound of her voice, Kaoru recognized that the lady was the one they called Chūjō no omoto.

"Ahh, but I *am* a maternal uncle," Kaoru replied playfully. "It appears that your mistress is, as always, staying with her mother. What's she been doing all this time at the family estate?" It was an impudent question.

"Nothing special, really. It's the same whether she's in residence here or at the palace. It seems that she passes her days in exquisite diversions like playing the koto," Chūjō no omoto said.

Such are the delightful privileges of rank, Kaoru mused. Forgetting himself for a moment, he sighed unconsciously, but then, realizing that the women might find his reaction suspicious, he tried to distract their attention by pulling over a six-string Japanese koto and playing it just as it was. Had the instrument been tuned to a mode inappropriate to the moment, it would have sounded strange and offputting. Luckily, as it turned out, the instrument was set in the *richi* mode, a minor key whose melancholy tones were perfectly suited to the autumn. Kaoru's performance was skilled, but he did not finish the song, leaving those ladies who were avid connoisseurs of music feeling devastated that he had stopped halfway through the piece.

Is my mother's status in any way inferior to the First Princess's? They are both daughters of an Emperor. The only thing separating them is that the First Princess's mother is an Empress and not a Consort. Still, Emperor Suzaku favored my mother every bit as much as His Majesty now favors his eldest daughter. It's mystifying, then, that the First Princess should enjoy a much higher degree of respect and admiration. The bay at Akashi must be an astonishingly blessed place.

With these thoughts running through his head, Kaoru pondered his own destiny. *To have received the Fujitsubo Princess as my wife was a tremendous honor, but how much greater would my fortunes be if somehow I could have the First Princess as well!*

Such an aspiration, however, was far too great for him, was it not?

Miya no kimi's quarters were in the west hall. From the sound of things, many younger attendants had gathered there and were taking great delight in viewing the moon. It occurred to Kaoru that Miya no kimi shared the same imperial

lineage as his mother and the First Princess, and he felt sorry for her. Recalling that her father had once considered him a potential bridegroom, he took that memory as a pretext for making his way over to the west hall.

Two or three page girls came strolling out in the charming robes they used when serving their mistress at night. As soon as they noticed the Major Captain approaching, they felt embarrassed at being exposed to his gaze and retreated back inside. Kaoru considered their reaction typical of girls that age.

He moved toward the room at the southeast corner of the hall and coughed gently to announce his presence. One of the slightly older attendants came out to receive him.

“If I were to tell you,” Kaoru began, “that I have been a secret admirer of your mistress, would I end up sounding like some callow youth who spouts the same old phrases that every gallant uses? If so, then I must find words other than ‘I long for you’²⁶ in order to express my feelings, for my attraction to her is quite sincere.”

Instead of passing the message on to her mistress, the attendant assumed a knowing air and took it upon herself to reply: “Well, whenever I think about the utterly unexpected situation my lady now finds herself in, I can’t help but be reminded of the fact that her late father once considered asking you to accept her as your wife. I’m certain that she will be overjoyed to hear these words hinting of your devotion, which you appear inclined to express like this from time to time.”

Kaoru was disgruntled, feeling that the attendant was dealing with him as if he were just some ordinary suitor. “Given the relationship we share by virtue of our families, she simply cannot dismiss me. Now that she’s in service to the First Princess, I would be even more delighted if she would agree to rely on me for support whenever it’s appropriate. If, however, she continues to rely upon an intermediary, which, I must say, is coldly offputting, then I’m afraid I won’t be able to do anything for her.”

Acknowledging the justice of his complaint, the flustered attendant went back in and apparently pressed her mistress to be more forthcoming, for Miya no kimi now spoke to Kaoru directly in a tender, charmingly youthful voice.

“Though I spend my days in lonely reverie, thinking that ‘even the ageless pines of Takasago are not the same companions of old,’²⁷ our family connection, of which you spoke, gives me reason to think that I can trust in you.”

If he had thought of her as just an ordinary lady-in-waiting residing in these quarters, he would have been altogether captivated by her reply. But she was a Princess, and it pained him to realize that, under her current circumstances, she must have grown accustomed to allowing men to hear her voice like this, even if

only briefly. Judging from her voice and movements, he imagined that she was fair of face, and he very much wanted to get a look at her. It amused him to think that she would likely send Niou into another of his usual lovesick frenzies. At the same time, he sat there reflecting on how hard it was in this world to find a woman like her.

Here she is, a Princess brought up with the greatest care by a father of boundless distinction. No doubt, there are many others just like her. What I still find astounding is the perfection of the two princesses who were brought up in that mountain villa under the care of their saintly father. Perhaps more amazing, in the brief time I had with Ukitune, I saw traces of that same ideal grace, despite her capricious, thoughtless temperament.

No matter what, Kaoru's thoughts always seemed to return to that household at Uji. As he was obsessing over the mysterious bonds he had once shared with each member of that family, all of which had ended in cruel heartbreak, his attention was drawn to delicate-looking dayflies flitting about in the twilight.

*I see them here, impalpable, elusive
But when I look again, they have disappeared
These ephemerids, vanished I know not where*²⁸

It is said that Kaoru, as was his wont, murmured this poem to himself, and then added, “Were they there, were they not there?”²⁹

¹ The first section of the first volume of *Sanbōe* (*Illustrations of the Three Jewels*, completed in 984 by Minamoto Tamenori), which is titled “The Perfection of Charity,” tells the story of how Indra tests the compassion of a king named Śibi. Indra transforms into a hawk and orders his lieutenant, Viśvakarman, to turn into a dove. The dove takes refuge inside Śibi’s robes, and the hawk demands that the king return its prey. Śibi sacrifices his body for the dove and dies. Realizing that the compassionate Śibi is a bodhisattva, Indra resurrects and heals him.

² Death and illness were believed to be defiling. To avoid the bad effects of defilement, it was customary to remain standing when speaking with someone from a household where a death had occurred, usually separated by blinds or screens (or kept outside, as in this case). This custom is depicted at several points in the narrative. See, e.g., the conversation between Genji and Tō no Chūjō in the *Yūgao* chapter.

³ See, e.g., *Tales of Ise*, section 6.

⁴ *Hakushi monjū* 160. This line from Bai Juyi is cited earlier, in the *Azumaya* chapter.

⁵ *Kokinshū* 855 (Anonymous): “O cuckoo, if you travel to the abode of the one who has died, tell her that I spend all my days weeping aloud for her.”

⁶ It was believed that the cuckoo traveled back and forth between the realms of the living and the dead. The word for the cuckoo’s quiet call, *shinobine*, has an alternative meaning, “to cry out in secret (grief).” The master/overseer of rice paddies (*taosa*), a mythic figure in Japanese folklore, was another name for the

cuckoo, which migrated back at planting time. In Kaoru's complex allusive variation, however, *taosa* refers to Ukifune. *Kokinshū* 1013 (Fujiwara no Toshiyuki): "How many fields does he tend, the cuckoo who calls out morning after morning to announce that he, the master of the rice paddies, has arrived?" See also *Shūishū* 1307 (Ise): "O cuckoo, you who have come across the mountains from the realm of the dead, did you speak with the one for whom I yearn?"

⁷ *Kokinshū* 139 (Anonymous): "The fragrance of the orange blossoms awaiting the fifth month brings to mind the perfumed sleeves of a lover from long ago" (alluded to earlier in the *Hanachirusato* chapter).

⁸ *Kokinshū* 1061 (Anonymous): "If I were to cast myself away each time I suffer the woes of this world, even a deep chasm would soon grow shallow as it filled!"

⁹ *Risshi* were appointed by the government to act as instructors in the rules of discipline for other priests and nuns.

¹⁰ *Kokinshū* 1068 (Anonymous): "Turning my back on this hateful world, I draw near the foot of a tree to take shelter, lying face down in these dark gray robes." The poem plays on the word *utsubushizome*, which means "dyed a dark gray," but which also contains the element *utsubushi*, "to lie facedown."

¹¹ *Man'yōshū* 224 (Yosami no otome, on the death of her husband, the poet Kakinomoto Hitomaro): "Do they not say that you, for whom I wait day after day, now lie amidst the empty shells in the depths of the Ishikawa River?"

¹² *Gosenshū* 1333 (Minamoto no Wataru): "That tears of uncertainty, of not knowing what the future holds, are sorrowful is due simply to the fact that they fall in plain sight" (alluded to earlier in the *Suma* chapter).

¹³ An *obi* that was studded with gemstones or other precious materials would normally have been worn by someone of the fourth or fifth rank and thus not appropriate for Kaoru. However, the rarity of rhinoceros horn would have made the gift suitable. A similar exception is depicted in the *Momiji no ga* chapter: Genji's father-in-law, the Minister of the Left, presents him with a famous gem-studded leather obi sash when he is promoted to the third rank.

¹⁴ The death of this uncle is mentioned above in connection with Kaoru, who also wears the prescribed light gray robes, but does so in secret memory of Ukifune.

¹⁵ The door is called a *yarido* in the original. This small detail is worth noting because this rustic, humble style of door is mentioned earlier (in the *Azumaya* chapter) as a feature of the small house where Ukifune is in hiding from Niou. This mention of the *yarido* in *Azumaya* added a romantic element to the scene in which Kaoru makes his impulsive decision to take Ukifune off to Uji. Given Kaoru's restless penchant to try to resurrect lost loves, the parallel drawn between Kosaishō and Ukifune here is not accidental.

¹⁶ A more complete description of this ceremony and the contents of the fifth scroll are provided in the *Sakaki* chapter.

¹⁷ This description is possibly an allusion to a line in Bai Juyi's *Song of Everlasting Sorrow*.

¹⁸ Kaoru's glimpse of the First Princess is mentioned earlier in passing in the *Shiigamoto* chapter in connection with the first time he spied on the older and younger Uji Princesses. He is struck in particular by the resemblance between the younger Uji Princess and the First Princess. The echo of that obsessive attachment here is noteworthy.

¹⁹ It must be remembered that Kaoru is not in fact the brother of the Akashi Empress. Only a few people, including Kaoru, know the secret of his paternity, and this ongoing deception colors how we read his actions.

²⁰ This tale has been lost, but it is mentioned in other sources of the period, including *Sarashina nikki*, where it is referred to as *Serikawa monogatari*. The son, Tōgimi, eventually rises to the position of Major Captain himself and, like Kaoru, falls in love with a First Princess.

²¹ *Gosenshū* 612 (Tachibana no Toshinaka): "I wonder, as I dare to set out on this river of tears, will its turbulent waters flow into calmer, happier shallows?"

²² The name Miya is an acknowledgment of this young lady's imperial lineage.

²³ *Kokinshū* 229 (Ono no Yoshiki): "If I were to spend the night lodging on moors covered with maidenflowers, would I not frivolously ruin my reputation?"

²⁴ *Hakushi monjū* 790.

25 Kaoru's statement and Chūjō no omoto's response both allude to lines from a Tang period story, *You xian ku* (*Dwelling of the Playful Goddesses*) by Zhang Zhuo (ca. 660–ca. 740). The text of this erotic tale was lost in China, but copies of it survived in Japan. The male protagonist of the story is attracted to the dwelling of a beautiful goddess who is said to resemble her maternal uncle and her older brother. Chūjō no omoto's remark implies that she suspects Kaoru of having an interest in the First Princess, who looks like her brother, Niou. Kaoru's bantering response suggests that he gets the implication, since he is the putative uncle of the First Princess.

26 *Kokin rokujō* 2640 (Anonymous): "How I wish I had words other than 'I long for you' that I might tell you specially that you are the only one I love."

27 *Kokinshū* 909 (Fujiwara Okikaze): "Who can I call my friend ... even the ageless pines of Takasago are not the same companions of old" (alluded to earlier in the *Matsukaze* chapter).

28 *Kokin rokujō* 825 (Anonymous): "I realize that life is ever unknowable, as impalpable as ephemeralids ... I see them there, but find it hard to trust my eyes." *Kokin rokujō* 828 (Anonymous): "Though I try to catch it, your heart remains ever elusive, as mercurial and intangible as ephemeralids."

29 *Gosenshū* 1191 (Anonymous): "In this world, all things, even our sorrows and tribulations, are as insubstantial as ephemeralids and soon vanish, leaving us to ask, were they there, were they not there?" *Kokin rokujō* 820 (Anonymous): "Things of this world are as fleeting and insubstantial as ephemeralids ... are they there, are they not there?"

LIII

Tenarai

Practicing Calligraphy

IN THOSE days, there was an exceptionally pious priest residing at Yokawa on Mount Hiei¹—a certain bishop whose name slips my mind. He had a mother who was over eighty years old and a younger sister who was in her fifties. Both of these women had become nuns, and together they undertook a pilgrimage to Hatsuse in fulfillment of a long-standing vow they had made to Kannon. Their traveling party included one of the bishop's closest and most highly regarded disciples, an ascetic who accompanied them in order to perform the dedication of sutras and images of the Buddha.

After completing numerous acts of devotion, they started for home. Unfortunately, just as they were crossing the hills on the slope of Narasaka, the mother fell ill. Her condition caused tremendous apprehension among the attendants, who worried that their mistress might not be able to complete her pilgrimage. Thinking it best to rest for a day, the party stopped in the vicinity of Uji at the house of an acquaintance of the bishop. But then the old woman took a turn for the worse, and a messenger was immediately dispatched to Yokawa.

His Holiness had made a firm vow to remain in retreat for the year and not leave Mount Hiei. Nonetheless, he rushed to his aged mother's side, disturbed by the possibility that she might die on the road.² Although his mother had lived such a long life that there would have been no need to feel any special regret about her passing, the bishop himself, along with his most efficacious disciples, raised a tremendous clamor as they performed healing rites.

The master of the house where they were lodging listened to this uproar with a worried expression: *What effect will the defiling presence of an ill, very old woman have as I purify myself in preparation for a pilgrimage to Mitake? What if she should die here?*

Upon hearing these concerns, the bishop recognized that his host had good reason to be anxious, and he felt sorry for being such an imposition. Moreover, the house was quite small and inconvenient. For these reasons, he decided that he would move his mother little by little whenever she felt well enough to travel. His plan, however, was thwarted when he learned that the direction to his mother's house was prohibited to them, blocked by the presence of the Middle Deity. He then remembered that an old imperial villa formerly used by the late Emperor Suzaku was nearby, just north of the Uji River.³ Since His Holiness knew the steward who oversaw that estate, he sent a note requesting permission to stay there for a day or two.

"The steward and all the members of his household left yesterday on a pilgrimage to Hatsuse," reported the messenger, who had brought back with him the caretaker of the villa, an eccentric, ragged-looking old man.

"Yes, that's right," the caretaker affirmed. "The main hall is empty at the moment, so you must come right away before anyone else arrives. You see, pilgrims are always stopping by to lodge there."

"That sounds perfect," the bishop replied. "I know it's an imperial residence, but if no one is using it right now, we'll be able to rest at our leisure."

His Holiness sent some members of the party to inspect the site. The old caretaker was accustomed to looking after people who needed lodging, since visitors arrived regularly, and so he had already arranged to have plain and simple furnishings set out for the guests. The bishop then made his way over to the villa ahead of his mother and sister. The place had fallen into disrepair, and when His Holiness observed its frighteningly eerie atmosphere, he ordered his most saintly disciples to begin chanting sutras. The ascetic and one other disciple—a priest of equal rank and eminence—expressed their concern that something uncanny might happen in such a setting. Both men had experience with situations like this, and so they ordered the lighting of torches, a task they assigned to some lower-ranking monks whose burly appearance made them the appropriate choice for driving off lingering spirits.

The monks took up their torches and immediately set off to inspect the grounds behind the main hall, a neglected spot that people rarely approached. Warily peering into an eerie stand of trees that resembled a sacred grove at a shrine, they spotted something white amidst the undergrowth.

"What could that be?" The party froze in its tracks. Raising their torches higher, the men could make out the seated figure of a young lady.

"It must be a fox spirit in human form. Abhorrent creature! I'll make it show its true shape," one of the monks said, taking a few steps closer to the figure.

"Don't be rash! It could be a malevolent spirit," warned another who, just to

be safe, was keeping his eyes fixed on the strange apparition and displaying the mudra⁴ used to ward off evil. Had there been any hair on his head, he felt sure it would have been standing on end.

The fearless monk was undeterred, however, and moved closer to the strange figure to get a better look. It was a young lady with long, lustrous hair leaning against the thick gnarly roots of a tree. She was weeping most piteously.

"This is passing strange," he said. "I should like for His Holiness to have a look."

"Yes, indeed ... exceedingly weird," replied one of his companions, who hurried off to inform the bishop of the unearthly discovery.

"I have long heard of fox spirits taking on human form, but I've never witnessed such a thing personally." So saying, the bishop left the main hall with the express intent of investigating the matter himself.

The bishop's mother and sister were now on their way to the villa, and the menial servants were busy tending to their responsibilities in the kitchen and living quarters as they hastened to make preparations for the arrival of their guests. As a result, the area behind the main hall remained deserted except for the four or five monks who were keeping an eye on the strange creature. They observed no change in its condition. Hours passed as they watched in doubtful wonder.

It will soon be dawn, and finally we shall see if it's human or something else. With that thought in mind, they recited the proper incantations in their hearts and formed the correct mudras. While they were doing so, the true nature of the creature became evident to the bishop.

"It's not a fox spirit, it's a young woman. She's human. Approach her and find out her name. She's obviously not dead. Probably someone left her body here thinking she had passed away, and she revived after they left. That must be what happened here, wouldn't you agree?"

"Why would anyone abandon a woman like this at an imperial villa?" one of the monks asked.

"Even if she *is* human, maybe she was bewitched by a fox spirit or wood sprite and tricked into following it here," suggested another.

"Either way, this is most unfortunate. Her presence defiles this place, and your mother is just about to arrive."

The monks shouted for the caretaker. The echoing of their voices was eerily disturbing.

The disheveled old man emerged from the main hall, pushing the unkempt hair on his forehead back up under his cap.

"Does a young woman live close by? Look at what we've found," one of the

monks said, pointing to the young lady.

“Must be the work of a fox,” the caretaker replied. “Queer things happen from time to time in this grove. Why, just the year before last, in the autumn, a fox took a little child who lives on the estate ... barely two years old, mind you ... and left him in these woods. Nothing to be shocked about, really.”

“Did the child die?”

“No, no, he’s fine. Foxes like to alarm folks, but they don’t do any real harm.” The caretaker seemed utterly nonchalant about the matter, as if being bewitched by a fox spirit was the most natural thing in the world. Apparently, he was more preoccupied with preparing food for all the visitors who had arrived in the middle of the night.

“In that case,” the bishop said, “we’d better check again to see if that’s what befell this young lady.”

The fearless monk who had confronted the apparition earlier approached once again and began tugging on one of the sleeves of the young lady’s robes.

“Be you demon or deity, be you fox or woodland sprite, you cannot hope to conceal your identity in the presence of these most eminent priests. Announce yourself! Tell us your name!”

The woman buried her face in her sleeves and wept all the harder.

“Come now, insolent sprite or demon! Do you really think you can keep your true shape hidden?”

Though he was determined to get a better look at her face, the monk was steeling himself just in case this was one of those female demons with no eyes or nose that he had read about in ancient tales. Still, he felt that he had to put on a brave front with the bishop watching him, and so he tried to pull the woman’s sleeves back. Whereupon she threw herself facedown, sobbing loudly.

The intrepid monk remained convinced that anything so unusual and suspicious could not be a creature of this world and that it would be best for them to continue observing it to see if any transformation took place. However, the weather was changing and there was no time for that. “A heavy storm is coming,” he said. “If we leave the creature here like this, it will surely die and defile the residence. We should drive it away, outside the enclosure.”

“She’s obviously human,” the bishop reassured him, “and it would be cruel to knowingly abandon her while she’s alive. After all, it’s natural for us to feel bad if we do nothing to help the fish that swim in the lakes or the deer that cry in the mountains when such creatures have been caught and are about to die. Human life is all too fleeting as it is, and so even if this young lady is destined to survive only a day or two more, we shouldn’t begrudge her the time she has left. Perhaps a god or a demon possessed her, or maybe she was driven from her home, or

deceived by someone plotting against her. Whatever the case, even if it seems that she's fated to die in this strange, pathetic manner, the Buddha would certainly show mercy to one in her situation. It is our duty to do no less. At the very least, we must try to help her. Give her medicinal infusions for a while. If she passes away after that, then I suppose there's not much more we could have done for her."

The bishop ordered the ascetic to pick up the young lady and carry her inside the villa. Some of the monks objected: "But Your Holiness ... that's out of the question. To take a foul creature like this inside the villa will surely have a baleful effect on your mother, who's suffering enough as it is."

Others showed greater sympathy: "But if she *has* been bewitched by a shapeshifter, then it would be a grave sin to leave a living being out in this rain and allow her to pass away before our very eyes."

The menials would have raised a tremendous fuss and said all sorts of crude things had the monks brought the young lady into the main hall, and so they laid her down in an inconspicuous corner where people wouldn't be bustling in and out.

The carriages bearing the bishop's mother and his sister arrived at the villa. As soon as the women alighted, a clamor arose when, to everyone's alarm, it was discovered that the mother was feeling worse as a result of the strain of the journey. Only after things had settled down did the bishop turn his attention once more to the young lady.

"How's she doing?"

"Lethargic and unresponsive," one of the monks reported. "She doesn't even seem to be breathing at times. It's as if she's been possessed by a malevolent spirit and is no longer aware of herself or her surroundings."

"What are you two talking about?" asked the bishop's sister, who had overheard their conversation.

"I've witnessed many strange occurrences in my lifetime," the bishop answered, "but in all my sixty-plus years, this has to be one of the most unusual I've ever encountered."

Tears came to the nun's eyes as she listened to her brother explain what had happened.

"When we were staying at the temple in Hatsuse," she said, "I had a dream about a young lady. Could you describe this woman to me? May I see her?"

"By all means, go to her at once," the bishop replied. "She's resting just beyond the sliding doors on the east side."

The nun hurried over and peeked into the room. There wasn't a servant in sight. A woman was lying there, alone and abandoned. She seemed very young,

but exuded an air of refined beauty. Dressed in crimson trousers over a singlet of white damask that was suffused with an ethereal scent, her appearance gave the impression of boundless grace and nobility.

"Why ... she's the very image of my late lamented daughter," the nun gasped. Unable to stop her tears, she summoned her attendants and had them pick up the young lady and carry her to chambers further inside the villa. Of course, the attendants could not tell just by looking what tribulations this woman had endured, and so they carried out the nun's orders without fear or hesitation.

The young lady appeared to be lifeless, but then she opened her eyes ever so slightly.

"Say something," the nun implored. "Tell me who you are and how you ended up like this."

The young lady was silent. It seemed as though the nun's words were incomprehensible to her.

The nun picked up a cup containing a medicinal infusion and, with her own hands, tried to get the patient to drink. The lady, however, did not have the strength to take the medicine and seemed to be on the verge of breathing her last.

At that moment the nun turned in desperation to the saintly ascetic. "This infusion is no use. Her condition is worse than ever. She's going to die if we don't do something. Please, please perform a healing rite for her!"

"This is exactly what I was worried about," the ascetic replied. "I advised His Holiness against getting involved with such a strange and hopeless case." Despite these misgivings, the ascetic began chanting the *Heart Sutra* in order to appease the local deities before he commenced with the healing rites.⁵

The bishop stuck his head in and asked again, "How is she doing? Try to find out what sort of spirit is possessing her so that we may exorcise it."

The young lady was extremely weak, and it looked as if she might expire at any moment. "I don't think she'll last much longer," one of the attendants remarked.

"What a nuisance. If she dies, then we'll have to go into retreat. And all because of an unexpected defilement," grumbled another.

"You're right. It really *will* be a nuisance. What's more, she looks like she comes from a distinguished noble family, so even after we know for sure that she's dead, we won't be able to dispose of her body right away!"

"Be still," the nun scolded, "and make sure that no one hears about this matter! Any kind of gossip about this is bound to stir up trouble."

The nun kept constant vigil and was so preoccupied by her desire to save the young lady that she seemed to others to be more concerned about the threat to the well-being of a stranger than she was about the illness afflicting her own

mother. Still, even though the young lady was an outsider, she was so extraordinarily beautiful that all of the attendants who saw her thought it would be terrible to just let her die. So moved, they fussed over her, doing all they could to be of assistance.

Weak as she was, she managed to open her eyes from time to time. Whenever she did, an endless stream of tears would pour forth.

"Ahh ... how heartbreaking," cried the nun. "I believe the Buddha has brought you to me as a replacement for the beloved daughter whose death I continue to mourn. If you should die as well and this all comes to naught, then our chance encounter will have left me with nothing but one more bitter, painful memory. We must have been destined to meet. Perhaps we share a bond from a previous life. Please ... won't you at least speak to me a little?"

The nun continued to plead in this fashion until, finally, the young lady replied in a thin whisper: "I may have survived, but I'm a woman of no importance, and my life is worthless. Don't let anyone else see me. This evening, after darkness falls, throw me back into the river."

"You've uttered hardly a word to me since you were brought here, and so I suppose I should be thrilled to hear your voice. But what fearful things you say! Whatever could possess you to speak like that? And how did you come to be in those woods behind the villa?"

The young lady did not respond. The nun examined her body, looking for wounds or any sign of strange anomalies. Finding nothing out of the ordinary, she was at once shocked and saddened by the sight of such unblemished beauty, for it caused her to have doubts about the young lady, who might truly be a shape-shifter come to bewitch people and lead their hearts astray.

The bishop's party remained in retreat at the villa for two full days, and the unceasing reverberation of voices chanting prayers and healing rites for the two afflicted women left everyone on edge and feeling uneasy about the strange, suspicious events that had occurred.

A number of peasants living in the vicinity of the villa had once been in service to the bishop. When they learned that His Holiness was staying there, they came to pay their respects and express condolences for his mother's illness.

As the bishop was listening to them prattle on and on about trivial, everyday matters, one of the peasants offered an apology to him: "We're sorry that we couldn't be of service to you earlier, but you see, Lady Ukifune, a daughter of the late Prince Hachinomiya, died suddenly, without any prior indication that she was ill. Well, this lady was being courted by the Major Captain of the Right, and so I can assure you that her death caused quite a stir. We were so busy yesterday taking care of the funeral arrangements that we couldn't get away to see you

until now.”

The man’s story got the bishop to thinking about the young lady who had been found in the grove behind the villa: *Is it possible that a demon snatched the soul of Hachinomiya’s daughter and brought it here? Similar cases have been known to occur in the past.* His doubts were prompted by his observations over the past couple of days, for no matter how often he checked in on her, he never got the sense that she was really alive. There was something alarmingly sinister about her that greatly disturbed him—a precarious, ephemeral quality, as if she might suddenly disappear.

Several people questioned the peasant’s story: “But the smoke and flames we observed last night didn’t seem big enough for a proper funeral pyre.”

“The rites were kept simple on purpose,” the man explained. “If you ask me, it wasn’t much of a ceremony.” The peasants, who had been defiled by their proximity to death, were kept standing outside and were eventually sent away.

Some in the bishop’s party began to gossip among themselves.

“The Major Captain was once enamored of Hachinomiya’s eldest daughter, but she passed away several years ago. I wonder who that menial could have been referring to?”

“Now that the Major Captain has wed the Fujitsubo Princess, do you really think it likely that he would give his heart to another woman?”

With his mother’s condition improving and the direction toward her home no longer prohibited, the bishop decided that the party should make its way back, especially given how awkward it was to remain any longer in such a dreary, haunted place.

Several people wondered aloud about the decision: “But the young lady is still in such a delicate state,” they pointed out. “Is she really up to the journey? The poor little thing may suffer terribly on the way.”

Despite these concerns, two carriages were readied. The bishop’s mother rode in the lead carriage and was accompanied by two other nuns who had been assigned to care for her. The young lady was placed in the second carriage and was accompanied by the bishop’s sister and an attendant who stayed by her side throughout the trip.

Progress was slow and fitful, mainly because the party had to make frequent stops in order to prepare medicine for the young lady. Since the nuns resided in Ono on the lower slopes of Mount Hiei, their journey was a long one.

“We should have arranged to stop somewhere along the way,” someone complained; and indeed, it was very late at night when they finally arrived.

The bishop looked after his mother, while his sister, the nun, tenderly cared for the young lady, whose identity remained unknown. Each of the nun’s

attendants took turns assisting her, taking the woman from the carriage and carrying her inside to rest. The bishop's mother was constantly beset by the infirmities of old age, and for a time her condition worsened as a result of the lingering effects of the journey. Nonetheless, she eventually recovered, and His Holiness was able to retire back up the mountain to his temple at Yokawa.

It was rather scandalous for a priest to be traveling in the company of a young woman, and so the bishop spoke not a word about his trip to those disciples who had not been with him to witness what had taken place. For her part, his sister made all of her attendants swear an oath of silence, for she feared that someone might come looking for the young lady.

How is it possible that someone who seems to be of such high status should have fallen so low and ended up in a place inhabited by rustics? The nun imagined several possibilities. Did she fall ill while traveling on a pilgrimage, only to be betrayed and abandoned by a duplicitous stepmother? She has uttered nothing apart from that horrid request to be thrown into the river.

The nun was extremely anxious, hoping that the patient would soon recover her health and faculties. Sadly, the young lady made no effort to get up, but remained lethargic and disoriented. Her condition was so alarming that survival seemed unlikely. Still, the nun couldn't bear the unpleasant thought of giving up, and so she revealed to others the dream she saw on her pilgrimage at Hatsuse. She also discreetly contacted the ascetic who had granted her pleas for healing rites when they were staying at the imperial villa in Uji and asked him to burn poppy seeds in an effort to exorcise any malicious spirits that might be lingering.

The rites of exorcism continued to be performed throughout the fourth and fifth months. Saddened and perplexed that nothing seemed to be helping, the nun sent a letter to the bishop:

Please come down to us again. Help this woman. That she has managed to hold on this long shows that it is not her destiny to die at this time. Whatever spirit or demon has possessed her will not let go. My dear brother, I know that you vowed to stay in retreat and not venture out, not even to the capital, but can there be any harm, would you really be breaking your vow, in coming to Ono?

After reading this heartrending message, His Holiness decided to leave his mountain retreat and descend to Ono. *What a curious affair! The young lady has survived so long ... what if I had made a snap judgment to abandon her at that villa? My discovery of her there must have been the workings of a shared karmic bond, and so I must do my utmost to save her. If I fail, then I'll have to assume*

that she was fated to die after all.

Receiving her brother with reverence and joy, the nun described to him the young lady's condition over the past few months: "A patient who's been ill as long as this would normally show the unpleasant effects, but she hasn't deteriorated at all. You can see that she's as youthful and lovely as ever ... nothing of her appearance shows any sign of disfigurement. True, she does appear to be nearing death, and yet she continues to cling to life." The nun spoke with sincere intensity, weeping the whole time.

"From the moment I first saw her," the bishop replied, "I knew there was something out of the ordinary. Well ... I shall see what I can do." He peeked in on the young lady, and then added, "She really is quite beautiful, isn't she! No doubt she was born with such features as a reward for good deeds performed in a previous life. What trespass could she have possibly committed to deserve this cruel fate? Have you heard anything that might explain what happened?"

"I've heard nothing ... no rumors or gossip. I'm convinced that she's merciful Kannon's answer to my prayers."

"No, no, that's not right. There must exist some prior bond between people for karmic destiny to bring them together. Nothing happens by accident, so how could you think it possible, absent some necessary cause, for Kannon to have brought you someone who has no connection to you?" After voicing his priestly doubts about his sister's interpretation of events, he at once set about performing an exorcism.

The nun, who for her own reasons wanted to keep the young lady's presence a secret, felt that it would be awkward if word got out that her brother, who had declined to interrupt his vows even when summoned by the palace, had inexplicably left his mountain temple to go to the trouble of performing prayers and rites for a woman like this. The other priests in attendance shared the nun's concern, and they advised His Holiness to perform the rites quietly in order to keep them secret.

"I will hear no more of this, my noble disciples," the bishop replied. "I've proven to be a shameless priest, for I have broken many of the prohibitions that I'd sworn to uphold. Still, when it comes to women, I've never defiled myself or done anything that would merit censure. I'm over sixty now, and if at this point in my life I'm condemned for trying to save a young woman, then so be it. I would simply consider that my karmic destiny."

"But whenever vulgar rumormongers spread vicious gossip about a holy man of your high repute, that damages the Buddha's sacred teachings," the disciples said, voicing their displeasure.

The bishop made a gravely solemn vow: "If she shows no signs of improving

while I am performing these incantations, then I swear I shall never do them again!" He persevered with the rites all through the night, and at dawn succeeded in driving out the stubborn spirit and forcing it into the body of a medium. The bishop and his disciple, the ascetic, wondered just what kind of creature had possessed the young lady, and they took turns continuing the rites in the hopes of pressing the spirit to reveal its situation and motives.

The spirit, which had for several months resisted revealing anything at all about its true nature, was finally overcome and began to shout and curse: "Once, my status was such that no one would ever have expected a man like me to end up in a place like this, subdued in this fashion. You see, long ago I was a monk who practiced austerities, but as a result of some petty resentments I harbored toward the world, I was unable to break free of my attachments and achieve salvation. While wandering adrift in the limbo between realms of existence, I came upon a place where several beautiful sisters resided, and I managed to steal the life of the eldest. Sometime later, I heard the young lady who lies here before you bemoaning her fate and insisting day and night that she wanted to die. One night, when she was alone in the pitch darkness, I took advantage of her despair to possess her. Alas, merciful Kannon protected her, allowing this saintly bishop to defeat me in the end. I shall leave you now!"

"Who are you? Announce yourself," the bishop demanded. However, the spirit's words were no longer intelligible, perhaps because the medium was exhausted.

Her mind and soul restored, the young lady regained her senses a little and glanced around the room. Surrounded by a throng of wizened old monks, she didn't recognize a single face. The sensation of having arrived in some strange, unknown land was profoundly unsettling. She tried recalling details from her past, but couldn't remember anything clearly—not the place where she lived, not even her own name.

All I remember is that I decided to throw myself in the river because it was unbearable to go on living. But where am I now? She struggled to make sense of fragmentary memories. I was suffering dreadfully, lost in hopeless sorrow, but everyone around me was asleep. Stepping out through the hinged doors at the corner of some room, I felt the wind blowing wildly and heard the violent roar of a river. Frightened and alone, oblivious to past and future, I collapsed on the edge of the veranda and pondered uncertainly which way I should go. Having come this far, I felt ambivalent about going back inside, and as I sat there brooding, I kept telling myself that I should be resolute and leave this world behind once and for all, that it would be better to be devoured by demons than have anyone see me looking so foolish and pathetic. And then, at that moment, a

radiantly handsome man approached and said, “Come with me, come to my home.” I recall the feeling of being embraced in his arms, and then, just as I recognized him as the man whom people addressed as “Your Lordship,”⁶ I must have fallen into a trance. When I came to and looked around, I was in an unfamiliar grove and the man had disappeared without a trace. I remember weeping bitterly as I realized that I had not, in the end, been able to die as I had wished. After that, I can’t recall what happened, no matter how hard I try. I gather from what people have been saying that many days have passed since then. And to think, what a wretched-looking figure I must have presented to these strangers who were caring for me all that time.

During those days when she was sunk in that trancelike state, she had eaten at least a few morsels of food on occasion. Now, however, because she was ashamed and filled with remorse at the thought of having been resuscitated in this way, she fell into a deep depression and refused everything, even her medicine.

“Why must you remain so weak, seemingly unwilling to let us help you?” the nun tearfully pleaded. “I was so happy when your fever finally broke and you seemed to be feeling more yourself, but now ...”

The nun kept a constant bedside vigil, lavishing attention on her patient. The attendants in residence also did everything they could to help, thinking it would be most regrettable if the young lady were to die under their care, especially seeing how fair and graceful of face and figure she was.

The young lady was grateful, but in her heart she continued to long for death. Still, she had managed to come back from the brink, clinging to life despite her ordeal, and because of her youthful vitality, she gradually regained the strength to raise her head, and eventually began to eat and take her medicine again. Despite this improvement, she also continued to lose weight, and her face looked increasingly gaunt.

The nun was happily anticipating a speedy recovery when the young lady said to her, “You must make me a nun. Otherwise, I can no longer go on living.”

“It would be a great pity to alter such beauty as yours,” the nun protested. “How can you ask me to do such a thing?”

As a compromise, the bishop snipped a few wisps of hair from the top of the young lady’s head and had her take an oath swearing to uphold the Five Precepts.⁷ This did not satisfy her, but being passive and yielding by nature, she couldn’t bring herself to insist on being allowed to take the full formal vows that would make her a nun.

Setting off back up the mountain, the bishop gave instructions to his sister as he parted: “Let’s leave it at this for now and focus on nursing her back to

health."

The nun was overjoyed to have been entrusted with the care of this young lady, who seemed like a dream come true to her.⁸ In her zeal, she would have her charge sit up and personally see to combing her hair, which, although it had been braided in a rather unsightly fashion and carelessly left that way during the long ordeal of spirit possession, was not especially tangled. By the time the nun finished, the young lady's tresses had a vibrant, lovely sheen. The presence of such beauty in a place with so many gray-haired nuns who all seemed to be just a year shy of one hundred⁹ made everyone feel as though a dazzling, wondrous angel had descended from the heavens. This stirred a sense of foreboding in the nun, who pressed the young lady to tell her more.

"Why do you seem so cold, keeping your distance from me even though I fret so terribly over you? Who are you? Where are you from? How did you end up in that grove?"

Feeling deeply ashamed at what the nun must think of her, the young lady replied, "I must have lost my memory while I was in that weird trance, for I have almost no recollection of anything that happened before that spirit possessed me. The only thing I can vaguely recall is sitting at the edge of a veranda, gazing blankly at a garden and thinking that I no longer wanted to live in this world. Suddenly, a man stepped out from beneath a large tree nearby. I have the feeling that he took me with him somewhere. After that, I can't remember a thing ... I can't even remember who I am."

Her manner of speaking was sweetly endearing. She then broke down in tears as she added, "Whatever happens, I don't want anyone to find out that I'm still alive. It would be too much to bear if someone were to come looking for me."

Realizing how painful her questions must be, the nun felt that she could press the young lady no further. She was even more astounded than the old bamboo cutter must have been when he discovered the moon princess, Kaguyahime, inside a stalk of bamboo. Knowing how that story ended, the nun was uneasy, wondering if this young lady, like Kaguyahime, might disappear, like moonlight slipping through some narrow gap.

Now, the bishop's mother had come from a distinguished background, while his sister, the nun, had been the principal wife of a high-ranking official. The nun had given her husband a daughter, but when he passed away she was left to raise their only child on her own. She did everything she could for the girl, eventually arranging a promising marriage to a young groom of exceptional breeding. But then her daughter died as well. Heartbroken and despondent at being a childless widow, she took vows and withdrew to begin life at her mountain retreat in Ono.

Lamenting the tedium of her forlorn existence, the nun desperately wanted to find someone comparable in age and looks to her lost daughter—a keepsake of the one she mourned day and night. And then, quite unexpectedly, she was granted this young lady, who in face and figure was even lovelier than her own daughter. Hardly able to believe this was really happening, the nun was at once astonished and overjoyed. Although she herself was now in her fifties, she had retained a graceful beauty and dignified demeanor.

The burbling mountain stream here was far more soothing than the rapids near the old villa at Uji. The Ono residence was elegantly designed, the trees surrounding it were more openly spaced and pleasant, and the flowers in the garden had been meticulously arranged to charmingly stylish effect. Autumn arrived, and as it progressed the skies took on a poignant appearance. With the start of the rice harvest in the nearby paddies, the young women of the household amused themselves by singing together in imitation of the peasants of the region, who chanted in rustic rhythm as they gathered their grain. The sharp report of the wooden clappers used to scare off birds was enchanting, reminding the young lady of things she had once seen in the Eastern Provinces.

The house in Ono was set a little further up the mountain from the villa once occupied by the imperial consort whose daughter, the Second Princess, was taken as a wife by Genji's son after the death of Kashiwagi.¹⁰ One side of the nun's residence faced the slope of the mountain. The pine trees there cast a thick shade, and the rustling of the wind in their branches stirred feelings of extreme desolation. With only religious devotions to break the monotony, life was always quiet and solemn.

On brightly moonlit evenings, the nun would strum a seven-string koto. Another nun, who went by the name of Shōshō, would accompany her on the *biwa* lute.

“Do you play any instruments?” the nun asked the young lady. “With nothing to occupy your time, you must be bored.”

As she sat watching these women who were all past their prime play music to while away the tedious hours, the past came flooding back to Ukifune and she recalled her own ignominious status. *A girl of my lineage is never taught such elegant, leisurely accomplishments, and so I grew up without the slightest training in the social graces. How truly miserable and worthless I am!*

Filled with self-loathing and regret, Ukifune was moved to compose the following, which she wrote out to practice her calligraphy:

*Who stopped me, held me in the realm of the living
By setting a fishing weir across the rapids*

*Of that river of tears where I cast my body*¹¹

It was a cruel twist of fate that she had survived against her wishes. Dreading the future, she detested what her life had become.

On those nights when the moon shone full, the old women would elegantly recite poems and share stories with one another as they reminisced about the past. Having almost nothing in common with them, Ukifune could not join in their conversations. She would stare off absent-mindedly, then record her feelings in the course of practicing her calligraphy.

*Who in the capital where this moon also shines
Would know I'm alive ... though like the moon in its course
I've come back around, returned to this woeful world*

At the very moment when she resolved to take her own life, her thoughts had strayed to the many people whom she yearned to meet one last time. Now, however, she had no clear recollection of any of them. Except, that is, for her mother, who must be lost in grief, and her old nurse, who must be crestfallen now that the cherished dream of seeing her beloved mistress respectably married was shattered. *Where are they now? Do they have any inkling at all that I'm still alive?* From time to time she also recalled Ukon, with whom she had always been able to speak openly and intimately during those times when she had no one else who could understand how she was feeling.

It's never easy for any young woman to abandon the world and hide herself away in a mountain retreat as lonely and isolated as the residence in Ono. That's why the only other people living there on a permanent basis were seven or eight very old nuns. Now and then their daughters or granddaughters—women who were either in service in the capital or making their way in life by other means—would come to call on them. Ukifune was reluctant to show herself to these visitors out of concern that one of them might have occasion to visit the household of one of the noblemen she had known. If they did, then naturally it would get about that she was still alive, and the thought that Niou or Kaoru might find out about her was mortifying, for they would no doubt wonder about her circumstances, about how far she had come down in the world, and imagine how eccentric and vulgar she must look.

The nun assigned two of her own attendants, Jijū and Komoki, to be in exclusive service to the young lady. In looks and disposition, these two women were nothing like those “birds of the capital”¹² who had once waited upon Ukifune. Thinking about her past, and coming to terms with her present, she

recalled a line of verse: “If only I could find a retreat from this world.”¹³ The nun gathered that something terrible must have happened to make the young lady want to hide here and keep her presence a secret, and so she chose not to share any details with the other women in the house.

By this time the nun’s son-in-law had risen to the rank of Middle Captain. Now, this Middle Captain’s younger brother was a priest—a disciple of the bishop of Yokawa, no less—who just happened to be in retreat on Mount Hiei. This priest’s brothers regularly climbed the mountain to visit him, and it was on one such journey that the Middle Captain decided to drop by the residence at Ono.

Listening to the shouts of the advance escort announcing the approach of a gentleman of considerable prestige and dignity, Ukifune vividly recalled the way Kaoru looked whenever he arrived on one of his secret visits. The idle life of this house, which was as lonely as the villa at Uji, was certainly tedious, but the women who had grown accustomed to living here had furnished it in a charming manner that created a clean, spare atmosphere. It was the season when the wild pinks planted in the hedgerow were especially delightful, and the maidenflowers and bellflowers were just coming into bloom. She could see amidst the blossoms a large group of young men dressed in multihued hunting robes. Their lord, who was dressed in similar fashion, had been called over to the veranda on the south side of the residence, where he sat gazing out over the garden. He was about twenty-seven or twenty-eight, a mature-looking man who projected a thoughtful, serious demeanor.

The nun had a standing curtain set up just inside the sliding doors off the veranda to receive the Middle Captain. She wept at first, then gathered herself to say, “With each year that goes by, I sense the past receding ever farther into the distance, and yet, after all this time, I find it astounding that I am still unable to free myself from the anticipation I feel as I wait for you to bring your radiant light to this gloomy mountain abode.”

“Never a moment goes by,” the Middle Captain replied, “when my heart is not filled with poignant memories of the past, and yet I have been inexcusably remiss about calling on you since you left the world for this remote dwelling. I envy my younger brother, who has withdrawn to his mountain refuge, and I visit him regularly. Still, I did not want to disturb you with all the people who usually insist upon accompanying me. Today, though, I was able to leave them behind, and so I’ve dropped by.”

“You say that you envy retreating into the mountains, but you’re merely repeating a sentiment that’s fashionable these days. Still, when I think of the kind devotion you’ve shown to the memory of my late daughter, I’m often

moved to profound gratitude knowing that you have not yielded to the world's fickle ways."

Having visited the residence in Ono on earlier trips, the Middle Captain was familiar with the place. Thus, when the nun provided simple fare for the men of his escort—items like dried boiled rice steeped in water—and delicacies such as lotus seeds for him, he accepted her hospitality without reserve. Subsequently detained by a sudden, torrential rain shower, he stayed on to share a quiet, heartfelt conversation.

If a gentleman of such ideal temperament as my former son-in-law were to become a complete stranger to me, that would make me even more disconsolate than the loss of my daughter, whom I can do nothing to bring back now. Why couldn't she have left me a grandchild as a living memento? Her heart was filled with longing and sad regrets, and so, considering how infrequently the Middle Captain visited, she could not resist telling him about all the recent events that she had been keeping to herself—events which, no doubt, anyone would have found remarkable and deeply touching.

Ukifune looked truly adorable—an nobleman's lovely daughter¹⁴—as she gazed out in reverie, so many things reminding her that "I am still myself."¹⁵ In keeping with the somber religious customs of the residence, where the clothing was dark and lusterless, she wore trousers of a dull, reddish-brown hue, similar to the color of cypress bark, over a white singlet fashioned from some painfully coarse, inelegant fabric. *What a strange impression I must make in these clothes that are so different from what I once wore*, she fretted. Though in truth, she looked utterly captivating even in those stiff, scratchy-looking garments.

Some of the attendants serving in Ukifune's presence were talking amongst themselves.

"It feels like our mistress's late daughter is back with us again, and now, with the Middle Captain paying us a visit, I'm overcome with emotion."

"If only he would take the young lady as his wife ... then he would call on us more frequently, the way he did in the old days."

"Yes, they would make a most attractive couple."

Overhearing them, Ukifune was alarmed. *Anything but that! There's no way I would go back to living in society and be expected to marry some man. Just hearing them talk about it brings back painful memories of the past. I shall put any such possibility out of my mind and never consider it.*

The nun withdrew inside, and while she was away, her visitor,¹⁶ the Middle Captain, was troubled as he gazed up at the cloudy sky, for the rain showed no sign of letting up. Recognizing the voice of the woman called Shōshō, he summoned her.

"Am I right in thinking that all the attendants I once knew are living here as well? It's been so difficult for me to visit like this, you all probably consider me coldhearted."

Shōshō had once been in close service to his late wife, and the Middle Captain was deeply touched to see her again, for her presence brought back memories of those days.

"As I was entering the far end of the passageway here," he said, "a sudden gust of wind blew open the blinds and I glimpsed the retreating figure of a woman inside. Judging from her long, flowing hair, she didn't strike me as someone of common status, and I must say, I was surprised to see a lady like her in a house where all the women have renounced the world. I wonder who she might be."

Apparently, the Middle Captain had only glanced at the young lady from behind as she was withdrawing into her quarters. *If I could arrange to have him get a better look, Shōshō thought, indulging her fervid imagination, I'm sure that he'd be smitten with her. After all, he still has difficulty forgetting his late wife, and she was not nearly as beautiful as this young lady.*

"My mistress has never gotten over the loss of her daughter, and just when it seemed that she would never find consolation, she unexpectedly came across a young lady and, from what I've observed, takes comfort in gazing upon her day and night. But tell me, how did you come to catch sight of the woman when she was looking so relaxed and unreserved?"

So such things really do happen, the Middle Captain mused, his interest piqued by the presence of a beautiful woman in a most unlikely place. *Whoever the lady is, she's really quite alluring.* He had caught only a passing glimpse, but her image left a vivid impression. He pressed Shōshō for more details, but she would say nothing more about the young lady's circumstances.

"You'll find out in due course," was all she offered, and he worried that he might come across as forward if he were too inquisitive.

Just then, one of his men said to him, "The rain has stopped, my lord, and the sun will soon be going down." Whereupon he prepared to take his leave.

Breaking off a sprig of the maidenflowers blooming near the veranda, he stood there and murmured a snatch of verse to himself: "Is their lambent beauty ..."¹⁷

The old-fashioned women in the residence were in admiration of the Middle Captain.

"See how discreet he is, concerned not to do anything that would give people a reason to gossip," one of them observed.

"He's become an ideal nobleman ... so mature and handsome. If only he could

visit us regularly as he used to in the old days,” said another.

“I’ve heard that he still faithfully calls on his present wife, the daughter of the Fujiwara Middle Counselor,” the nun added, “but they say he’s not really enamored of her and spends most of his time at his father’s.” Turning toward Ukifune, she added, “It’s very depressing and painful to me that you remain so aloof, lost in your own sorrows. From now on, cultivate a more hopeful attitude, knowing that being here with us is the working of your karmic destiny. Not a single moment went by over the past five or six years when I wasn’t mourning my dear, sweet daughter and yearning to see her again. But after being granted the chance to care for you, I’ve finally been able to set aside my grief. Although there must be people in this world who mourn you,¹⁸ as time passes they will no doubt resign themselves and accept that you are no longer alive. Nothing lasts forever, not even our most profound sorrows. That’s just the way the world is.”

Tears welled up in Ukifune’s eyes. “I don’t mean to be distant with you, but after coming back to life under such strange, bewildering circumstances, I feel as if I’m stumbling about, lost, as if everything is a dream. Perhaps that’s the feeling people get when they’re reborn into a different world, and maybe that’s why I can’t remember anyone from the past, even though there must be people in this world who knew me. You’re the only one I feel close to, the only one I can rely on.”

She looked so genuinely guileless and pretty as she spoke. The nun smiled as she sat there, gazing protectively at the young lady.

The Middle Captain arrived at Yokawa. The bishop was delighted by this rare visit, and the two men chatted about worldly matters. The Major Captain stayed on that evening and, after having sutras read by monks noted for their sonorous voices, he whiled away the night with musical diversions. At one point, as he was engaging his younger brother in intimate conversation, he broached the subject of the young lady he had seen earlier.

“I stopped by the house in Ono on the way and was very touched to see my former mother-in-law again. She may have renounced the world, but women of such refined sensibility are hard to find.” He paused for a moment before continuing. “Be that as it may, just as I arrived the wind blew open the blinds and I saw an exquisite lady with very long hair sitting near the veranda. She must have been worried about being seen, for at that very moment she stood up and moved further inside. Having glimpsed her from behind, I must say that she didn’t look at all like a common woman ... though it doesn’t make any sense that a noblewoman would be living in a place like that. The only people she meets all day are nuns, and so naturally she’ll get used to being around them and think their lifestyle is normal. It would be a terrible shame if she were to end up

looking and acting like them.”

“The women at Ono went on a pilgrimage to Hatsuse last spring,” the younger brother said, “and I heard that on their way back they found a woman under mysterious circumstances.” Because he had not witnessed those events directly, however, he couldn’t give any more details.

“That’s terrible ... I feel sorry for her,” the Middle Captain replied. “I wonder who she is? She must have found the world too sorrowful to bear and gone into hiding there. This feels like a tale out of some old romance.”

The next day, on his way back to the capital, the Middle Captain found it impossible to pass by Ono without stopping at the nun’s residence. Expecting that he might drop by again, the nuns were prepared. The sight of Shōshō and the others serving him, which reminded him of the old days, was delightfully elegant, despite the fact that their sleeves were now dyed a sober color. The nun was even more tearful than usual as she received her former son-in-law.

“Who is the young woman living with you—the one who seems to be hiding herself from the world?”

The Middle Captain’s question caught the nun off guard and she was unsure about how to reply. He had obviously caught a glimpse of the young lady, and so it would only serve to make him suspicious if she tried to cover up the situation.

“I’ve tried to forget my daughter, but I cannot,” she replied, “and I’m painfully aware that my sins have only continued to accumulate as a result of my lingering attachment. Caring for this young lady over the past few months has been a comfort that has eased such doleful thoughts. I don’t know much about her background or circumstances, but it’s clear that she’s depressed and deeply troubled. She’s also terribly anxious, worried that certain people might discover that she’s still alive. That’s why I’ve tried to reassure her that no one would possibly seek her out or even hear about her in a place like this, hidden away in a deep valley.¹⁹ So tell me, how is it that you found out about her?”

“Though I came here on a sudden romantic impulse, in my defense I would remind you of the difficult path I had to cross to reach this abode deep in the mountains. If the young lady is someone you are caring for as a substitute for the one we both lost, then our past connection is an even greater reason why you should not dismiss me as a suitor. By what circumstances did she come to resent the world? If only I could console her somehow.” He seemed intrigued by the young lady and wanted to see her.

As he was about to leave, he took some folding paper from his robes and wrote the following:

O maidenflower, yield not to Adashino’s

*Fickle breezes, for though the road there may be long
I shall bind us with sacred ropes drawn around you*²⁰

He gave this to Shōshō to take in to the young lady.

The nun read his note as well. “You really must reply to him,” she coaxed. “He’s a refined, modest gentleman, and so you have no reason to be worried about him.”

Ukifune wouldn’t hear of it. “But I’m so inept at calligraphy. How could I possibly write anything to him?”

This could be most embarrassing, the nun thought. “As you’ve heard,” she wrote to the Middle Captain, “the young lady is not like others. She wants nothing to do with worldly affairs.”

*She has me perplexed, my thoughts a tangle,
This maidenflower that I transplanted
To the grass hut where I renounce the world*

I could hardly expect the young lady to reply to me directly the first time. With these sympathetic, understanding thoughts in mind, the Middle Captain made his way back to the capital.

He would have looked like some callow youth were he to send off ardent letters to the young lady, but he couldn’t get that brief glimpse of her out of his mind; and even though he knew nothing about her circumstances and the reasons why she was so sad and pensive, he felt sorry for her. Thus, some time soon after the tenth day of the eighth month, he joined a party that set out to hunt small game birds with kestrels²¹ and used that expedition as an excuse to drop by Ono again.

He summoned Shōshō, as was his custom whenever he visited, and said, “My heart has been restive since I caught a glimpse of her.”

Shōshō conveyed his feelings to Ukifune, but because she did not feel as if she had to reply, the nun sent out a message to the Middle Captain in her place: “I look at her and am reminded of Mount Matsuchi.”²²

When the nun came out to receive him directly, the Middle Captain spoke to her in a manner that indicated the sincerity of his feelings: “You told me once that the young lady seems deeply troubled, and I would like to learn more about her situation. I’m beset by the feeling that nothing in my life has turned out as I might wish, and thus in my heart I long to go into retreat at some mountain abode. But even as I entertain such a desire, I go on day after day, blocked from acting on it by the knowledge that the people for whom I’m responsible would

never forgive me if I abandoned them. I'm afraid that a man of melancholy disposition like me is not an especially good match for a woman who is by nature as happy and carefree as my present wife. If only I could share my feelings with a woman who truly understands what it means to grieve."

"If you wish for a woman whose tribulations have made her melancholy, the young lady would seem to be the ideal companion for you. However, she apparently resents the world so much that she finds it disturbingly unpleasant²³ and no longer wants to go on living the normal life expected of a woman. Even I felt incredibly forlorn when I decided that it was time to turn my back on the world ... and I have only a few more years to live. Looking at her, I wonder how long someone in the prime of youth, with so much ahead of her, will ultimately be able to stand this solitary life." She sounded every bit like a mother.

The nun went back inside and admonished the young lady. "You're being heartless. At the very least you could exchange a few words with him. The world expects that those who live in a residence like this be sensitive to others, even if they make rash or frivolous requests."

"But I have no idea how to respond to people, and in any case, whatever I might say would be inconsequential," Ukifune replied. She continued to lie there, coldly unmoved by the nun's entreaties.

"What do you mean, she won't speak to me? That's unkind," her visitor complained. "When you alluded to the maidenflower on Mount Matsuchi plighting her troth in autumn, you were just leading me on." Resentful, he composed the following:

*Hearing its voice, I came to seek the pine cricket
Sure it waited unseen for me, only to find
I've lost my way again midst fields of dewy reeds*

"Don't you feel sorry for him? At least reply to his poem," the nun said, urging the young lady to respond.

For Ukifune, however, even the prospect of engaging in such worldly exchanges made her feel wretched, and she knew that if she were once more to begin corresponding with a man, the Middle Captain would begin to pressure her at every opportunity. It was simply too much of a burden to even think about, and so she refused to reply.

The women there all felt disheartened at the young lady's lack of interest. The fashionable, modish sensibility the nun had possessed earlier in her life must have lingered on, for she replied to the Middle Captain:

*Since you came over grassy autumn moors
Blame not the thick vines that cover this hut
For the dew that has soaked your hunting robes*

"It seems," she added, "that the young lady tends to find this sort of bantering troublesome."

The women inside the Ono residence were oblivious to Ukifune's inner feelings, to how terribly painful it would be for her if, as a result of the Middle Captain's romantic interest, people found out against her wishes that she was still alive. What's more, they all had unrequited longings and fond memories of the Middle Captain, and so they would speak to Ukifune in an effort to sway her emotions and convince her to give him a chance: "A brief exchange with him on a trivial occasion like this won't do any harm. After all, he doesn't look like a man who would give you reason to worry or take advantage of you against your wishes. Even if you're not inclined to engage in the usual sort of romantic relationship, the least you can do is answer him in a way that shows you're not heartless, that you're sensitive to his feelings."

It worried Ukifune no end that these women of old-fashioned sensibility who had cast off the world to become nuns were behaving in an incongruously modish manner, showing a fondness for composing lame, halting verses and striking an attitude of youthful giddiness. She lay facedown, lost in her thoughts. *Though I had given up on my life, knowing that I was destined to experience endless woe, to my shock and unbearable shame I survived. What will become of me as I wander lost in this world? How I long to live out my life completely forgotten, neither seen nor heard, given up for dead!*

The Middle Captain, perhaps saddened not just by the young lady's rejection but also by the sorrows of life in general, sighed deeply and then began playing a quiet, melancholy air on his flute. He murmured, as if to himself, a snatch of verse: "... the cry of the stag."²⁴ He was truly a man of sensibility and taste.

"Remembering things that happened long ago fills my heart with grief. To make matters worse, it seems that the lady I've just met will have nothing to do with me, though I assumed she might be sensitive enough to understand my sorrows. That's why I can no longer trust that I will find an escape from the trials of the world in your abode nestled among these mountain recesses."²⁵ He looked resentful as he prepared to take his leave.

"Why are you leaving? Will you not view the moon on an evening too precious to waste,"²⁶ the nun said, sliding over toward the blind to detain him.

"Why, you ask? Because I tested the feelings of the one who lives in that distant village ... ,"²⁷ the Middle Captain replied playfully. *It wouldn't do, he*

reflected, to come across as too flirtatious. The image I have of the young lady from that one brief glimpse is lodged in my mind's eye, and it has been a comfort to me whenever I have recalled it during a moment of idle tedium. Still, the lady herself is much too aloof—her attitude is completely inappropriate for a place of retreat like this. The thought cooled his ardor.

Seeing that he was preparing to return to the capital, the nun felt increasingly dissatisfied, since she would miss not just him, but the music of his flute.

*Are you one of those untouched by the poignancy
Of a late night moon that you would choose not to lodge
At a hut that stands near the rim of the mountain*

The verse wasn't very accomplished, but when the nun added, "This poem expresses the young lady's sentiments," the Middle Captain's heart beat faster.

*Let me gaze longingly at the moon till it sets
Behind the mountain rim ... does its light shine through gaps
In the planked roof to brighten the room where she sleeps*

When the bishop's aging mother caught the faint sound of a flute, she was deeply affected and came out to join the others. Sniffling and coughing, her voice hoarse and trembling, she rambled on and on about this and that without ever bringing up anything about the past. Perhaps in her dotage she no longer recognized the husband of her late granddaughter.

"Come, come, my dear," she said to her daughter, "play your seven-string koto for me. And you, sir, play the flute. It always sounds so lovely on a moonlit evening." She then turned to the other nuns and added, "What do you all think you're doing? Fetch a koto at once!"

Hearing the old woman's voice coming through the blinds, the Middle Captain guessed her identity. He was surprised nonetheless that a woman of her advanced years would be in retreat at a place like this. Thinking about his late wife, who had died so young, and comparing her to her grandmother, he was moved to sorrow and pity by the uncertainty of the world and by the realization that the death of a person is determined by destiny and not by age. Taking up his flute, he soulfully played an air in the autumnal *banshiki* mode.

"It's your turn now," he said to the nun. "Please play for me."

"Your playing has matured since the old days. It shows a special depth of feeling." The nun was a woman of discerning taste in music. "Of course, my ear may not be what it once was, since I've grown accustomed to hearing only the

sound of the mountain winds. But never mind ... I shall do my best, though I imagine this koto is not tuned to the proper mode.” And with that, she began to play.

The seven-string koto is no longer popular among the fashionable set nowadays, and very few people play it at all, let alone well. The Middle Captain was thus moved and delighted by this rare performance. The soughing of the wind in the pines set off the notes of the koto to brilliant advantage. Together with the accompaniment of the flute, the music seemed to make the moonlight clearer and brighter. The bishop’s mother felt more and more elated, and since normally she could not sleep at night in any case, she stayed up to enjoy the concert.

“If I may say so,” the bishop’s mother remarked, “back in the old days, this old woman could play the six-string koto rather effortlessly, though I have no doubt that styles of playing are different in these modern times. Alas, I don’t get much practice playing any more. You see, my son is always scolding me, saying how much he dislikes hearing the koto and telling me to stop wasting time on trivial things like music and concentrate on my prayers invoking the Holy Name of Amida Buddha. It’s a shame, really ... my Japanese koto has such an exquisite tone.”

It was obvious to the Middle Captain that the old woman very much wanted to play for him. Laughing quietly, he replied, “His Holiness has chosen a rather peculiar thing to be censuring. After all, aren’t we taught how noble it is that everyone in the Pure Land paradise—including the bodhisattvas—plays instruments like these and that the angels enjoy dancing to them. Is music really a distraction from your devotions? Is it really a sin? I would be delighted if you would perform this evening.”

The old lady was extremely pleased to be flattered in this way. “Well, if you insist,” she replied, coughing and clearing her throat the whole time. “Tonomori, fetch the *Azuma* koto for me.”

The other nuns found her behavior rather disgraceful, but since she had so openly and bitterly complained about her son, His Holiness, they felt sorry for the poor dear and let her do as she pleased. Pulling the six-string koto over in front of her, she made no effort to match the style in which the Middle Captain had been playing his flute a few moments earlier. Instead, she chose to perform a piece to her own liking, one she took pride in, lightly plucking out an air in the *Azuma* mode. Because the modes were so mismatched, the others let their instruments fall silent. The bishop’s mother assumed that they had stopped playing in appreciation of her own skill, and thus encouraged, she accompanied her playing by singing solfège: “*Takefu ... chichiri, chichiri ... taritanna.*”²⁸ The

quick pace of her glissandos together with the syllables she sang created a painfully old-fashioned effect.

When she finished, the Middle Captain praised her. “Most intriguing. Not the kind of song or style of playing one hears nowadays.”

The bishop’s mother was hard of hearing and had to ask one of the women close to her to repeat what he had said. When she understood his compliment, she cackled uncomfortably loudly before smugly replying, “I hear that young people nowadays aren’t fond of this sort of music. For example, take the young woman who’s been living here the past few months. She’s apparently a very pretty little thing, but she won’t have anything to do with such *useless* pastimes as playing the koto and instead seems intent on remaining hidden from the world.”

The nun was mortified by her mother’s comments, which spoiled the mood of the evening. The Middle Captain took his leave, but continued to play the flute as he made his way down the mountain. Its notes, wafted by the breeze, could be heard at the residence in Ono, where, moved by the beauty of his playing, the nuns stayed up until dawn.

Early the next morning, he sent a message: “I felt unsettled last night, my heart agitated by past grief and present desire, and so I hurried away.”

*Those times we shared melodies on koto and flute
Are painful memories that I cannot erase ...
And now her aloofness also moves me to tears*²⁹

“You should teach the young lady to be a little more sensitive to the feelings of others. How can you imagine that I would behave this way, like some love-struck gallant, if it were at all possible for me to suppress these yearnings?”

Feeling more troubled and forlorn than ever after reading his note, the nun looked as though she would not be able to stop her tears. She replied:

*Hearing the sound of your flute, I longed for the past
For the music of the koto ... and when you left
You left me with sleeves that were drenched in my own tears*

“No doubt you heard what my aged mother blurted out about the young woman —how she’s so aloof and eccentric that she seems incapable of showing sympathy for others.” Finding nothing unique or especially intriguing in this reply, the Middle Captain simply tossed it aside.

His entreaties, which arrived as frequently as the rustling of the autumn winds

through the reeds, were extremely troublesome for Ukifune. With each letter from him she was made aware once more of the outrageously insistent nature of men's hearts, and with that awareness, memories gradually came back to her.

"He continues his courtship because I've sworn only to uphold the Five Precepts," she pleaded with the nun. "Administer the vows to me right away, so that I may put on the robes that will make the Middle Captain give up his pursuit of me."

Ukifune read and studied the sutras. In her heart, she prayed and invoked Buddha's Holy Name. Because she seemed intent on abandoning all worldly things in this manner, she lacked the vivaciousness one normally associates with a young woman, and the nuns around her thus assumed that she was by temperament gloomy and despondent. Still, she was so fair of face that it was gratifying just to see her, and so they overlooked the young lady's faults and took comfort in gazing admiringly at her from morning to night. Those moments when she would break into a fleeting smile were cause for joyous—if rare—celebration.

The ninth month arrived and the nun was planning to go on another pilgrimage to Hatsuse. It had been her lot in life to spend many years alone and forlorn, unable to forget the precious child she had lost. Now, however, she had gained a measure of consolation in this young lady whom she couldn't help but cherish like a daughter. Grateful for the gift Kannon had bestowed upon her, she wanted to offer prayers of thanksgiving.

"Let's go together," she said, encouraging Ukifune to accompany her. "No one will find out about you. I know we have the same images of Kannon here, but there are numerous examples of those who were blessed with good fortune after performing their devotions in that sacred place."

Despite the nun's pleas, Ukifune had heard exactly the same thing long ago from her mother and her nurse. *I went with them to Hatsuse on several occasions*, she recalled, *but those pilgrimages were useless. Even my wish to die has been thwarted, and I've experienced unparalleled misery.* Mingled with these feelings of wretchedness was a vague fear of traveling with people who were practically strangers to her. Still, she was careful to reply in a way that would not make her appear headstrong.

"I'm reluctant to go with you. You see, I'm not feeling well, and so I'm not sure if I'll be able to withstand the hardships of such a journey."

Convinced that the young lady had good reason to fear the trip, the nun did not press the matter any further. Just then she noticed the following poem among the scraps of paper that Ukifune had used to practice her calligraphy:

—

*Passing through this unpleasant world where nothing lasts
I do not wish to seek out the twin-trunked cedar
Standing by the shallows of the Furukawa³⁰*

“Does the twin-trunked cedar refer to someone you hope to meet again?” the nun asked playfully. Her question, which unwittingly hit the mark, startled and embarrassed Ukifune. Her blushing face was incredibly adorable. The nun replied:

*I know not from what roots sprang that cedar standing
By the Furukawa, nor do I know your roots
Yet I see in you a likeness of my daughter*

It was a rushed response with little to distinguish it.

The nun had said that she planned to travel as inconspicuously as she could, but then all the women wanted to accompany her. This made her anxious, however, for she was concerned about leaving the young lady with so few people in the residence. She decided to have a page girl and two mature attendants—the worldly and wise Shōshō and another named Saemon—remain behind in Ono.

Ukifune stared out, watching the party depart and reflecting on her wretched fate. She whiled away the tedious hours pondering her situation: *What will become of me? How lonely I'll be now that the one person I can rely on is not here!*

Yet another letter from the Middle Captain arrived.

“You must at least look at it,” Shōshō told her, but the young lady wouldn’t listen.

The house felt even more deserted than usual, and in her boredom, Ukifune sank into a pensive mood, reflecting on both her past and her future.

“It pains me to see you looking so depressed,” Shōshō said. “Let’s play a game of Go to divert you from your melancholy thoughts.”

“Oh, but I’m really not very good at it,” Ukifune replied, but then she reconsidered and decided that she should at least try. A board was brought out, and Shōshō, assuming that she was the superior player, let her opponent go first. The young lady, however, turned out to be quite formidable, and so Shōshō decided to go first on the rematch.

“I hope my mistress will come back soon. I’d like her to see just how skillful you are. She’s a very strong player herself. Her brother, His Holiness, has been extremely fond of Go ever since his youth, and he always took great pride in his

mastery of it, convinced that he was reasonably talented. So much so, in fact, that he fancied himself High Priest of the Go Board, as if he were the equal of Tachibana Yoshitoshi himself!³¹ One time he challenged my mistress to a game. ‘I promise I won’t be too hard on you, though you’re not likely to defeat me in any case,’ he told her. But in the end he lost to her ... twice! It’s apparent to me that you are far better than the High Priest. Really, your play is superb!”

Because Shōshō spoke so admiringly, Ukifune felt uneasy as she observed the severe, shaven head of the old nun. *It will be awkward if she starts pestering me to play all the time.* Saying that she was not feeling well, she lay down.

“You should do something to cheer yourself up now and then,” Shōshō said. “It’s a shame to see someone as lovely as you constantly moping like this. It makes me feel as though I’ve found a flaw in the gem.”

The soughing of the evening wind deeply affected Ukifune, calling up many memories.

*My heart may not fully grasp the keen sorrow
Of dusk in autumn, but dew still falls madly
Upon sleeves gazing out, steeped in gloomy thoughts*

At that enchanting moment, just as the moon was rising over the mountains, the Middle Captain, who had sent Ukifune a letter earlier in the day, arrived at the residence. *Ahh, how dreadful!* she thought. *Why has he come here?* She retreated into the interior of the residence.

“You’re being utterly ridiculous,” Shōshō chided. “At moments like this, with the Middle Captain displaying such ardor, you must be especially sensitive to his feelings. At least hear him out a little. It’s absurd to think that listening to a few words will bind you to him, or somehow defile you.”

Despite these assurances, Ukifune remained extremely anxious, and so the women informed the Middle Captain that she had gone off with their mistress on a pilgrimage. However, the messenger he had sent earlier in the day had already informed him that the young lady was in residence alone, and so he complained bitterly and at considerable length.

“I have no desire to hear her voice. I would just like her to come closer and then tell me honestly, once and for all, if what I have to say is too unpleasant for her to hear.” He tried every complaint and appeal he could make, and when nothing worked, he reproached her bitterly: “You’re heartless! I would have thought you might have developed greater sensitivity toward others living in a place like this. Your attitude is too much to bear!”

*Anyone familiar with melancholy thoughts
Would understand the mournful beauty in the depths
Of a night in autumn at a mountain village*

“It seems only natural that your heart would share my emotions , and yet ...”

“With my mistress away, you have no one to act as your intermediary,” Shōshō told the young lady. “If you don’t reply, you’ll come across as eccentric and uncouth.”

Ukifune did not expressly compose the following as a reply, but recited it as if speaking to herself:

*He thinks of me as someone preoccupied
With melancholy thoughts ... but I drift through life
Unaware of lamenting this woeful world*

Shōshō heard the young lady’s poem, and when she relayed it to the Middle Captain, he was deeply moved. “I’d like to speak to her,” he said, “so try to convince her to come closer, even for just a moment.”

He complained to them so harshly that Shōshō and Saemon felt put-upon by his unreasonable demands. “But the young lady is so strangely aloof, I find her unfathomable,” Shōshō protested. Nonetheless, she went back inside and discovered that the young lady, as was her wont, had retreated further inside, entering the quarters of the bishop’s aged mother—a room into which she had never before so much as peeked.

Shōshō was shocked by her attitude, and when she reported what had happened to the Middle Captain, his desire to know more about the young lady grew stronger than ever.

“When I consider what must be in her heart as she gazes out in sad reverie at a place like this, I’m moved to sorrow and pity. Judging from her overall appearance, there’s no reason to think that she’s at all insensitive, and yet, given her behavior, she seems more extreme and heartless than people who know nothing at all of life’s sorrows. What terrible experience in her past could have made her so cold and aloof? There must be some reason for the bitter antipathy she holds against the world. Do you think that she will always remain here like this?”

In the face of these questions, Shōshō was unsure about how much detail she should go into, and so she told him the following: “The young lady is someone that my mistress ought to have been caring for all along, but they were separated from each other and lived apart for many years until my mistress found her again during a pilgrimage to Hatsuse and brought her back here.”

Ukifune was lying facedown near the bishop's mother, unable to sleep. She had heard stories from the attendants about what a truly frightful figure the prickly crone was. Having dozed off earlier in the evening, the old nun was now rending the air with indescribably thunderous snoring. Meanwhile, Saemon and Shōshō, who were close in age to the bishop's mother, had settled down nearby and were snoring with equal ferocity.

Scared out of her wits, she wondered if these women might actually devour her during the night. It wasn't so much that she valued her life, but being weak and timid by nature, she felt wretched, like someone who has a fear of crossing bridges made of a single log and has to return home.³² Komoki, the page girl, had accompanied her when she fled into the old nun's quarters, but being a romantically inclined child, she had gone back out to where the rare, intoxicatingly attractive visitor was sitting. Ukifune waited for her, silently pleading, *Please come back ... please come back!* But even if the girl had returned, she could hardly have been counted on to provide much comfort.

His efforts at persuasion having failed, the Middle Captain decided to leave.

"It was unkind of her to hide like that," Shōshō said, criticizing the young lady as she and the other women settled down to sleep in the same place. "And she has such a lovely face ..."

At some point during the night—Ukifune guessed that it must have been around midnight—the bishop's mother woke up in a fit of coughing. When she sat up, her hair, which was covered in a black head scarf, glowed pure white in the lamplight. Noticing the young lady lying there, the old nun grew suspicious and shaded her eyes to see better—a gesture that made her look every bit like a scythe-weasel.³³

"Something's not right here! Who are you?" she said, her voice stern and demanding.

Ukifune was convinced that this time for certain she was going to be devoured. *When that other demon came and possessed me, I wasn't all that frightened because I was in a trance. But what am I to do this time?* The thought was ominous, and her mind was filled with wild fancies. *I was brought back to life in that hideous state, but now that I've regained my human faculties, all the dreadful things that happened to me in the past come back to torment me and I'm overwhelmed with bewilderment and fear. Of course, if I had died, then I would now be surrounded by even more frightful-looking demons.*

Obsessing more than usual over events in her past, she was deeply despondent and unable to sleep. *I spent all those years moving back and forth between the capital and the far-off Eastern Provinces without ever so much as glimpsing the face of my father. Then, unexpectedly, I was able to meet my sister and draw*

closer to her, which brought me both joy and peace of mind until that outrageous incident separated us once more. Soon after, a gentleman who was willing to take care of me appeared, and no doubt he would have eased the heartaches I had endured. But just as our relationship was beginning, I hurt him grievously with that shocking affair. Looking back at my behavior, how shameless I was to have felt even the slightest attraction or sympathy for Prince Niou. Our affair is the sole reason that I ended up wandering lost and falling to this wretched condition. As I reflect on my fate, I wonder how I could have been so enthralled by the promise that his love would remain as constant as the color of the evergreens on the Isle of Tachibana.

She now felt a strong aversion to Niou's amorous nature. In contrast, whenever she recalled this or that occasion when she had been with Kaoru—a gentleman who, despite his dispassionate demeanor, had been steady and trustworthy from the very beginning—she realized what a splendid nobleman he truly was. *Should the truth ever get out that I was rescued and am hiding away in Ono, I'd feel more ashamed before Kaoru than anyone else.* Despite feeling embarrassed at the thought of this possibility, a new question suddenly occurred to her: *Will there ever come a time in this world when I may see him again, just as he used to be, even if only from a distance?* But then, after much self-reflection, she caught herself. *Is my heart still corrupted by desire? No ... I must never even think about seeing Kaoru again.*

It was a great relief to her when at last she heard a cock crowing. *How much happier I'd be to hear my mother's voice calling me to get up.* She was feeling utterly dejected as the dawn broke. Because the page girl, Komoki, did not come right away to accompany her back to her own room, she continued to lie there. The old nuns who had been snoring so loudly were up very early, as was their habit, and making a fuss as they prepared all sorts of unappetizing items, such as rice gruel, for their morning meal.

"You should hurry up and eat," one of them insisted, moving closer. The woman, who seemed weird and unpleasant, was offputting.

"I'm afraid I'm not feeling up to it right now," Ukifune replied, declining as politely as she could. The woman continued to press her, however, which was extremely rude and annoying.

Suddenly a crowd of vulgar, low-ranking monks arrived.

"His Holiness will be coming down from Yokawa today," one of the monks announced.

When the man was asked the reason for this sudden visit, he replied in a voice filled with evident pride: "Her Imperial Majesty, the First Princess, has fallen ill, possessed by a malignant spirit. The chief abbot³⁴ at Enryakuji has been

conducting the healing rites, but yesterday he twice sent us messages saying that his prayers were doing no good without the bishop being present. Then, late last night, a Lesser Captain of the fourth rank—a son of the Minister³⁵ himself—came up to Yokawa bearing a letter from the Empress requesting His Holiness's assistance. And so he has decided to go to the capital."

It may be awkward, but I must be brave and take advantage of this opportunity to ask His Holiness to administer vows to me. There's almost no one here to stop me, so the timing couldn't be better. With that in mind, Ukifune arose and addressed the bishop's mother.

"I'm seriously ill, so when your son, His Holiness, arrives, please inform him that I would like to take the vows that will make me a nun."

The senile old woman nodded in vague agreement.

Ukifune returned to her usual quarters. The nun was the only person who was permitted to comb her hair—Ukifune couldn't stand having anyone else touch it—and because she couldn't dress it herself, she simply loosened the cords and let it hang down a little. It made her sad to think that it was by her choice and no one else's that her mother would never again see her the way she looked now. She had been under the impression that her hair had thinned out as a result of the terrible ordeal she had been through, and yet, far from falling out, it was if anything thicker, a full six feet in length, and beautiful all the way to the ends. Each strand was fine and gave off a lovely sheen.

Ukifune recited a snatch of verse to herself: "... hoping that it would come to this."³⁶

The bishop arrived at dusk. The aisle room facing south had been cleaned and cleared away, and soon a host of round shaven heads were scurrying about raising an alarming uproar that disturbed the normally quiet atmosphere of the place. His Holiness went over to his mother's quarters to ask after her.

"How have you been doing these past few months? I see that the rooms on the east side are vacant. Has my sister already left on her pilgrimage? Is that young lady still in residence here?"

"She is," the old nun replied. "She decided to remain here. She told me to tell you that she's not feeling well and that she wants to become a nun. She wants you to administer the vows."

The bishop arose and went over to the young lady's chambers. "Excuse me, are you in here?"

Because she was sitting behind a standing curtain when he called out, she moved closer to him by way of reply, her demeanor quiet and demure.

"From the moment I first met you under those startling circumstances, I felt certain that there must be a bond between us from some previous life. Since

then, I have prayed devotedly for you. Of course, as a priest, it wouldn't do for me to call on you or send you letters without some reason to do so, and so naturally I have not kept in touch. How has it been, living among old women who have renounced the world? They must look frightfully strange to you, no?"

"It's depressing for me. Despite my desire to end my life, I continue to survive for reasons that remain a mystery. Please don't get me wrong ... there's no way someone as foolish as I can adequately express the gratitude I feel for all the kindness you've shown on my behalf. It's just that I can no longer lead the sort of life expected of a woman. Please make me a nun. Even if I were to return to society, someone in my situation would never be able to settle into a normal relationship."

"But you have such a long future ahead of you," the bishop counseled her. "Why is your heart so firmly fixed on this one desire? Becoming a nun may instead lead to regrets and attachments that will only increase your sins. You may think yourself strong enough at the time you stir your heart to action and make the decision, but being a woman, your resolve will waver as the years go by, and you will face many impediments to salvation."

"From the time I was a child," Ukifune replied, "I knew only heartache and misfortune, and for that reason my mother even told me once that she had thought about making me a nun. Later, after I came to understand things a little better, I had no desire to live as a normal woman, but increasingly focused my thoughts and placed my hopes on the world to come. Now I feel as if I'm on the verge of collapse and that death is gradually drawing nearer. So I ask you again ... please ..." She was crying as she spoke.

It makes no sense. What could have made someone so beautiful despise her life so much? Even the spirit that possessed her said that she wanted to die. Making this connection, the bishop considered her request. *She certainly has good cause to feel the way she does. In fact, it's amazing that she's managed to live this long. Having been possessed once by such an evil creature, she's in terrible danger.*

"Despite my reservations, the Buddha himself ³⁷ would praise the merits of your stated resolve. So who am I, a priest, to stand in your way? It is no trouble to administer the vows to you, but because I've been called out on an urgent matter, I have to go to the palace tonight. Starting tomorrow I must undertake healing rites for the First Princess. It will take about seven days to complete, and when I withdraw from the palace, I'll drop by here on the way back and perform the ceremony for you."

Ukifune was bitterly disappointed to hear that, for she knew that if the nun were back by then, she would most certainly object.

"I'm suffering just as much as when you administered to me the vows to uphold the Five Precepts. If my condition worsens, I fear that taking vows to become a nun will do no good at all. I would be grateful if you could do the ceremony today."

She was weeping so violently that she moved his pious heart to pity. "It's late, isn't it? In the old days I never gave a thought to going up and down this mountain, but as the years pass by it's getting harder for me to bear the strain, and so I thought I should rest here on my way to the palace. If you're really in such a hurry to take your vows, then I'll carry them out today."

Ukifune was overjoyed. She picked up a pair of scissors and pushed the lid of a comb box toward the bishop.

"Come here, my noble disciples," he called out.

The two monks who had first discovered the young lady happened to be accompanying the bishop, and when they entered the room he told them, "Prepare to cut her hair."

The ascetic thought this was a reasonable course of action. *She was in such a terrible state when we found her, it would seem cruel to force her to remain in society as a laywoman.* Nevertheless, the length of hair that she had laid out through the gaps in the curtain panels was so beautiful that he hesitated for a moment, reluctant to use the scissors.

At that moment, Shōshō was in her own room talking with her older brother, who was also an ascetic, while Saemon was receiving another of the priests who was a personal acquaintance of hers. Because visits from people close to the nuns were so rare at this out-of-the-way place, both women were preoccupied entertaining their guests, leaving the page girl, Komoki, as the only one attending the young lady. When Komoki reported to them what was happening, Shōshō rushed in a panic over to Ukifune's chambers, where she found the bishop helping the young lady, who did not have proper religious attire, put on one of his own outer robes and a surplice for the ceremony.

"This is merely for the sake of form," he said. "Now, please face in the direction of your parents and pay obeisance to them."

Ukifune had no idea which way to turn, and with the memory of her mother being too much for her to bear, she wept.

"Oh my dear ... how distressing!" Shōshō exclaimed. "Why are you taking such an ill-advised step? What will my mistress say when she returns?"

We've already begun the ceremony, His Holiness thought, and now that we've come this far, such talk will only serve to upset the young lady and put her in the wrong frame of mind. He admonished Shōshō, preventing her from saying anything more or coming any closer to interfere.

“Turning round and round, wandering through the Three Realms where all is in flux ... ,”³⁸ the bishop chanted.

At last, I've cut myself off from all obligations and attachments, Ukifune mused. Still, as she recalled the debt she owed her mother, taking this step made her sad.

The bishop's disciple was having difficulty cutting her hair. “In a quiet moment,” the ascetic said, “have the nuns trim it up for you.”

His Holiness clipped the locks around her forehead. “Never regret the change in your appearance,” he told the young lady, and then instructed her in the noble truths. They had all advised against rushing into this, but how happy she felt to have finally renounced the world. She felt that only by taking this step did she have a sign from the Buddha that surviving had been worthwhile after all.

The bishop and his entourage departed for the capital and the residence fell silent. As the evening breeze rustled outside, the nuns let the young woman know of their disappointment. “You've been living in this forlorn house for some time, and given your situation, we were expecting that you would soon be leading an auspicious life with the Middle Captain. But now that you've taken this drastic action, how do you plan to spend the many years of life that remain to you? It makes even those of us who are old and decrepit sad to think that a normal life is over for a woman when she becomes a nun.”

Despite their comments, at that moment Ukifune felt only relief and joy. She had come to the point where she couldn't imagine having to live on in this world and so, for her, becoming a nun was a wonderful thing, one that brightened her mood and lifted her burdens.

Early the next morning, however, she was ashamed to see her changed appearance, in part because no one around her had agreed with her decision, which they considered thoughtless. The ends of her hair had been cut so carelessly that they had suddenly gone all wild and uneven. Ukifune wanted someone to come in—preferably without making any snide or disapproving comments—and dress her hair properly, but because she was by nature shy and timid, she remained in her room with the blinds down to keep it dark.

She had never been able to express her most private feelings easily. Moreover, she now had no confidante to whom she could open up. Thus, all she could do when her emotions were too much for her to hold in was sit down in front of her inkstone and pour her heart into the poems she would scribble out under the pretext of practicing her calligraphy.

*Yet again have I turned my back on this world ...
A world I once renounced, thinking of myself*

And those I knew as not among the living

“By taking these vows, I’ve made an end of it at last,” she wrote. Still, looking at her own poem, her heart was filled with sorrow and pity.

*Over and over have I turned my back
On a world that I have been determined
To make an end of once and for all time*

As she sat scribbling other poems that expressed similar sentiments, a letter from the Middle Captain arrived. The old nuns had been shocked and stunned about what had happened, and in the midst of the uproar someone had sent word to the Middle Captain. He thought it a great shame, but he was also filled with regret and disappointment. *She was deeply determined to take this step, and that must be why she kept her distance and refused to reply to me, since she probably wanted to avoid any frivolous exchanges. But even so, what a drastic thing to do! The night I mentioned how much I wanted to get a closer look at her hair, which seemed so alluring that time I caught a glimpse of it, I was told, “All in due time.”*

He sent off a reply: “I don’t know what to say to you.”

*I must make haste, for I do not wish to be late
And fail to board the fishing boat that from this world
Rows away, bearing a nun to that distant shore³⁹*

Ukifune made an exception and agreed to read his note. In that moment of intense emotion, how must she have felt, moved by the thought that now, indeed, it was over? Along the edge of a mere scrap of paper, she wrote the following, again under the pretense of practicing her calligraphy:

*Though her heart is leaving behind the shore
Of this woeful world, the destination
Of the nun’s drifting bark remains unknown*

Shōshō wrapped the poem up to send to the Middle Captain.

“You should make a cleaner copy of it first,” Ukifune said.

“But I might make an error if I do that,” Shōshō replied, and sent it off just as it was.

It was a rare sight indeed to see a reply in the young lady’s own hand. There are no words that can adequately describe the anguish the Middle Captain

experienced.

The bishop's sister returned from her pilgrimage only to be deeply distressed to find out what had happened. "I'm aware that a woman in my position should be encouraging you for taking this step," she said to the young lady, "but you have so many years ahead of you, how are you going to get by? I have no idea how much longer I will live—I could pass away today or tomorrow—and so all my thoughts have been on ensuring that your future is secure once I'm gone. That's why I went to Hatsuse to pray to Kannon."

The nun was prostrate, writhing in grief. Ukifune found her extremely pitiful, but then she thought of her true mother and felt her heart break as she imagined just how terrible it must have been for a parent who had been left without even a body to mourn.

As usual, Ukifune was unresponsive and sat with her back to the nun. Because she looked so very tender and lovely, the nun couldn't hold back her tears as she remarked, "You certainly are a passive, fragile little thing!" She then made arrangements to provide her with the appropriate religious attire. A short outer robe and a surplice were tailored in the dark gray cloth that the nuns were accustomed to wearing. As the women there stitched the robes and tried them on the young lady, they vented their disappointment.

"She unexpectedly brought a radiant light to this mountain abode, and it was a joy to look at her every morning and evening. What a shame it's come to this!"

The women also expressed their resentment of the bishop and bitterly criticized his actions.

Just as his disciples had claimed, the efficacy of His Holiness's healing powers was so extraordinary that the First Princess's malady was quickly cured. As a result, the bishop's reputation grew and he was praised more and more as a man of noble virtue. Because Her Majesty was concerned about the dangerous possibility that the possessing spirit might linger, she extended the healing rites. As a result, the bishop had to remain in service and was not able to return to Yokawa right away. One quiet, rainy evening he was summoned by the Empress to be in attendance throughout the night. The ladies-in-waiting who had been caring for the First Princess for several days during her ordeal were exhausted and had all retired for the evening, and so there were only a few people in the imperial presence.

The Akashi Empress, who was resting in the same curtained dais as her daughter, the First Princess, chose a moment when almost no one was up and about, or in service close by, to address the bishop.

"Out of all the priests I have relied⁴⁰ upon over the years, I shall be even more inclined to place my trust in you to guide me on the path to salvation now and in

the next life.”

“The Buddha has given me signs indicating that I don’t have much time left in this world,” the bishop replied. “I will not likely live beyond this year or next, and that’s why I undertook the rigorous discipline of a yearlong retreat at Yokawa, where I’m able to concentrate on my devotions to the Holy Name without distraction. The only thing that could have taken me away from my temple was a summons from Your Majesty.”

The Akashi Empress described to him the stubborn nature of the spirit that had possessed her daughter and how terrifying it was to hear it announce itself under various identities. Her account at that moment reminded him of the strange events at Uji and Ono, and he told her what he had witnessed.

“Earlier this year, I saw for myself a most unusual and mysterious case of spirit possession. During the third month my elderly mother made a pilgrimage to Hatsuse to fulfill a vow, and on the way back she stopped over at an old imperial villa near Uji to recover from an illness. It’s an enormous structure that hasn’t been properly occupied for many years—the kind of place that evil spirits are likely to haunt—and I was concerned that staying there might have a deleterious effect on someone like my mother, who was seriously ill.” He then went on to give an account of his discovery of the young lady.

“Truly amazing!” Unsettled by the bishop’s account, the Akashi Empress had the women who were in service nearby awakened from their slumbers. Kosaishō—the lady-in-waiting who was on familiar terms with Kaoru—had been listening to His Holiness’s account, but the women who had just been awakened had heard none of it. The bishop felt bad that he had thoughtlessly frightened Her Majesty, and so he did not go into any further detail about the incident.

“On my way here,” the bishop continued, “as I was coming down the mountain, I dropped by the residence of my mother and sister in Ono to pay them a visit. While I was there, the young lady I spoke about was in tears, fervently imploring me to help her fulfill her deepest desire to renounce the world and become a nun. And so I performed the ceremony and had her hair cut. Now, my sister, who is a nun also living in Ono, was once the wife of the late Commander of the Guards.⁴¹ She had a daughter who passed away, and so she was thrilled to have found this young lady, for whom she cared with extraordinary devotion. When I administered the vows, she was bitterly resentful of me. And I must admit, the young lady is truly so beautiful that I felt a twinge of regret when she took on the appearance of a nun. Who could she be? I wonder.”

The bishop was something of a raconteur, and because he had gone on and on like this, his story raised questions for Kosaishō.

“Why would a spirit or demon have carried off a highborn lady to a place like that villa? And surely you must know who she is by now?”

“I’m afraid I don’t. She may have said something about her background to my sister, but in any case, if she really *is* from a distinguished family, she wouldn’t have been able to keep her identity secret, now, would she? Peasant girls may possess such beauty. And even the daughter of the dragon king may be reborn as a bodhisattva.⁴² I imagine the young lady is a commoner who had an especially light burden of sin from a previous life.”

Just then, the Akashi Empress remembered having heard about a young woman who disappeared from the villa at Uji at about the same time as the lady in the bishop’s story. Kosaishō had also heard a story from her older sister about a young woman who had died under weird circumstances, and she wondered if this wasn’t the same lady. Still, there was no way to be sure.

“This young lady,” the bishop added, “is in hiding and does not want anyone to know that she’s still alive, which suggests that she may have an enemy—perhaps a jealous wife or stepmother—who wishes to do her harm. I brought the matter to your attention because her situation is so bizarre.”

It seemed to Kosaishō that His Holiness wanted to keep the matter secret, and so she told no one else about his story.

“This young lady must be the same one my brother was seeing. I have to let Kaoru know,” Her Majesty said to Kosaishō. But then she let the matter drop. After all, both the bishop and Kaoru wanted to keep the matter secret, and without knowing all the facts with greater certainty, she was uncomfortable bringing up a delicate topic with such a dauntingly upright young man like her brother.

When the First Princess had completely recovered, the bishop returned to Yokawa. On the way he dropped by the residence in Ono, where he was met with a bitter outburst from his sister.

“You may have intended to set her on the path to salvation in the next life, but she is still young and beautiful, and if she comes to regret her decision, your rash actions will stir lingering attachments that will surely add to the burden of her sins. Why didn’t you consult with me first? It’s incomprehensible!” The nun’s complaints, however, were useless at this point.

“You must now concentrate solely on your devotions,” the bishop told Ukifune. “No one, neither the old nor the young, knows how long they have to live. The fact that you have rejected this world as a fleeting illusion is the proper frame of mind for someone in your situation.”

His words were mortifying to Ukifune, for they were reminders that he had earlier witnessed her wretched condition.

The bishop brought out the damask, gauze and silk cloth he had received from Her Majesty as a reward for his services. “Take these,” he told Ukifune, “and have a new habit made for you. So long as I’m alive, I’ll do what I can to assist you. Nothing need worry you. We’re all born creatures of this vulgar world, and insofar as we’re pressured by our attachments and desire for its glories, it seems that all people find renunciation difficult. Why would anyone in your position, pursuing religious devotions in the midst of this forest, ever have cause to feel regret or shame?”

And so he instructed her, finishing with two lines from Bai Juyi: “Life is as thin and fragile as a leaf on a tree. The moon wanders through the sky until dawn breaks over the pines at the gate.”⁴³ He may have been a monk, but to Ukifune, who sat there listening to him speak in his formidably elegant and erudite manner, he was saying things that she very much wanted to hear.

The wind, which blew all day long, sounded forlorn and melancholy. She heard the bishop saying, “On a day like this, even a hermit in the mountains is moved to weep aloud.”

Am I not also a hermit now? Ukifune asked herself. *That must be the reason why I cannot stop my tears.*

She stood up and moved toward the edge of the veranda. Looking out at the valley spreading off into the distance, she saw a hunting party of men dressed in robes of various hues. Although they were heading up Mount Hiei, it was unusual for anyone to travel along the path that ran past the residence here. Once in a great while she might catch sight of a monk walking along from the direction of Kurodani, but to see a layperson out here was rarer still. Then she realized that the party belonged to the Middle Captain, who had been so aggrieved by her behavior.

He was visiting with the intent of making yet another of his complaints—useless though they were now—but because the autumn foliage was so delightful, having turned a deeper crimson here than in other places, he was enchanted, his mind distracted, from the moment he entered the valley.

How astonishing it would be to come across a beautiful woman in a place like this, he thought.

“I had some free time,” he told the nun, “and feeling bored, I took to imagining how lovely the autumn leaves must look right now. Even your trees seem to beckon me to lodge for the night beneath their sheltering shade.”

He was seated on the south-facing veranda, gazing around at the view. The nun, lachrymose as ever, composed the following:

The chill blasts of late autumn sweep

*The mountain's base, wither the trees
Leave no sheltering shade for you*

The Middle Captain replied:

*I know no one awaits me, but gazing
At the treetops in this mountain village
It is hard for me to just pass them by*

He continued talking on and on about the young lady, though words could do nothing to win her now. “Do let me steal a glance of her to see how her appearance has changed,” he pleaded with Shōshō. “You can at least do that much, as a token of the promise you once made to me.”

Because he pressed her this way, Shōshō went inside, and when she saw how beautiful Ukifune looked, she felt the urge to do anything she could to show the young lady to the Middle Captain. Wearing subtly figured robes of simple, serene colors—light gray over pale orange-brown—she had a dainty physique, lithe and elegant, her face had a bright, modern appeal, and the ends of her hair, thick and abundant, spread across her back and shoulders like an opened multiribbed fan. Her fine complexion and delicate features gave off a lambent, rosy glow, as if she had applied her makeup with exquisite care.

Shōshō wanted to paint a picture to capture the scene of Ukifune performing her devotions, absorbed in reading a sutra with a rosary hanging from the frame of the standing curtain next to her.

Each time I see her like this, Shōshō reflected, I'm moved to tears. And if I feel that way, how much more intense would be the reaction of a man whose heart was drawn to her? Thinking that perhaps this was the appropriate moment to act, she let the Middle Captain know that there was a small opening just beneath the latch on the sliding door, and then moved aside the standing curtain that might otherwise have obstructed his view.

Seeing the young lady for the first time, the Middle Captain was filled with regret, resentment and sorrow, as if he himself were somehow to blame for what had happened. *I never once imagined that she was this beautiful. For a woman so extraordinary, so perfect in all respects, to have become a nun ...* He could not contain his emotions and so he withdrew before she could hear him weeping madly, as if he had taken leave of his senses.

Anyone who lost a lady as magnificent as she would surely be searching for her, would he not? And there certainly would have been rumors going around had the daughter of some nobleman or other gone missing or gone into hiding

after turning her back on the world in a fit of bitter resentment. Mulling over the situation, the Middle Captain was mystified. *Even if she has become a nun, how could I be repulsed by such a lovely woman? If anything, she's even more alluring, which will only make my yearning all the more painful. Somehow, secretly, I shall make her mine.*

Assuming a serious demeanor, he spoke with the nun. “The young lady must have reasons for her reluctance to behave as a normal woman might, but now that she’s taken vows, she should be able to speak to me without feeling so constrained. Please let her know how I feel. I come here like this because I cannot forget the past, and her presence gives me added incentive to call on you.”

“Her future is bleak, and that’s a worrisome situation,” the nun replied. “How happy I would be knowing that she had someone serious and sincere who would never forget to care for her. It makes me sad just thinking about what might become of her once I’m gone.”

Judging from the way the nun was weeping, the Middle Captain assumed that she must have some inseparable bond with the young lady, but he could not fathom what that might be or who the young lady was.

“My own situation is uncertain—after all, I have no way of knowing how long I will live—but once I have given you my word that I will look after her as her future benefactor, I shall not waver from that promise. Is there really no one else who may be searching for her? I’m not particularly concerned about such things, and they wouldn’t deter me in any case, but I can’t help feeling that you’re hiding something from me.”

“If she were living in a manner that would draw attention to herself, I have no doubt that she would have many suitors seeking her out. But now that she has taken vows, she seems entirely focused on her devotions. Judging by her behavior, I have no reason to think that she intends to do otherwise.”

The Middle Captain sent a message to Ukifune with the following:

*Though it is you who rejected this vulgar life
It hurts me to think that your distaste for the world
Is pretense and it is I you truly detest*

The messenger conveyed in detail all the sincere, heartfelt things that the Middle Captain had said.

“Think of me as your brother,” he went on to say. “Just sharing with you stories about passing, trivial matters would be a consolation.”

“I regret to say, it’s unlikely that I would comprehend the deeper meanings of

your stories," Ukifune replied evasively. As to his complaint about her distaste for the world, she made no effort to respond.

It had been her fate to suffer shocking cruelties, and so she behaved as if she detested this world and wanted to spend the rest of her life ignored and left alone by everyone, as if she were a withered tree hidden deep in mountain recesses.⁴⁴ This explained why she had been constantly depressed and distracted all these months. But after she finally realized her most fervent hope, her mood brightened a little. She would pass the days, mornings and evenings, playfully conversing with the nun, or engaging her in a game of Go. She practiced her devotions often and with intense commitment, and she read not just the *Lotus Sutra*, as one might expect, but many other sacred scriptures as well. For all that, once the snows began to fall and accumulate so deeply that no one could be seen traveling up and down the mountain, she had no way to rid herself of melancholy thoughts.

The New Year arrived. With no signs of spring nor any sound of rippling water from the frozen stream, she felt forlorn and was filled with unpleasant thoughts of Niou, who had once told her that he was "lost in wild longing" for her.⁴⁵ Yet for all the pain those memories brought, she still could not forget those times.

*Gazing out at the snow on mountain moors
Beneath dark, cloudy skies, today as well
I grieve for things that happened in the past*

As always, she wrote this down while practicing calligraphy, which served as a diversion for her during the breaks between her devotions. Almost a year had passed since she had vanished from the world, and many a time she wondered if there was anyone who remembered her.

Some of the women brought in early spring greens, which they had picked and placed in a plain, rustic basket. When the nun saw them, she had the women take the greens in to Ukifune.

*To watch as the young spring greens are eagerly picked
Amidst patches of snow at the mountain village
Gives me hope for the years that lie ahead of you*

The young lady replied:

*From now on I shall go to moors deep in snow
To pluck young spring greens for the sake of your health*

~~To pluck young sprouting green, or the bark of, your heart.~~

*That the years of your life may pile up as well*⁴⁶

The nun was touched by the apparent sincerity of the sentiments expressed. *If only she were dressed as a laywoman—her figure then would surely be recompense for the blessing I've received by being allowed to look after her*, she thought, weeping with heartfelt emotion.

The colors and scent of the red plum tree growing near her bedchamber seemed no different from those Ukifune remembered from the past. She recalled a snatch of verse: “Is this spring not the spring of old?”⁴⁷ She was especially fond of the red plum, which she preferred to all other blossoms, perhaps because its ever-enchanting fragrance⁴⁸ was so like that of the man she could not forget. One morning, when she was about to make an offering of holy water as part of the ritual devotions she regularly performed during the wee hours just before dawn, Ukifune summoned one of the lower-ranking nuns—a woman slightly younger than the others—and asked her to fetch some red plum blossoms.

When the woman broke off a sprig, the blossoms scattered and fell, as if in resentful reproach, and their intense fragrance wafted toward Ukifune.

*He whose sleeves once touched mine, imparting their fragrance⁴⁹
Is nowhere to be seen, but the scent of blossoms
Scattering on a spring dawn brings him back to me*

Now, the bishop’s aged mother had a grandson who was the Governor of Kii, and recently this man had returned to the capital from his provincial posting. He was about thirty years old, strikingly handsome, and exuding an air of confident pride.

“How have you been getting on these last two years?” he asked the old nun. She, however, seemed to be too senile to respond, and so he went over to his aunt’s quarters.

“My grandmother has aged terribly. It makes me sad to see her in such a pitiful state. I’ve spent all this time living in a distant province, and that has made it impossible for me to see her during these remaining years of her life. After my parents died, she was the one who raised me, and so I think of her as my mother. Oh, by the way, does the principal wife of the Vice Governor of Hitachi ever call on you?” Apparently, he was referring to his younger sister.⁵⁰

“We experience only greater tedium and sorrow here as the years go by,” the nun replied. “We’ve had no word from Hitachi for a very long time. It looks to me as though my mother will not live long enough to see a visit from the Vice Governor’s wife.”

Ukifune was startled to overhear them mention her mother's married title.

"I've been back in the capital for several days," the Governor of Kii continued, "but I've been occupied with tiresome official matters and couldn't come sooner. Just yesterday I was thinking of calling on you, but then I had to serve in the escort of His Lordship, the Major Captain, on a trip to Uji, where we spent the day at the old villa of Prince Hachinomiya. From what I gathered, the Major Captain used to visit the late Prince's daughters there until one of them passed away a few years back. Then he secretly brought another of the Prince's daughters to the villa, but she too died a year ago last spring. So it turned out that the reason for the trip was to arrange a memorial service. The Major Captain spoke with the Risshi at the temple above the villa and told him to make the appropriate preparations. I suppose I'll have to provide some sort of offering or gift, probably a set of women's robes. Would you be able to sew them for me? If you can, I'll hurry up and order the cloth you need right away."

How could Ukifune not have been sorely affected when she heard this man's story? Mindful that her reaction might arouse suspicions, she turned away and sat facing the interior of the residence.

"I thought that Prince Hachinomiya had only two daughters," the nun said. "One of them is the principal wife of the Minister of War, Prince Niou."

"The second daughter that the Major Captain was seeing was a half sister to the other two. Evidently she was born to a woman of lower status. As a result, at least from what I heard, the Major Captain never intended to take her openly as his wife. Still, she must have meant something to him, for now he seems shattered by her death. They say that when the first of the daughters died, he was so distraught that he considered taking religious vows and renouncing the world."

Ukifune was utterly terrified by the realization that this man was in close service to Kaoru.

"It seems strange ... uncanny, really ... that both daughters should have died at that villa in Uji. How sad and inconsolable the Major Captain looked yesterday. He went off to a spot by the river and stared into the waters, weeping the whole time. It was pitiful to see him in such a state. When he went back up to the villa, he attached a poem to a pillar:

*It is harder than ever to hold back my tears ...
They linger not, but drop into this flowing stream
Vanish like the reflection of my loved one's face*

"He didn't say much more, but he looked devastated. Women must find him

extremely attractive. Ever since I was a young, I've looked up to him as a gentleman of outstanding character. That's why I much prefer putting my trust in him for support over serving more powerful lords, even the Chancellor."

The Governor of Kii may not be especially sensitive or a good judge of character, but even he recognizes how superior Kaoru is, Ukifune reflected.

"I doubt that he can compare with the late gentleman of the Rokujō estate ... the one whom people used to refer to as the Radiant Prince," the nun remarked. "Still, his descendants are the most glorious family of this generation. What about his oldest son, the Minister?"

"He too is quite splendid-looking, projecting a dignified presence and enjoying a special position of power and prestige at the court. But it's the Minister's nephew, Prince Niou, who is the most handsome of them all. If I were a woman, I'm sure I'd want to be in intimate service with him."

The Governor talked on and on, as if he was giving some sort of lesson. Listening to him, Ukifune was both touched and fascinated, and yet she felt that all the things he was talking about belonged to a different world now ... a world utterly removed from her present circumstances. After speaking on and on without pausing for a break, the Governor finally left.

Kaoru has not forgotten me. That realization stirred poignant emotions, and she was able to better comprehend how her own mother must be feeling. Yet for all that, she remained averse to ever allowing her mother to see her in her present guise, since that would cause only a different sort of grief.

As the other nuns busied themselves with the robes that the Governor of Kii had ordered, Ukifune was struck by how weird and curious it was watching them prepare clothes that were meant for her own memorial service. She felt the urge to tell them the truth, but ended up saying nothing. In the midst of all the cutting and stitching, the nun held out a short, unlined outer robe to the young lady and said, "Would you mind helping with this? You sew pleats so beautifully!"

The very idea of sewing such a garment was so distressing that she wouldn't even touch it. Instead, she told the nun that she was ill and went to lie down. The nun was hurt and confused and, hurriedly putting her own sewing aside, anxiously asked the young lady, "What's troubling you?"

One of the women placed a robe with a woven pattern of cherry blossoms over a crimson singlet. "The young lady should be wearing these," she said, "instead of those unbecoming gray robes."

*Having changed into robes of gray, shall I put on
Once more these brightly colored sleeves as mementos
Of my former life, longing for the world that was*

Ukifune wrote this as if she were practicing calligraphy again. *No secret is ever safe in this world, and it would be a pity if, after I die, the nun should hear things and figure out the truth about me. And if that happens, she'll no doubt think me perverse and cruel for having kept things from her.*

Turning these thoughts over in her mind, she casually remarked, "I have completely forgotten my past life, but as you busy yourself with these preparations, I am moved to sorrow by vague, unformed memories."

"No matter how much you've forgotten," the nun replied, "there still must be many things you remember. It hurts that you remain so aloof and keep everything to yourself. Having lived here for so long, I've forgotten about the colors that women normally wear in the world, and so I've lost the touch for making these sorts of robes. Regardless, I can't help wishing that my daughter was still alive and with me now. You must feel the same ... there must be someone in this world who once looked after you as I looked after my daughter. Though I saw with my own eyes that she had died, even now I wonder where she is, and I long to go and at least seek out her spirit. You simply went missing, and so there must be someone who is wondering what happened to you."

"Yes, there was one person like that when I was still part of the vulgar world, but I imagine that she probably died over the past few months." Ukifune was trying to hide her tears. "But it's so unpleasant to have only vague memories that I find it impossible to talk to you about her. Why would I keep secrets and be distant toward you?" She spoke only these few words and nothing more.

With the completion of the memorial services, Kaoru sorrowfully reflected on how brief and ephemeral his relationship with Ukifune had been. He had kept his promise and helped arrange postings at the sixth rank for two of the sons of the Vice Governor of Hitachi. One was now a Chamberlain serving His Majesty, and the other served as a secretary in Kaoru's Right Palace Guards. He thought that he would take a third son, who was still a boy and the most attractive of the siblings, into his own personal service as a page.

On a quiet, rainy evening, Kaoru went to pay his respects to the Akashi Empress. It was an idle day, with few women in Her Majesty's presence, and in the course of their conversation he took the opportunity to speak of personal matters.

"I'm aware that people have criticized me for visiting that peculiar villa in Uji over the years and in particular for secretly visiting a certain lady there, but I was convinced that my relationship with her was destined by karma, and that I behaved the way any man would who was driven by the dictates of his heart. I continued to call on her from time to time until that moment when something happened to make the place unbearable for me. I even came to wonder if the

villa itself might be star-crossed by virtue of its name. After that, I felt that the place was too far away and didn't visit it for a long time. Then, just the other day, I had some business to take care of there, and was reminded once again of the ephemeral nature of life in this world. The villa struck me as a kind of hermitage, the sort of place built expressly to stir religious feelings of renunciation."

Moved to pity by Kaoru's words, the Akashi Empress suddenly remembered the story she had heard from the bishop of Yokawa. "Some sort of terrifying spirit or evil demon must reside there," she said. "How did the young lady you loved pass away?"

Thinking that she must have surmised that the older Princess and Ukifune had died one after the other, Kaoru replied, "Yes, you're probably right about that. Evil spirits are always lingering around isolated places like that. The circumstances in which the second lady died are certainly suspicious." He would not, however, go into any greater detail.

Observing how awkward it was for Kaoru to openly discuss private matters that, he assumed, she already knew about, Her Majesty was moved to pity him. Connecting Kaoru's story with the memory that Niou had been depressed and fallen ill at that time, she now felt sorry for her son as well. However, given that the woman's lineage was so undistinguished that both men found it difficult to speak about her, she was reluctant to say anything more.

Speaking in confidence to Kosaishō, Her Majesty said, "The Major Captain has told me about the unbearable grief he feels over the disappearance of that young lady at Uji. It was so heartrending listening to him that I thought I should share with him what the bishop had said. But then I caught myself, because it occurred to me that the woman the bishop was talking about might not be the lady at Uji. You're the only one who has heard about the incident directly from both the bishop and Kaoru. So when you next have one of your conversations with the Major Captain, tell him what the bishop said—though be sure to leave out any details that might cause him embarrassment or pain."

"Begging Your Majesty's pardon," Kosaishō replied, "but if it is difficult for you to mention the bishop's story to the Major Captain, how much harder will it be for an outsider like me?"

"It depends on the situation, but there are times when it is best to hear something like this from an outsider. What's more, there's another consideration that makes this especially difficult for me."

Kosaishō understood immediately that Her Majesty was referring to Niou, and she appreciated the prudence of such discretion.

Taking advantage of Kaoru's next visit, Kosaishō told him everything. The

story was so unbelievably strange, how could he have been anything but shocked? *My sister must have been thinking of this when she asked me how Ukifune died. Why couldn't she have just told me herself?* He was hurt, but he found it difficult to open up and tell Kosaishō about everything that happened. *I kept this matter to myself from the very beginning, he calculated, and so I'll feel foolish if I confide to Kosaishō now after hearing this story from her. I kept our affair strictly guarded, but it seems that rumors have spread anyway. In the end, it is impossible for people to keep secrets to themselves in this world.*

"The circumstances of the woman that you mentioned put me in mind of one whose disappearance remains a mystery to me. Would that lady still be at Ono?"

"The bishop at Yokawa made her a nun on the day he came down to the palace. The women who were looking after her had not permitted her to do this, even when she was terribly ill, for they thought it would be cause for regret. However, it appears that the young lady herself managed to convince His Holiness of the deep sincerity of her wish to become a nun."

The place and time of the bishop's account matched what Kaoru already knew, and when he put all the facts together in his mind, everything fit together. *It will no doubt be a cruel shock if I call on this young lady and it turns out to be Ukifune. But otherwise, how can I find out for sure? People will call me a proper fool if I personally go around looking for a woman like that. And what if Niou finds out? He'll certainly begin pursuing her again and would do anything to block her from the religious path she's decided to follow. Perhaps Niou already knows about her and that's his intent. Maybe he even told his mother not to say anything about her. That would explain why Her Majesty, who must have heard about the young lady from the bishop, was reluctant to discuss such a remarkable story with me. And if indeed Niou is involved in such a plot, then no matter how heartbreaking it may be for me, I shall have to resign myself and think of her once again as someone who has died. And if she and I should be reborn in some future world—perhaps by the side of the Yellow Springs in the land of the dead—then some chance breeze⁵¹ may provide the opportunity for us to come together again. I must not give in to my desire to try to see her and make her mine.*

Kaoru's thoughts and feelings were in turmoil, and though he remained convinced that his sister would tell him nothing, he was desperate to find out Her Majesty's true intentions. And so, after coming up with an appropriate excuse to meet her, he used that occasion to broach the subject once more.

"I learned from a certain person that someone I thought had died in a shocking manner was in fact still alive—though apparently she has come down in the world and is living in wretched circumstances," he began. "At first I had my

doubts about the truth of this story, but then again, in all the time I was with her I never once imagined that she was the kind of person who was capable of doing something so extreme on her own just to part ways with me. Thus, I've had to reconsider what I was told and admit that the story isn't so far-fetched after all."

He then went on to share a few more details with her. It would have been very awkward for him had he talked about Niou's role, and so he mentioned nothing about the bitter resentment he felt. "If your son were to hear that I'm looking for her again, he will dismiss me as perversely obsessed and lascivious. For that reason, I plan to go on pretending that I know nothing about any of this."

"His Holiness's description of the night he found the young lady was so terrifying that I stopped listening. There's no way that Niou could have heard about this. When I found out about his outrageous behavior with the young lady I was shocked beyond comprehension, and so it would be even more distressing to me now if somehow he should find out that she's alive. It causes me nothing but grief and anguish to think that when it comes to his relationships with women, my son is known at court only for his fickle, frivolous disposition."

The Empress is prudent and discreet, Kaoru concluded, and she would never expose an intimate secret told to her in confidence, not even something mentioned in casual conversation.

Where is it, this mountain village that's now her home? How can I go about searching for her without making a spectacle of myself? One way or another, it seems that I'll have to meet the bishop of Yokawa and ask him directly if I'm ever going to learn the truth for certain. These thoughts constantly weighed on his mind.

On the eighth day of every month, Kaoru would, without fail, commission solemn rites to honor Yakushi, the Buddha of Healing, at the central hall at Enryakuji Temple. Occasionally he would participate in those rites, and this custom provided him with a pretext to journey to Mount Hiei. Only this time, before returning to the capital, he planned to go to Yokawa immediately after the ceremony. Ukifune's younger brother, who was serving as a page, was part of his escort.

I don't want her family to find out about this right away. I'll decide what to do after I see how she looks and what her circumstances are. Such were his intentions, but wasn't it possible that he was thinking this way in order to heighten the poignant ecstasy he would experience when, as if in a dream, they were reunited?

Suppose I find that this woman really is Ukifune? She'll have taken on an otherworldly appearance living among those peculiar-looking nuns. And if I were to learn the terrible truth that she is being hidden away by another man,

the anguish would be unbearable.

Was he perturbed by such musings all the way to Mount Hiei?

¹ Yokawa, along with Tōdō (east pagoda) and Saitō (west pagoda), was one of three extensive compounds that comprised the important and influential monastic center of Enryakuji. Part of this temple's prestige derived from geomantic practices. Mount Hiei is located northeast of Kyoto. Northeast was considered a permanently unlucky direction, and it was thus believed that a holy site like Enryakuji protected the capital from evil influences. “Bishop” is a common translation of *sōzu*, a position second in the monastic hierarchy to *sōjō*, which is usually rendered as “archbishop.”

² It has been argued that the character of the bishop of Yokawa is based on the historical figure Genshin (942–1017), who was author of the important tract, *Ōjōyōshū* (*The Essential Teachings for Rebirth in the Pure Land of Amida*), written in 985. Evidence supporting this claim is provided by Story # 39 in Book 15 of *Konjaku monogatari* (*Tales of Times Now Past*), which depicts Genshin hurrying to his sick mother’s bedside to make sure that she will achieve salvation upon her death.

³ This may be a reference to the real-life Emperor Suzaku (923–952), who used a villa near Uji as a retreat from the capital. However, since the association of fictional characters with real-life figures is a recurring feature of Murasaki Shikibu’s narrative technique, it may be that the author is simply introducing new information about her character, Suzaku.

⁴ Mudras were an important practice in Shingon Buddhism. Shingon esoteric practices during the Heian period were influential and had an impact on other Buddhist sects, including the Tendai Monastery at Enryakuji on Mount Hiei.

⁵ The syncretic nature of religious belief at the time meant that even Buddhist priests had to be respectful of Shinto practices. The desire to maintain a proper balance between different religious systems is depicted at several points in the narrative, most notably when the Rokujō lady worries about the sin her daughter has committed because of her position as the High Priestess at Ise, which forced her to neglect her devotions to the Buddha.

⁶ Although he is not explicitly named in the text, the implication is that Ukifune is recalling her relationship with Niou, who is depicted several times in the *Ukifune* chapter embracing her (or picking her up—the word used here and in the *Ukifune* chapter is *idaku*). Of course, she is being beguiled and deceived by the possessing spirit at this moment, but the mention of the title of Your Lordship (*miya*, prince) is noteworthy in that it reinforces the view held by Ukifune’s women that she prefers the more passionate and socially exalted of her lovers.

⁷ The Five Precepts constitute a vow against killing, stealing, lying, promiscuity, and intemperance. The vows to become a true nun are more numerous.

⁸ The phrasing of this line calls to mind the dream the nun had at Hatsuse, implying that her prayers were answered.

⁹ *Tales of Ise*, section 63 (Ariwara no Narihira): “The grizzled lady who is just a year shy of one hundred seems to be yearning for me, for the image of her face appears before my eyes.” The word for “grizzled/gray-haired” is *tukumogami*, which is sometimes written with Chinese characters meaning “ninety-nine.”

¹⁰ This story is told in the *Yūgiri* chapter.

¹¹ The following poem to Retired Emperor Uda was written by Sugawara no Michizane when he was exiled to Kyushu. It is cited in *Ōkagami* (*The Great Mirror*) in the chapter on Minister of the Left Tokihira: “Cast aside like jetsam to drift away, I beseech you, act as a fishing weir and hold me back.”

¹² *Kokinshū* 411 (Ariwara no Narihira): “O miyakodori … bird of the capital … if that is your name, well then, I would ask you, is my love alive and well, or not?” *Miyakodori* is a type of gull whose black head

calls to mind the appearance of courtly women. Here it obviously refers to Ukifune's former, more sophisticated attendants.

13 *Shūishū* 506 (Anonymous): "If only I could find a retreat from this world, a refuge where I may hide this figure of mine, ravaged by the years." This poem is alluded to earlier in the *Azumaya* chapter.

14 The text at this point refers to Ukifune for the first time as *himekimi*, which is a respectful term for the daughter of a nobleman. This suggests that she is now being thought of in romantic terms appropriate to a story of courtship.

15 *Asamitsushū* 72 (Fujiwara no Asamitsu): "Because it is you who have changed your appearance in this world, I wonder, am I still myself?" The implication of this illusion is that Ukifune is privately asserting her selfhood against the identity (and alternative past) being imposed upon her by the nun. Ukifune's words bring to mind Murasaki's assertion of self, "I am who I am," in the *Miotsukushi* chapter when she learns that she has a rival for Genji's affections, the Akashi Lady—a revelation that throws Murasaki's understanding of her own past into doubt.

16 The word for guest or visitor, *marōto*, echoes the use of *himekimi* above, adding a romantic overtone.

17 *Shūishū* 1098 (Bishop Henjō, on seeing some young women in the garden of his monastery): "Is their lambent beauty to be found here as well? Alas, in this detestable world those maidenflowers are all it takes to give rise to sordid gossip." One of the old nuns picks up on his allusion, which indicates that their admiration is not only for his prudence but also for his sensitivity.

18 This line could be interpreted to mean "Though there must be people in this world that you [i.e., Ukifune] are still worried about ..."

19 *Izumi Shikibu shū* 726: "Because I live in obscurity, like wood buried in a deep valley, I know not if the spring has come, or if the cherry trees are in bloom." *Umoregi*, wood buried in a swamp or in mud that has partially fossilized or turned to charcoal, was a symbol for someone who is isolated or living in obscurity.

20 The poem plays on the word *ada* (an element in the place name Adashino), which means "fickle/faithless." The word *shime(f)u* means "to bind with rope" and could refer to the practice of tying plants up to support them against the wind. *Shime* as a shortened form of *shimenawa* could also refer to the Shinto practice of drawing a rope across an object or around a space to mark it as sacred. Since the Middle Captain does not want Ukifune to yield to another man, but wants to possess her as his own, both meanings clearly apply here.

21 *Kotakagari* means "hunting with small falcons," which I take to refer to kestrel falconry. The specific mention of this type of hunting is likely intended to call to mind the poetic association of *kotakagari* with maidenflowers (i.e., Ukifune) that is found in *Kokin rokujō* 1201 (Ki no Tsurayuki, on the subject of kestrel falconry): "I have passed the day hunting in these autumn fields ... maidenflower, may I lodge with you this night only?" This poem, which is alluded to earlier in the *Yūgiri* chapter, is also attributed to Kiyohara no Motosuke, *Goshūishū* 314.

22 *Shinkokinshū* 336 (Ono no Komachi) [also *Komachi shū* 98]: "For whom does she wait in expectation, the maidenflower on Mount Matsuchi? It seems she has plighted her troth with the coming of autumn, and yet ..."

23 *Kokinshū* 1019 (Anonymous): "When, upon seeing the blossoms, I sought to break off a stem, I discovered they were maidenflowers, whose very name is disturbingly unpleasant to me."

24 *Kokinshū* 214 (Mibu no Tadamine): "At this mountain village autumn is indeed the loneliest season ... night after night I lie awake listening to the cry of the stag" (alluded to earlier in the *Yūgiri* chapter).

25 *Kokinshū* 955 (Mononobe Yoshina): "To escape the trials of the world, I want to seek out mountain recesses, though I remain fettered to the one I love" (also alluded to earlier in the *Yomogiu* chapter).

26 *Gosenshū* 103 (Minamoto no Saneakira): "On an evening too precious to waste, if only I could show the moon and the blossoms to one who understands, as I do, true beauty" (alluded to in the *Akashi* chapter).

27 The phrase *ochinaru sato mo* ("distant village") appears in a poem that Kaoru sends to Uji in the *Ukifune* chapter. This connection with Uji makes it clear that the Middle Captain is talking about Ukifune. See also, *Kokin rokujō* 174 (Anonymous): "Waiting to see here again the moon I never tire of viewing, wondering, does it tarry at the distant village on the mountain's rim?"

²⁸ These syllables are probably a solfège, but the first three, *Takefu*, call to mind a *saibara*, “The Entrance to the Road” (*Michi no kuchi*): “O breezes that join our hearts / Tell my parents ‘I am here’ / In distant *Takefu* / At the entrance to the road.” This *saibara* is mentioned in the *Ukifune* chapter, and because it tells of a young woman who is thinking of her parents, the reference to it at this point evokes *Ukifune*’s state of mind and how much she misses her mother. The syllables that follow *Takefu* may be the old nun’s attempt to imitate the sound of a flute, which the Middle Captain has had to stop playing because of the mismatched modes.

²⁹ The Middle Captain’s poem plays on the words *koto* (referring to the instrument and to “things”) and *fushi* (“melodies” and “times/occasions”).

³⁰ *Kokinshū* 1009 (Anonymous, a *sedōka*, a less common poetic form with the syllabic metrical pattern 5-7-7-5-7-7): “Beside the Hatsuse River, beside the ancient Furukawa, stands a twin-trunked cedar. The years have passed by, and I long to see it again, that twin-trunked cedar.” A cedar (especially a twin-trunked cedar) was a symbol of faithful love. For an earlier reference to this symbol, see *Kokinshū* 982, which is alluded to in the *Sakaki* chapter. The “ancient river” in *Ukifune*’s poem is Furukawa (or Furu River, a name that plays on *furu*, meaning “ancient” and “to flow/to pass”). Furukawa is an alternate name for the Hatsuse River, which means that *Ukifune* is explicitly saying that she does not want to go on the pilgrimage.

³¹ Tachibana Yoshitoshi was a lower-ranking nobleman who served Retired Emperor Uda in the early tenth century. His formal name as a master of Go was Kanren, but he was also given the sobriquet, High Priest of the Go Board (*Kisei Daitoku*).

³² Most commentaries speculate that this sentence refers to a folktale or perhaps a Buddhist sermon. However, the source has not been identified.

³³ The word used here is *itachi*, which refers to a weasel. However, it’s more likely that the old nun resembles a dangerous mythical creature, the *kamaitachi*, or scythe-weasel—mentioned earlier in the *Azumaya* chapter.

³⁴ The title this priest holds, *zasu* (literally, “master of the seat,” but often translated as abbot or chief abbot) is several ranks lower than *sōzu* (bishop) in the *sōkan* system of priestly ranks.

³⁵ The text reads “Minister of the Right” and is referring to Genji’s powerful son.

³⁶ *Gosenshū* 1240 (Bishop Henjō, written when he first took the tonsure): “Surely my mother never stroked my pitch-black hair hoping that it would come to this.”

³⁷ The text uses the phrase “the Three Treasures” (*sanbō*—the Buddha, the Dharma/Law, the priesthood), but in this context the word refers to the Buddha.

³⁸ This line comes from the *Hōonjurin*, a Tang period Chinese compendium of selections from various sutras and Buddhist commentaries completed in 668. It is part of a longer verse: “Turning round and round, wandering through the Three Realms where all is in flux, obligations and attachments can never be broken off, yet renouncing obligations, entering a state of Non-Action [*wu wei*], truly all obligations will be repaid.”

³⁹ This poem (and the reply that follows) plays on the word *ama*, which can mean both “fisherman (or diver)” and “nun.”

⁴⁰ The verb here (a causative form) can be read as an honorific suggesting that the Akashi Empress is speaking about her husband, or that her words are being conveyed by an intermediary. However, it also makes sense to read it as a causative, and in the context it seems clear that the Akashi Empress is speaking about herself.

⁴¹ The nun’s late husband is described earlier in the chapter simply as “a high-ranking official.” A commander would have been at the fourth rank, which is not that high a position. It is likely that the husband was also serving as a consultant, which was not an uncommon arrangement.

⁴² The twelfth chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* (“Devadatta”) tells the story of the eight-year-old daughter of one of the eight Dragon Kings who live in the ocean’s depths. Upon hearing the *Lotus Sutra*, she desires salvation and, after transforming into a male, achieves instant enlightenment. She retains her dragon form, but is a bodhisattva residing in the Spotless World to the south.

⁴³ *Hakushi monjū* 161.

⁴⁴ This sentence echoes a poetic allusion by the character Bennokimi in the *Hashihime* chapter. The text has only the words “withered tree,” but that image only makes sense if we recall the earlier allusion to *Kokinshū* 875.

⁴⁵ Ukifune is remembering words from a poem by Niou that appears in the *Ukifune* chapter.

⁴⁶ This poem plays on the word *tsumu*, which may mean either “to pick/to pluck” or “to pile up/accumulate.” *Kokinshū* 21 (Emperor Kōkō): “For the sake of your health I went out to the moors in springtime to pluck young spring greens with snow falling on my sleeves the whole time.”

⁴⁷ *Tales of Ise*, section 4 [also *Kokinshū* 747] (Ariwara Narihira): “Are not the moon and the spring the moon and spring of old? Only I myself am unchanged, am as I was before” (alluded to earlier in the *Sawarabi* chapter).

⁴⁸ *Shūishū* 1005 (Tomohira Shinnō [Prince Tomohira]): “Driven by my yearning for your fragrant scent, which I find ever enchanting, I broke off a stem of red plum blossom this morning.” The allusion to this poem suggests that Ukifune is thinking of Kaoru.

⁴⁹ *Kokinshū* 33 (Anonymous): “It is their fragrance more than their color that so enchants me ... whose sleeves were they, the ones that brushed against the plum tree at my abode?” (alluded to earlier in the *Niou miya* chapter, where it refers explicitly to Kaoru).

⁵⁰ The Governor of Kii is obviously referring to the current Vice Governor, not the husband of Ukifune’s mother, who held the position previously.

⁵¹ Kaoru is envisioning a future world in which his relationship with Ukifune will begin again as a result of that staple of Heian courtly romances, a breeze that blows aside a blind or curtain and provides the man a glimpse of the woman (a *kaimami*).

LIV

Yume no ukihashi

A Floating Bridge in a Dream

KAORU TRAVELED to the main temple on Mount Hiei and made the customary offerings of sutras and images of the Buddha. The following day he moved on to the temple at Yokawa. The bishop there had not been expecting him, but he received the Major Captain with gracious humility, honored by the visit of such an exalted personage. Although Kaoru had occasionally commissioned prayers and rites from this bishop over the years, the two of them had never been especially close. Recently, however, Kaoru's regard for His Holiness had greatly increased after he witnessed the prelate's efficacy in healing the First Princess.

For his part, the bishop surmised that his bond with the Major Captain had to be growing stronger. After all, why else would someone so distinguished go to the trouble of visiting a temple located in the recesses of Mount Hiei? The thought delighted him, and he lavished attention on his guest.

As the men chatted at their leisure on all sorts of subjects, it became apparent that the Major Captain had come to Yokawa with some special purpose in mind. Upon realizing this, the bishop called for food and drink. After the servants and other priests withdrew and the two men were once more on their own, Kaoru finally broached the subject that had brought him here.

"Do you keep a residence in the vicinity of Ono?"

"As a matter of fact, I do," His Holiness replied. "It's a peculiar, rustic abode. Mother, who is quite elderly, resides there now as a nun. You see, I have no place in the capital where she can be cared for, so I had her moved to Ono to be closer to me while I'm in retreat here. That way I can look after her late at night or early in the morning if the need arises."

"I've heard that many people once lived in and around Ono," Kaoru continued, "but the area seems practically deserted now."

He leaned in and began speaking in hushed tones. “I’ve been wanting to discuss a delicate matter with you, but I’ve hesitated for fear you might find the subject disreputable. You see ... there are rumors that a woman I may know—someone I must take responsibility for—is hiding away in your house at Ono. Since I had to find out if those rumors are true, I inquired further about her background and circumstances. As I understand it, she has become your disciple and taken vows to uphold the Precepts. Is that correct? Is she now a nun? The woman is young and her mother is still alive, and ... well, certain people are blaming me for having caused her disappearance.”

The bishop suddenly felt his chest tightening at the realization that, despite all of his experience, he had acted rashly by administering vows to the young woman. *So that's what this is all about. I could tell by the young lady's looks that she was no ordinary woman. If a man like the Major Captain is inquiring after her, she's obviously not someone to be taken lightly.*

He paused for a moment as he tried to collect his thoughts and figure out how best to respond. *The Major Captain is obviously well informed. Having already learned this much, he's come here seeking answers, and I can't very well hide the truth from him. Halfhearted attempts to keep her presence at Ono a secret would only make matters worse.*

“I’m not sure what you’re talking about,” His Holiness began cautiously. “Perhaps you’re referring to the young woman whose suspicious circumstances have been a source of personal concern to me for several months now. The nuns who live at my residence in Ono undertook a pilgrimage to the temple at Hatsuse, and on their way back they stopped over at a villa in Uji. While they were there, my mother suddenly fell seriously ill as a result of the exertions of the trip. As soon as a messenger from Uji informed me of her condition, I left my mountain retreat and went to see her.”

The bishop’s voice suddenly dropped to a whisper: “That was when I first heard the strange tale of the young woman. My sister, who is also a nun at Ono, was so upset by the plight of this lady that she nursed and cared for her with extraordinary tenderness. Indeed, she seemed more concerned about her than about our mother. Be that as it may, apparently the young woman was near death, though she continued breathing ever so faintly. The situation was eerily strange. I told myself it was just like one of those ancient tales about a woman whose spirit returns to her body just as she’s about to be placed in a coffin. So, I summoned some of the more efficacious healers among my disciples and had them take turns performing esoteric rites.

“In the meantime, I was trying to help my mother by praying fervently and meditating on the Holy Name. She’s at such an advanced age that I know I

shouldn't grieve over her passing, but because she fell ill while on a pilgrimage, I was hoping to help her focus on the *nembutsu* with a calm heart and a clear mind. Since I was so preoccupied with my prayers, I didn't pay all that much attention to the condition of the young woman. Based on what I heard later, I gather she was bewitched by a shape-shifter—some goblin or sprite of the forest. Once she was out of danger, they moved her beyond the capital to Ono, where she remained in a catatonic state and near death for a full three months.

"My sister, who was once the principal wife of a Commander of the Imperial Guard, became a nun following her husband's death. She had given the Commander a single child ... a girl. Sadly, her daughter also died, and my sister was so grief-stricken that she has mourned her loss ever since. Thus, when she came across the young woman, who is about the same age my niece would have been had she lived, she was overjoyed, convinced that this was the answer to her prayers—a gift, you might say, from the merciful Kannon in recompense for the lost child. My sister did absolutely everything in her power to make sure the young lady did not die. She asked for my help, entreating me so tearfully that I was moved to compassion. I went down to Ono and performed a healing rite, and the young lady gradually began to recover and return to a more normal condition.

"Even then, however, she continued to sense the nearby presence of the malignant spirit that had possessed her. She spoke with an air of sadness about all manner of things, and told me she wanted to be free of the hindrance to salvation threatened by this evil spirit. She was so thoroughly focused on the life to come in the next world that as a priest I felt I should encourage her. Thus, it's true what you've heard ... I administered vows to her. It never occurred to me that the two of you shared a bond that made you responsible for her. The older nuns at Ono warned me that gossip about the peculiar circumstances in which they found the lady might begin to circulate and give rise to all sorts of unpleasant complications. That's why I spoke not a word about this matter in all these months."

The bishop's account confirmed for Kaoru the truth of the vague rumors he had heard—the very reports that had driven him to come here to Yokawa seeking answers. Still, he was stunned by the realization that the woman he had given up for dead was, in fact, still alive. It all felt like a dream to him, and as tears began to well up in his eyes, he almost lost his composure. Ashamed to betray his emotions in front of a man as enlightened as His Holiness, he fought to regain control and was able to put on a calm, stoical front.

The bishop could see how much the young woman meant to his guest, and he now understood what a terrible mistake he had made by administering her vows.

As a nun she was as good as dead to the world, and the bishop knew he had sinned by bringing so much grief to the Major Captain.

“It was no doubt the workings of her karmic destiny that she was possessed by an evil spirit,” His Holiness said at last. “I assumed she was the child of a noble house, but ... what misdeed could she have possibly committed to have fallen so low in the world?”

“She had only a marginal connection with the imperial line,” Kaoru answered, “so I must confess that I never once seriously considered taking her formally as a wife. In fact, it was mere happenstance that brought us together in the first place. Of course, it never occurred to me that she would encounter such hardships or that her worldly status would be so reduced. Because she disappeared mysteriously, without a trace, I harbored all sorts of doubts and suspicions, wondering if she hadn’t done something awful like throwing herself into a river or lake. But then I never heard anything that confirmed her fate one way or the other. Now that I know what happened, I’m relieved things have turned out as they have. After all, becoming a nun will lighten the burden of her sins.

“Still, there’s the woman’s mother to think of. She continues to grieve and long for her daughter, and I feel that I ought tell her what I’ve learned. On the other hand, I’m afraid that if I do, she’ll raise a tremendous fuss and undermine your efforts over the past few months to keep this matter secret. The emotional bonds between a parent and child can never be broken, and since the mother has suffered unbearable grief, she will certainly want to see her daughter.”

Kaoru paused, then added, “Would you take me to see the young woman at Ono? I know it’s improper to ask such a thing of a man in your position, but now that I’ve learned what happened, I simply cannot turn my back on her. This all seems like a nightmare, and though I know it will do no good now that she’s a nun, I’d like to speak with her anyway.”

The expression on his guest’s face moved the bishop to sorrow and compassion. Yet he was deeply troubled, for he doubted the wisdom of bringing the Major Captain to the girl. *Is this really for the best? She may have naively assumed that donning the attire of a nun would enable her to turn her back on the world once and for all, but even the most devout priest—one who shaves both head and beard when he takes the tonsure—is never able to completely renounce all worldly attachments and desires. Renunciation is much harder for a woman, and I would be committing a sin if I took him to her and the poor girl ended up suffering and led astray.*

“I have obligations that will keep me at Yokawa for the next few days,” the bishop replied, “but at the beginning of next month, I shall inform the people at Ono that you intend to visit.”

Kaoru was frustrated and impatient, but it would not do to importune the bishop. He assumed that this was how things had to be. He let the matter rest and began to make preparations to leave.

Ukifune's younger brother, who was in Kaoru's service as a page, had accompanied the party to Yokawa. Kaoru summoned the boy and then spoke with the bishop again: "This lad is the brother of the young lady in question, and I'll rely on him as my intermediary for now. Please write a short note for him to take to his sister at Ono. Don't mention me at all ... just say that someone is searching for her."

"Were I to take you to Ono," His Holiness replied, "I would surely be committing a sin. I've explained the woman's circumstances in considerable detail. It is now up to you to call on her yourself. Who would censure you for doing what you feel you must?"

Kaoru smiled at the bishop's words.

"It shames me to know that you think you would be committing a sin on my behalf," he said. "It seems so peculiar to me that I've not yet taken vows myself, but continue to live on as I do, dressed in this vulgar garb. Ever since I was a child, my mind has been turned toward deeper thoughts of renunciation. Yet I continue to worry about my mother, who's cloistered in her villa at Sanjō. She's all alone, with no one else but me to support her, and my connection to her has been an inescapable fetter binding me to this world. Though I became enmeshed in worldly affairs and quickly achieved high rank at court, the honors that come with my public position do not satisfy my heart's one true desire. I yearn to take vows myself, but I have let time slip away, and the unavoidable obligations and entanglements binding me to this world have only increased. I cannot simply run away from my public and private responsibilities, but when it comes to all other matters, I try unfailingly to respect and follow the injunctions of the Holy Buddha, despite having only the barest comprehension of His teachings. Since I strive in my heart to live in a manner worthy of a holy man, do you really imagine I'd risk committing a grave sin over some trivial relationship? It's simply out of the question. You must not entertain such doubts about me. It's just that it would give me great joy to bring peace and comfort to the young woman's poor mother by finding out exactly what happened."

When Kaoru revealed his long-held religious aspirations, the bishop at last understood his motivations. "Your noble intentions are commendable," he said, nodding.

The sun had set during the course of their conversation, and so it would have been convenient for Kaoru to stop at Ono for the night on the way back to the capital. However, he was still uncertain about the young woman's situation, and

it would have been awkward for him to visit the house there. His mind was filled with troubled thoughts as he prepared to leave.

"At the very least, please give the boy the note I requested of you," Kaoru urged His Holiness, "and have him deliver it to his sister for me."

The bishop, who had been observing the page with admiring eyes, wrote out a letter and handed it to the lad. "You should come here and call on me from time to time," he said. "Given all that has happened, you have good reason to pay a visit."

The boy did not fully grasp His Holiness's meaning, since he did not yet know that his sister had become the bishop's disciple. He simply took the letter and left with Kaoru.

When the party neared Ono, Kaoru ordered his escort to spread out along the path a little, telling them, "I do not want to draw too much attention."

The house at Ono faced onto verdant mountains that were covered in deep, dense foliage—a place where there was nothing to distract the mind or heart. Ukifune sat gazing out pensively at the fireflies flitting over the garden stream. Such small things were her only solace, bringing back memories of Uji and the past. Just then, from beyond the eaves of the veranda fronting the valley, which spread out below to present a distant prospect, the cries of the outrunners of a nobleman's escort could be heard taking special care to clear the way for their lord. When the blazing lights of innumerable torches came into sight, the bishop's sister and the other nuns, in wonder at this spectacle, came out onto the veranda and sat down.

"Who could it be?" asked one of the nuns. "He seems to have an enormous escort."

"After we sent the dried seaweed up to the temple earlier today," the bishop's sister replied, "my brother sent back a note expressing his gratitude. He wrote that our gift arrived at a most opportune moment, for the Major Captain was visiting him."

"Which Major Captain? The husband of the Fujitsubo Princess?"

The only people who provided the residents at Ono with any contact with the outside were those who traveled to and from Yokawa.

How cut off from the world ... how countrified this place is, Ukifune thought. The Major Captain passing by has to be Kaoru.

Amidst the bustle she could clearly make out the voices of certain members of the party she had come to know all too well on those occasions when Kaoru traveled over the mountain paths to Uji. She should have forgotten all of that by now, what with the passing of so many days and months. Yet the memory of little things—things like those voices—persisted. Because it made her feel

miserable and sick at heart to dwell on how her life might have turned out, she sought to distract her troubled thoughts by meditating on the Holy Name of Amida Buddha. As she did so, she became increasingly reserved and withdrawn.

Kaoru considered having the page deliver the bishop's note on the way back to the capital, but that was much too awkward with so many witnesses around. Thus, he waited until after he returned to his villa before dispatching the boy the following day on a separate trip back to Ono. He ordered two or three of his closest, most trusted retainers to discreetly accompany the lad, and he provided an escort made up of the very same men he had employed in the past when he needed to have messages taken to Uji.

He summoned the boy when there was no one around to overhear them and gave the following instructions: "Do you remember the face of your sister, who disappeared and was given up for dead? I myself was resigned to her death, but now I've learned beyond any doubt that she's alive. I want you to go to Ono and visit her. I don't think it would be right to ask a stranger to perform this task for me. But don't say anything to your mother just yet. She would be shocked, and if she caused a commotion, certain people who have no business knowing the truth would find out what happened. I feel terrible for your mother, and that's why I want you to quietly investigate this."

Kaoru considered this page fairer in looks than all the boy's siblings. For his part, the boy had been deeply saddened by his sister's disappearance and was overjoyed at this news. However, he thought it would be shameful to cry in front of the Major Captain, and so he merely gave boyish grunts of assent to show that he understood the order to keep the matter confidential.

Meanwhile, a letter from the bishop arrived at Ono early in the day, during morning services:

Did a messenger from the Major Captain—a young boy—call on you last night? Please tell the young woman that I have been apprised of her background and that I am now mortified, ashamed, and fearful that I have committed a grievous error. There are many things about which I must speak with her face-to-face. That's why I feel compelled to call on you either today or tomorrow.

The bishop's sister was startled. What could this mean? She went to Ukifune's chambers and showed her the letter. The young woman blushed, ashamed that gossip about her was evidently spreading and upset that the nun would resent her for having kept her circumstances a secret. She wracked her brains trying to come up with some explanation, but words failed her, and she remained silent.

"Tell me the truth, now. How cruel you are to treat me like a stranger," the nun said, giving voice to her bitter resentment. Not knowing all the details, she was upset and agitated.

Just then she heard a boy's voice asking for permission to enter: "I've come with a letter from His Holiness."

Puzzled and suspicious, the nun wondered if this new letter would explain what was happening.

"Let the messenger in," she ordered.

At once an exceptionally noble, fine-looking page wearing indescribably splendid robes stepped inside. A round mat of woven straw cords was brought out for the lad, but when the nun had it placed just outside the blinds, he protested.

"His Holiness assured me that I would be welcomed more warmly than this."

In response to his complaint, the nun spoke directly to him. She received the letter and, with a quick glance at the cover, saw the addressee: "To the young lady who recently took vows." Her brother, the bishop, had written his name there as well.

Ukifune couldn't very well refuse to accept the letter, since it was clearly meant for her, but she felt so awkward and ashamed that she shrank back into the interior of her room and could not bring herself to look into anyone's face.

"I know you're shy and reticent by nature," the nun scolded, "but your behavior is really too much ... truly deplorable!"

She read the bishop's letter out loud:

The honorable Major Captain visited this morning and inquired about your situation. I told him everything I know about you, beginning from that first moment when you were discovered at Uji. You rejected a relationship with a man whose affection for you was boundless, and you abandoned your home to take up residence in a rustic mountain abode disturbingly unsuited for someone of your status. I was shocked to hear of your decision—one that, far from ensuring your enlightenment and salvation, may instead earn you the censure of the Buddha. Nothing can be done about that now, but somehow you must find a way to clear the clouds of sin that envelop the Major Captain as a result of his passionate attachment to you. And you must do so without violating the karmic destiny that brought the two of you together. A person accrues great merit by taking vows to uphold the Precepts, even if it's only for a single day. So I must ask you to continue to put your trust in your connection with the Buddha. I shall call upon you in person to discuss the details of this matter. Until then, the boy can apprise

you of all that has happened.

The letter had been written in a straightforward manner, leaving no doubt that His Holiness fully understood the situation—though for anyone not privy to all the details, his message must have sounded rather cryptic.

“Who is this boy?” the nun demanded. “Your cold, aloof treatment of me—keeping secrets the way you do—is hurtful and disheartening.”

Pressured for a response, Ukifune turned away and stared outside again. The boy was her little brother—the very one she had thought about with such yearning on the evening she resigned herself to ending it all. She had been close to him from the time they began living in the same household. True, he had acted mean, spiteful, and haughty toward her when he was little, but their mother doted on him, and she would bring him to the Uji villa from time to time. As the boy grew older, his attitude gradually improved, until, at last, his childish heart accepted her as his sister and they grew closer. Thinking back on it now, it all seemed like a dream to her. She now wanted more than anything to find out how her mother was doing. Little by little, she had learned how other people who were once close to her were faring, but she had heard nothing about her mother. For that reason, the sight of this dear little brother made her happy and sad at the same time, and tears poured down her cheeks.

The page exuded a charming air, and he looked so much like the young lady that the nun was prompted to remark to her, “You two must be brother and sister ... am I right? The boy must have many things he wants to tell you. We should permit him inside the blinds.”

Please, no! Ukifune thought. He surely gave me up for dead already, and I couldn't stand it if he were to suddenly see how different I look in these unsightly robes.

Her mind racing, she paused for a moment before addressing the nun: “I cannot express in words the pain I feel knowing that you interpret my silence as proof that I’m unfeeling and secretive. I must have looked wildly disordered and weirdly offputting when you first found me, but at that time, I had lost all sense of reality. Perhaps my soul was no longer within me ... perhaps it had escaped my body, for no matter how hard I try, I can remember nothing that transpired during that period of my life. When the man you addressed as the Governor of Kii called on you recently and was gossiping about affairs at the court, his words stirred dim recollections of places I had once known. Later, however, when I tried to remember them, virtually nothing came back—nothing, that is, except the memory of a woman who seemed always worried and who wanted only the blessings of good fortune for me. I asked myself who she might be, and that

question has tormented me ever since, bringing me many moments of grief. And now when I look at this boy here, his face seems familiar, and I get the feeling I've known him since he was a little child. I'm filled with a sense of unbearable longing, and yet I'd prefer to let the past go and live out my life without telling him or anyone else that I remain in this world. The only person I care to meet is the woman I mentioned to you ... assuming she's still alive. Whatever happens, I don't want the man His Holiness mentioned in the letter to find out about me. Please contrive some plausible story and convince them all that they are mistaken. Please keep me hidden away here."

"I'm afraid that's no longer possible. My brother is a distinguished prelate, extremely honest and forthright. He will have told the Major Captain absolutely everything he knows. I won't be able to keep you hidden away forever, and the gentleman will eventually learn the truth. His status and power shouldn't be taken lightly." The nun had been flustered by the young woman's request.

"Such an attitude is unheard of ... extraordinarily willful," the other nuns muttered to one another as they set up a standing curtain between the main chamber and the aisle room and let the page inside the blinds.

The boy had been told the young woman at Ono was his sister, but he was so young that his sense of deference made him too shy to speak up first. Staring at the floor, feeling resentful and uncertain, he finally said, "I've brought another letter. The bishop assured me that my older sister is here, but since I have to speak through a curtain like this, I can't be sure."

"He's right to feel the way he does, the little darling," the nun remarked. "The woman that letter is meant for is indeed here," she continued, speaking to the page. "Those of us who are mere bystanders find it hard to comprehend exactly what's going on, and so perhaps you should speak to her directly. You may be very young, but the Major Captain must have had good reason to entrust you with this task."

"How am I supposed to talk to her when she acts so cold and won't reply? If she considers me a stranger, then there's nothing for me to say. But I was ordered to bring this letter here and hand it to her personally, and that's what I must do."

"What he says is perfectly reasonable ... after all, he has to do what he's been told," the nun said, trying to break down Ukifune's reserve. "You really mustn't be so unpleasant. Your attitude is weirdly disturbing, almost as if you're still possessed."

She pushed the young woman to a spot closer to the standing curtain, but Ukifune sat there, trancelike.

The boy sensed her presence—her distinctively vacant demeanor—and he

knew at once, without any doubt, that she was his sister. He moved closer and passed the letter through the curtain.

“I shall return home as soon as I receive your prompt reply,” he announced. Stung by his sister’s coldness, the boy wanted to leave as quickly as possible.

The nun unfolded the letter and presented it to the young woman. The writing was in Kaoru’s hand, which, as always, was dignified and distinguished-looking. His unique, ethereal scent had seeped into the paper and the wrapping. The other nuns caught a brief glimpse of the missive. Being nosy women easily impressed by such things, they couldn’t help feeling that the Major Captain must be a splendid, superior man.

Kaoru’s letter read as follows:

Out of consideration for His Holiness, I forgive your rash heart, which is weighed down by the various sins you have committed¹—matters that I cannot bring myself to speak of any longer. As much as my own heart longs to talk with you about all that happened between us—events that now seem like some sordid dream-tale—I find my own obsessive attachment to you contemptible. What must others think of me?

He must have felt that he had not adequately expressed all that was in his heart, for he had added a poem:

*I thought to call upon a master of Buddha’s Law
To be my guide along the path I hoped to follow ...
How is it, then, that I lost my way on love’s mountain*

I wonder if you have forgotten the boy who delivered this letter? I keep him near me, a dear memento of one whose whereabouts remain unknown.

The letter, which expressed his heartfelt emotions, contained so many intimate details that Ukifune could hardly deny that it was meant for her. Nonetheless, she was unwilling to meet Kaoru, and the shameful prospect that he might come here threw her heart into wild chaos, for then he would see that she no longer looked like the Ukifune of old. Falling even deeper into dark despond, she found no words adequate to voice her feelings.

The nun was looking on helplessly as Ukifune, now lying facedown, wept inconsolably. *Such an odd, naive young woman*, she thought as she pressed for a response.

“Come, come ... what shall I tell the boy?”

"I'm too confused and upset at the moment," Ukifune answered. "Let me have a little time to recover before I reply. I'm trying my best to remember the past, but it won't come back to me at all. It's like a mysterious, unpleasant dream that I can't comprehend. Perhaps, if I can calm myself a little, my memory will return, and I will understand what this letter refers to. Until then, I want you to take it back to the gentleman today. It would be terribly embarrassing if, in fact, it was meant for another woman."

Without so much as a glance at it, she pushed the letter, refolded, back to the nun.

"This is outrageous," the nun protested vehemently. "Your complete lack of respect for a man like the Major Captain will bring sharp censure down on all those around you!"

Ukifune couldn't bear listening to such unpleasant imputations. She remained prone, her face covered by her sleeves.

The nun spoke briefly to the boy.

"Your sister is constantly tormented by a malignant spirit and is not in her right mind. That's why she changed her appearance and became a nun. The whole time I've stayed by her side, I've worried constantly about what would happen if someone came looking for her and discovered, to his shock, that she had renounced the world. And now, just as I feared, I learn of her heartbreaking relationship with the Major Captain. A terrible thing has been done. She seems to be suffering the aftereffects of the possession, and as a result of today's agitation, she'll likely be more distracted and confused than ever."

The nun treated the page to a delightful repast of local delicacies, but he couldn't enjoy them; his childish heart was unsettled for reasons he could not entirely explain.

"My lord went to a great deal of trouble to send me here," he complained, "so what am I to report to him? Can't she at least say a word or two to me?"

"It's a fair request," the nun replied. She conveyed his appeal to Ukifune, but to no avail. The young woman remained silent.

"Just tell your lord what you've witnessed," the nun advised the boy in the end. "Let him know of your sister's unstable condition. This house is not so removed from the capital as to lie far beyond the distant clouds. I know harsh winds may blow down from the mountain here, but I hope you will call on us again."

It would have been inappropriate for the page to stay overnight without a good excuse, and so he prepared to leave. He had been secretly yearning for his sister, and it was a great disappointment when she refused to meet him. With an anxious and troubled heart, he made his way back to the Major Captain's villa.

Kaoru had been waiting in nervous anticipation, impatiently wondering when the boy would return. But as soon as he was informed of Ukifune's vague, uncertain response, a desolate chill settled over him, his ardor cooled, and he concluded that it would have been best to have never sent the letter at all.

Then, another thought occurred to him: *Is it possible someone else is keeping her hidden away?*

His suspicions drove him to consider various reasons for Ukifune's rejection of him, and as he brooded over the possibilities, he could not shake the memory of how he himself had once concealed her from the world with a careless disregard that had left her utterly isolated and forlorn.

¹ Kaoru is referring not only to her affair with Niou but also to her attempted suicide, her decision to hide from him and her mother, and her renunciation of the world.

Translator's Note

STARTING IN the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries (the early Kamakura period), some versions of the manuscript conclude with the words *hon ni habemaru* (本には[侍]べめる) or a variant such as *hon ni haberumeru* (本にはべるめる). This formulaic phrase simply means “This seems to be the manuscript,” but I have chosen not to include it in the translation. Medieval copyists often added the phrase to manuscripts as a conventional ending. Moreover, the use of the phrase has been construed by some readers as suggesting that the final chapter is incomplete, since the verbal ending ~める (“it seems that/it appears that”) conveys an additional nuance along the lines of “this seems to be *all there is* to the manuscript.”

This interpretation is of course not unreasonable, especially in light of the fact that it has long been held that *Genji monogatari* is either unfinished or missing portions of the manuscript. In a manner similar to the lack of an explicit narrative account of Genji’s final years, the ending of “A Floating Bridge in a Dream” has frustrated some readers over the centuries by raising questions not only about Murasaki Shikibu’s narrative design but also about the meaning of the story as a whole. Certainly there is reason to think that parts of the manuscript have been lost. It is also quite possible, given the open-ended nature of the work, that the author died before she could tie up all the loose ends remaining in the tale of Kaoru and Ukifune. For one thing, unlike all the other chapters, there is no explicit reference through a poem, a setting, or a literary allusion that would provide the title “A Floating Bridge in a Dream” (though the phrase does appear in the *Usugumo* chapter, p. 396). For another, the narrative leaves Kaoru suspended in a state of severe emotional and moral turmoil that seems to beg for some form of resolution.

Nonetheless, the possibility that Murasaki Shikibu planned her narrative to end just as we have it, at a dramatic moment when the protagonist confronts his own responsibility for a devastating loss, should not be dismissed. Kaoru's painful self-awareness is of a piece with his development as a character and heightens the sense that his destiny, his very being, has been determined by the sins of his parents, which have doomed him to a lonely, isolated existence.

That said, doubts about the completeness of the manuscript and the perceived lack of narrative closure are all but impossible to resolve to anyone's complete satisfaction, barring the discovery of a much earlier manuscript with credible provenance.

ALSO BY DENNIS WASHBURN

Temple of the Wild Geese / Bamboo Dolls of Echizen
by Tsutomu Mizukami (translation)

Converting Cultures: Ideology, Religion, and Transformations of Modernity
(coedited)

Translating Mount Fuji: Modern Japanese Fiction and the Ethics of Identity

Shanghai by Yokomitsu Riichi (translation)

Word and Image in Japanese Cinema (coedited)

The Dilemma of the Modern in Japanese Fiction

Copyright © 2015 by Dennis Washburn

All rights reserved
First Edition

For information about permission to reproduce selections from this book, write to
Permissions, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10110

For information about special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact
W. W. Norton Special Sales at specialsales@wwnorton.com or 800-233-4830

Book design by Brooke Koven
Production manager: Julia Druskin

ISBN 978-0-393-04787-5
ISBN 978-0-393-24807-4 (e-book)

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10110
www.wwnorton.com

W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., Castle House, 75/76 Wells Street, London W1T 3QT