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*Murasaki
Shikibu*

The Tale of Genji

Translated and Abridged by Dennis Washburn

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The Tale of Genji

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Introduction

What makes a literary work a classic?

At first glance the answer to this question seems straightforward, since most readers can, when asked, readily produce a list of canonical works, ancient or modern, that reflects both personal preferences and the commonly accepted standards of their particular culture. However, when reading and judging works from markedly different literary traditions, responding to this question becomes more challenging. This is certainly the case with *The Tale of Genji*, which has been considered a classic in Japan for almost a millennium. The work is a complex prose narrative that has rhetorical features strikingly similar to the modern novel even though it depicts a society whose values and cultural assumptions contemporary readers (including Japanese readers) may find difficult to relate to or comprehend. How, then, are we to judge *The Tale of Genji*? Are there standards that can be usefully applied across time and cultural differences?

Taking account of both the intrinsic literary qualities and the reception histories of literary works that are now deemed classics, it is clear that *The Tale of Genji* shares with them at minimum the following five characteristics.¹ They emerge out of an established tradition, which they in turn fundamentally transform. Their formal artistry is of a depth and complexity that demands and rewards re-reading over the lifetime of an individual, while inspiring different interpretations over generations. They serve as a model for other artists across different media. They are paradoxically both worldly and intensely provincial. Finally, and above all, they are powerfully seductive. Examining *The Tale of Genji* through the critical lens of these characteristics will, I believe, illuminate the source of its achievement and its legacy.

The Author and Her Tradition

When Murasaki Shikibu began her masterwork at the beginning of the eleventh century, she was already well versed in the literary practices that were

an integral part of the everyday life of the court aristocracy during the Heian period (794–1185). Murasaki was born into a lower-ranking branch of the politically dominant Fujiwara clan. Her father, Fujiwara no Tametoki (ca. 945–?), was an accomplished poet and scholar of Chinese, and a number of her ancestors were also highly regarded poets: most notably her great-grandfather, Fujiwara no Kanesuke (877–933), her grandfather, Masatada (d. 962), and her uncle, Tameyori (d. ca. 998), all of whom had poems selected for inclusion in various prestigious, imperially sponsored anthologies. Yet despite this literary lineage, Tametoki never occupied any position of political significance, and that lack of high official status posed challenges for his daughter throughout her life.

Tametoki married in 970 and the couple had at least three children. His wife, known to us only as the daughter of Fujiwara no Tamenobu, 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. Because historical records are scanty, what can be surmised about her life will always remain somewhat speculative. The one aspect of her life about which there can be no doubt is that she received a thorough literary education from her father. Her diary writings² attest to her extensive knowledge, and indeed it was in her father's interest to make sure she was trained in a way that would allow her to serve at court in the salon of a high-ranking lady. Significantly, her education included Chinese literature, which at that time was a highly unusual area of expertise for a woman. Unfortunately for her, Murasaki Shikibu came of age during a ten-year period when her father held no substantial position in the court bureaucracy, and without official support or patronage, he seems to have been unable to either secure an appointment for her or arrange a marriage.

Her dependence on her father and the lack of official support likely 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 married a second cousin, Fujiwara no Nobutaka (ca. 950–1001). If Murasaki was indeed born in 973, her marriage would certainly have been considered late by Heian standards.

Moreover, she would not have been viewed as an especially attractive match as a principal wife. This is borne out by the fact that her husband, Nobutaka, was a much older man who had several wives and children by three other women. Still, it is useless to speculate on the nature of her marriage. What is known for sure is that they had a daughter, Kenshi, in 999, 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 *The Tale of Genji* soon after her husband's death during a stay at Ishiyama temple on Lake Biwa, where, reportedly, she was divinely inspired by a lovely moon over the waters. The result of this inspiration is a massively long, exquisitely detailed, realistic account of court life centered on the romantic relationships and political fortunes of the eponymous hero, the Radiant Prince Genji. How the earliest chapters circulated and exactly who was reading them at this time is not clear. However, since she was a widow and her father was without an appointment at the time, it seems certain that portions of her tale were read by members of the highest ranks of the aristocracy. For despite her lack of support and patronage, she came to the court's attention and secured a position serving the Empress Shōshi in the residence of the most powerful official at the time, Fujiwara no Michinaga (966–1028).

Murasaki's success was the direct result of her mastery of literary practices drawn from a vibrant indigenous tradition and an enormous body of work from China and India: officially sanctioned histories and anthologies; private and imperially sponsored collections of poetry; miscellanies, diaries, and journals; court records of ceremonials and rituals; religious texts; and fiction in a variety of forms. Because such a rich archive was available, much of the literature of mid-Heian Japan showed a tendency toward a fusion of forms: between folk tales (Japanese and continental) and courtly narratives, as in *Tale of the Bamboo Cutter* (compiled early tenth century); between poetry and prose, as in *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 between personal diaries or journals and poetry, as in *The Kagerō Diary* (ca. 974) or Sei Shōnagon's celebrated *Pillow Book* (ca. 996–1002).

The Transformative Achievement of *The Tale of Genji*

The sophisticated literary tradition that Murasaki Shikibu inherited is present in several key narrative elements of *Genji*. First, and perhaps most obvious, is the extensive use of poetry. The narrative is not strictly speaking a poem-tale like *Tales of Ise*, 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 introspective, creating the illusion that the characters possess subjectivity. This technique developed in Japan over a period of time, especially in diary or journal literature, and Murasaki makes use of it for the development of her characters, whose depth and emotional realism is 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 on display, for example, in the intrusions of a narrator who occasionally comments (often 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 are reflected in the operative generic word used in the title, *monogatari*. A *monogatari* is literally an accounting or "telling" (*katari*) of "things/matters" (*mono*), and during the Heian period the term was applied equally to the titles of journals and diaries, histories, poem-tales, and fiction. This broad usage points to a fluid notion of genre and style, and the literary culture was distinguished by what may seem to us now 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 the crossing of literary boundaries was an accepted practice that gave the author the freedom she needed to build her open, realistic fictional world.

Like all classics, then, *The Tale of Genji* emerged out of a vibrant and sophisticated literary milieu, and its impact was transformative. Murasaki Shikibu's achievement was recognized almost immediately by her peers. Written in the vernacular of court society, her vivid depictions of the world inhabited by her fictional hero, the Radiant Prince Genji, drew directly upon the realities of the lives of the aristocracy. The tale satirizes the foibles and hypocrisies of the nobility, especially as these are exposed in the course of relationships between men and women. At the same time, it reinforces and affirms fundamental aesthetic, moral, and religious values in a way that was flattering to the self-regard of aristocratic court society.

Readership and Reception

Even though the readership of *Genji* was limited during the early part of the eleventh century, its reputation quickly spread beyond the confines of the elite court nobility. The articulation of a well-defined aesthetic sensibility 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 fault lines in the dominant values at the court. 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 medieval Japanese society did not reject the aesthetic values embodied by Genji. Instead, medieval readers tended to interpret the work in more narrowly didactic terms: the spiritual truths of either Confucian teachings about virtue in human relationships or Buddhist teachings about the need for renunciation of worldly attachments. Buddhist-inspired readings in particular led to some strongly held convictions about the fate of the author, who was thought to have been condemned to Hell because her writing presented a compelling and alluring view of courtly love that seduced readers into clinging to illusory desires. The moral condemnation of fiction and the legend of Murasaki Shikibu's damnation were so widespread by the late

twelfth century that it was not uncommon for aristocratic women who were devotees of the text to engage in writing fan fiction or making offerings and prayers for the salvation of the souls of the author and her fictional hero.

The cultural sphere in which the text was celebrated gradually widened during the late medieval era and, later, the Tokugawa period (1600–1868), when relative political and economic stability resulted in the emergence of an urban mercantile class with high rates of literacy and sufficient leisure time to pursue artistic interests. For them, an understanding of the classics came to be a valued commodity—a polite accomplishment that served as proof of their refined taste and sensitivity and that bolstered notions of personal and social identity—making the tradition itself an object worthy of desire and possession.

Popular adaptations and abridgements of the work in the early modern period reinforced the canonical status of *The Tale of Genji*, and by the eighteenth century there was increasing interest in the text as an object of historical research. Scholars began to apply more rigorous linguistic methods to explicate the text. Consequently, Japanese culture came to be defined in terms of an ostensibly unique aesthetic sensibility, which prized above all else an intuitive sensitivity toward the sublime, sad beauty that inheres in mutable nature and transitory human existence.

A major reassessment of *The Tale of Genji*'s status occurred during the Meiji period (1868–1912), when Japan emerged from two centuries of self-imposed isolation only to confront the geopolitical realities of late nineteenth-century Western imperialism. The appeal to nationalist pride that underpinned conceptions of an idealized, uniquely native tradition reflected the aspirations of modern imperial Japan; and in that charged atmosphere Murasaki Shikibu's narrative took on new significance as a monument of world literature. 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 *The Tale of Genji* is the world's first novel. Justified or not, that claim of priority and originality has largely shaped the perception of the text's cultural centrality over the past century.

The Cultural Impact of *The Tale of Genji*

One sign of the impact a classic has on its tradition is that over time it no longer has to be actually read in order to have been “read.” A new reader coming to such a work is likely to find it both revelatory and vaguely familiar, like the naïf in the old joke who, upon seeing *Hamlet* for the first time, is struck with admiration at how smoothly Shakespeare was able to make use of so many famous quotations. The ability to appeal to a diverse readership over a long period of time is one mark of a classic, and though earlier interpretations of the work may strike us as simplistic today, we should be cautious in judging them, for they made dynamic adaptations of the text possible by later artists who utilized them to represent their own understanding of social and spiritual realities. Indeed, Murasaki Shikibu’s tale has often been read and appreciated through the filter of other forms of art.

The Tale of Genji has been rewritten through medieval fan fiction, fake chapters, Noh drama, Buddhist religious rituals, visual narratives of all sorts, product placement, erotic parodies, nationalist philological treatises, and picture books produced for the trousseaus of middle-class brides. Because many of the narrative techniques resemble those typical of the novel, the work has also had a profound influence on modern Japanese literature. The long list of writers whose work has been influenced by Murasaki’s legacy includes Masaoka Shiki, Natsume Sōseki, Yosano Akiko, Tanizaki Jun’ichirō, Enchi Fumiko, Mishima Yukio, Kawabata Yasunari, Nakagami Kenji, and Setouchi Jakuchō, among many others.³ The influence of *Genji* on the visual arts further demonstrates its ability to sustain multiple interpretations *over time*; and that influence has contributed to the development of a distinct visual culture through picture scrolls, picture books, decorative screens, woodblock prints, drama, films, anime, and manga.

A Provincial Classic

Because a work like *The Tale of Genji* transforms its tradition, sustains diverse interpretations over time, and serves as a source of inspiration for other artists, it is a critical commonplace to hold that, like any work considered a classic, it is distinguished by the universality of its appeal. It thus may seem counterintuitive to stress, as I am doing here, that a classic is actually distinguished by its

provincial quality, that it is the product of a specific time, place, and author. To try to represent in minute detail the experiences of a particular society, the unique customs and material objects that shape everyday lives, is to undertake a complex project of literary world-building. Paradoxically, the knowledge transmitted by the representation of a provincial society creates an aura of worldliness that is the source of the work's aesthetic appeal. For that worldliness enables us to imaginatively inhabit a culture so different from our own.

Worldliness, however, should not be mistaken for universality, which is a misleading critical standard that tends to obscure or deemphasize those historically specific rhetorical and cultural elements that make *The Tale of Genji* worthy of our interest in the first place. This is an important point to bear in mind, since for contemporary readers, even in Japan, the culture of the Heian court is distant and unfamiliar, and some aspects of it may even be alienating. To fully understand Murasaki Shikibu's achievement, then, we must come to her work on its own terms rather than simply imposing an interpretation based on the illusion of universality.

In encouraging the reader to approach *The Tale of Genji* on its own terms, I am *not* suggesting that we blindly set aside our own values and aesthetic preferences. To read critically demands that we engage a canonical literary work on equal terms, since the art of narrative only comes into being at the moment when we interact with it. Still, given the differences between Murasaki Shikibu's world and our own, is it really practical for a contemporary reader to approach her tale on its own terms? I believe it is, because the text itself shows us how to do that. Apart from its aesthetic appeal, the narrative is deeply pedagogical; that is, it teaches us how to read. Murasaki Shikibu developed a sophisticated theory of literature that informed the development of her art; and that conception can serve as an entry point for reading the text today.

To begin with, the narrative is literally embodied by its protagonist, Genji, who is the paragon of aristocratic manhood. He represents the realization of the ideals most admired at the Heian court. Though taken out of the line of imperial succession and made a commoner as a child, Genji is destined to rise in power and glory as a sage advisor and official protecting the imperial order. He

himself is a world-builder who creates a villa that rivals the splendor of the imperial palace. A sensitive reader, he appreciates and appropriates the cultural tradition, imbuing it with a modern, up-to-date sensibility. He is an accomplished artist who effectively authors himself, creating an aura, a presence, that gives him cultural and political authority. By constantly remaking traditions in his own image, he brings unprecedented glory to all he touches. He makes it seem as if everything starts with him; and his creativity and originality allow him to establish precedents that project both past and present into the future.

Yet for all his virtues, Genji is also a deeply flawed paragon. His behavior toward women is often appalling, and he is inconsistent and hypocritical in his views. While he is frequently praised in lavish terms, the narrator just as often criticizes him or expresses a self-conscious anxiety that the praise he receives is excessive and threatens the credibility of her storytelling. Nonetheless, taking his flaws into account, for better or worse, Genji is above all stunningly beautiful, and his presence exerts such an attractive pull on all around him that he comes to stand in for the appeal of the narrative itself.

The Seductiveness of Classics

The complete identification between hero and narrative is made explicit in a famous passage in [Chapter 25](#), *Hotaru* (“Fireflies”), which has come to be known as the “theory of the tale” (*monogatari ron*). Because this passage is helpful to understanding how Murasaki Shikibu and her contemporaries may have conceived of fictional narrative, I will briefly summarize it here.

The passage details an exchange between Genji and his adopted daughter, Tamakazura. Despite his professed paternal concern for her welfare, his behavior toward her has become increasingly inappropriate. Like other women in such difficult circumstances, Tamakazura feels isolated, with no one to turn to for advice or help in such a distressing situation. She is therefore reading tales as a way to find out if any other women, real or fictional, have ever experienced such bizarre treatment. Seeing her deeply absorbed in reading, Genji is exasperated that her attention is drawn away from him and teasingly

offers a harsh critique of fiction precisely on the grounds of its seductive appeal. In the patriarchal culture of the court, it was believed that women were more susceptible to the allures of illusionistic literary art and thus more easily led astray from the Buddhist path of enlightenment. Genji professes admiration for the affective power of fiction but is struck that such power should attach to stories that are, after all, lies.

When Tamakazura pointedly notes Genji's own tendency to lie, he realizes that he is not getting anywhere with his moral critique of fiction, and so he changes tactics, hitting on a different critical theory in order to continue to hit on her. Intriguingly, the defense of fiction he sets forth touches directly upon many of the characteristics of a classic noted above. His argument reveals a clear recognition of the concept of a literary tradition and how it evolves over time. He notes that the appeal of fiction can be sustained over multiple readings; he praises the power of fiction to better represent particular cultures and experiences at specific times and places, and how that power allows future readers to experience their past as present; he recognizes that fiction, like religious parables, can convey moral and aesthetic truths that may serve to guide readers along the path toward enlightenment.

These observations are all fine and well, but in the end Genji's literary theory is being used as an act of seduction. This becomes clear shortly after his exchange with Tamakazura when Genji tells his beloved principal wife, Murasaki,⁴ that his daughter, the Akashi Princess, should not be reading tales because they could put ideas in her head about love relationships that would be inappropriate for a girl destined to become empress. The narrator, not surprisingly, wonders what Tamakazura would have made of such hypocrisy. And readers are left to wonder how seriously we should take Genji's pronouncements.

I would argue that we should take them seriously insofar as they give us a sense of how Murasaki Shikibu herself read tales. For at the very least, it is clear that she understood the manipulative appeal of fiction and, as the scene described above demonstrates, had absolutely no qualms over taking advantage of that appeal. Indeed, she explicitly draws the reader's attention to the fact that she is manipulating us. Her genius is that she understood that for

literary seduction to succeed, it requires some degree of willingness to be seduced on the part of the reader. The appeal of a work considered a classic is never just the result of its intrinsic qualities. Rather, it depends upon a web of seduction spun by generations of fans, artists, critics, scholars, and, yes, translators, all of whom have been inspired to draw others into sharing their aesthetic obsessions. In the final analysis, in addition to all the qualities that it shares with other great and impactful works of literature, *The Tale of Genji* is a classic because it seduces us into reading it as such.

As with all classics, then, *caveat lector*. Reader beware.

Notes

- Note 01:My list is based in part upon critical concepts enunciated in *The Tale of Genji* itself. I will comment further on this point below, but it should be noted here that this list matches ideas that have developed over a long period in Euro-American criticism. For a representative approach to the question, see Italo Calvino's collection of essays, *Why Read the Classics?* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000). [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 02:A fine translation of this work is available: see Richard Bowring, trans., *Murasaki Shikibu: Her Diary and Poetic Memoirs* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992). [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 03:Yosano, Tanizaki, Enchi, and Setouchi all produced modern Japanese versions of the original text. Kawabata was a student of classical Japanese literature at university. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 04:Murasaki Shikibu is a pen name that was likely derived from the association of the author with Genji's beloved, Murasaki. Shikibu refers to a position her father held at one point in the bureaucracy at the time his daughter came of age. It is telling that we do not know for certain the given name of Japan's most famous author, mainly because she was a woman. [Return to reference 4](#)

A Note on the Translation

Any 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. That fact guided the practical choices I made in rendering the source text into English. In preparing the full translation of *The Tale of Genji* I relied most heavily on two standard print versions: one edited by Yamagishi Tokuhei, which was published by Iwanami shoten in six volumes (completed in 1967); the second edited by Abe Akio, Akiyama Ken, and Imai Gen'e, also in six volumes, which was published by Shōgakukan between 1970 and 1976. I cross-checked these two versions with other, more recent print editions of the original and utilized numerous critical studies and commentaries.

I began with an explicitly literal version that I subsequently retranslated several times. I approached my work in this manner so that the classical Japanese would leave some traces in my English style. These traces are apparent in a number of intentional quirks of style and typography: 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.

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 for a contemporary readership 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 of readers 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 endnotes.

With the goal of accessibility in mind, I tried to maintain an even pace in the narrative by keeping the visual disruption caused by endnotes 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 notes explain social customs or beliefs when such information seemed necessary to more fully comprehend the story.

I did not try to emulate in English the syllabic patterns of Japanese poetic composition, since many poems 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. 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. 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. Japanese poetry is an art form that demands contextualization, and so the narrative function of Murasaki Shikibu's poems calls for a flexible approach. 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.

Character 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 for all of them, some of the traditional names being 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, 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. Rather than strive for lexical variety, I have relied instead on narrative context to suggest the fuller nuances of this sort of vocabulary.

About This Abridged Edition

Abridging a work as monumental as *The Tale of Genji* is not an easy task, but I believe that this volume will still provide the reader with a full understanding of Murasaki Shikibu's achievement. The complete narrative follows four major arcs: Genji's early years and his numerous romantic relationships; his exile due to scandal and return to political power; the glory of his later years and his eventual decline; and the story of his descendants in the portion of the work known as the "Uji chapters." In order to maintain a sense of the flow and coherence of this structure, I decided against abridging individual chapters (with the exception of [Chapter 50](#), *Azumaya*), and chose instead to include a number of chapters in their entirety and to provide synopses of the chapters that have been omitted. The full chapters that appear in this volume were chosen with two primary aims in mind: to focus on key inflection points in the plot; and to

highlight the range of styles and the virtuosity that characterize Murasaki Shikibu's storytelling.

Murasaki Shikibu

The Tale of Genji

***1. 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 illfated romance had thrown the Chinese state into [chaos.](#) 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](#),^o 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 grew worse. 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.](#)"°

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](#).^o *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 [home](#)°

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](#).° 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](#).° 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 souging 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

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.](#)”°

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—Genji°](#)—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 Higiyōsha, 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](#),^o 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.

Notes

- *thrown the Chinese state into chaos*: The courtiers are referring to *Song of Everlasting Sorrow* (長恨歌) by the Tang dynasty poet Bai Juyi (白居易, 772–846). 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. [Return to reference chaos](#)
- *where the birth had taken place*: 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. [Return to reference place](#)
- *now that she's gone, I yearn for her*: The source of this poem has not been identified. [Return to reference her](#)
- *reality in the darkness was no better than dreams*: *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.” [Return to reference dreams](#)
- *And concerns for the young bush clover at your home*: 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.” [Return to reference home](#)
- *the ancient pines of Takasago*: *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. [Return to reference Takasago](#)

- *I long to speak with you to lift that darkness*: 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!” [Return to reference darkness](#)
- *and the beaded curtains have been drawn up*: *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. [Return to reference up](#)
- *he decided to confer on the boy the clan name of Minamoto—Genji*: The name “Genji” is the reading of the characters for Minamoto (*gen*) and “family name” (*shi/ji*). [Return to reference Minamoto](#)
- *This young man, Tō no Chūjō*: 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. [Return to reference Chūjō](#),

2. *Hahakigi* Broom Cypress

[Summary: Having spent tedious days on duty at the palace, Genji and Tō no Chūjō pass a rainy summer night talking about women and relationships with two other young officials. In the course of their discussions about what makes an ideal woman, Tō no Chūjō shares a story about a meek and submissive woman with whom he had a child—a girl he refers to as his “little wild pink.” The woman received threats from the household of Tō no Chūjō’s wife and ran away. Tō no Chūjō has not heard from her since. The next day Genji leaves the palace and spends the night at the refurbished villa of the Governor of Kii Province to escape the summer heat. By chance the Governor’s young stepmother, the second wife of his elderly father (the Vice Governor of Iyo), is in residence. Intrigued by her situation, Genji sneaks into the young wife’s bedchamber, picks her up, and carries her into an interior chamber. She laments his advances because she is married to a much older man and because Genji is of a much higher social status. Genji departs at dawn knowing that it will be difficult to exchange letters with her. He recruits her younger brother to be his page to help him relay messages to her. However, she continues to respond cautiously to avoid the danger of ruining her reputation.]

3. *Utsusemi* A Molted Cicada Shell

[Summary: Unable to stop thinking about the young wife of the Vice Governor of Iyo, Genji has the page arrange a meeting one night while her stepson, the Governor of Kii, is away. Genji spies on the young wife and her stepdaughter, who is just a few years younger than she, playing Go. Although he is attracted to the physical beauty of the stepdaughter, he admires the demure behavior of the young wife. Once everyone is asleep, the page helps Genji sneak into the young wife's chamber where she and her stepdaughter are sleeping. The young wife hears Genji approaching and slips away, leaving her robe behind. Genji approaches the sleeping stepdaughter unaware that she is not the young wife. Upon realizing his mistake, he decides that he should make the best of the situation and sleep with her anyway. He assures the young stepdaughter that his feelings for her are honest, though in truth he is not sincere and simply does not want to admit his mistake. After sleeping with the stepdaughter, Genji takes as a memento the robe the young wife left behind when she escaped. After returning to his villa at Nijō he sends the young wife a poem that likens her robe to an empty cicada shell, expressing his disappointment and hurt over her cold treatment of him. The young wife also suffers emotionally because she longs for Genji but knows that an affair with him will end badly.]

4. *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?](#)"° 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?](#)”°

One of the four guards accompanying him overheard the line and replied, “Those white flowers, my lord? They’re called evening [faces.](#)° 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.](#)'"^o

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 of 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 illfated 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](#).° 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 [passions](#)°—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.](#)^o

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.](#)”^o 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](#).”°

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](#).’ ”° 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 Nijō 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](#),^o 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](#),^o 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!](#)”^o 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.](#)”°

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](#)°

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.

Notes

- “*What home can I call my own?*”: *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.” [Return to reference own](#)
- *what do you call these flowers?*: *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?” [Return to reference flowers](#)
- *They’re called evening faces*: 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. [Return to reference faces](#)
- *hoping his mother might live a thousand years*: *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. [Return to reference years](#)
- *a certain riverside villa nearby*: 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. [Return to reference nearby](#)
- *a plant whose very name called to mind yearning passions*: 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 忍ふ, and “yearning/longing (for the past or for a love)” if written with the character 思ふ. [Return to reference passions](#)
- *like the waters of the Okinaga River, would flow on forever*: *Man’yōshū* 4482 (Umanofuhito Kunihto): “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. [Return to reference forever](#)

- “*a bleak moor in autumn*”: *Kokinshū* 248 (Bishop Henjō): “The house is desolate, the lady grown old, the garden and enclosure have become a bleak moor in autumn.” [Return to reference autumn](#)
- “*I am but a fisher’s child*”: *Wakan rōeishū* 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.” [Return to reference child](#)
- *whose name, warekara, means ‘it’s my own fault’*: *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.” [Return to reference fault](#)
- *blocking the direction to that village for her this year*: This is a reference to a long-term (though not permanent) *kataimi*, a directional taboo or prohibition. [Return to reference year](#)
- *like a Yamato-e–style painting*: This term refers to a native Japanese style of painting, distinguishing it from Chinese styles. [Return to reference painting](#)
- “*How truly long are the nights of the eighth and ninth months!*”: Bai Juyi, *Hakushi monjū* 1287. [Return to reference months](#)
- *truly I suffer more than you*: *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.” [Return to reference you](#)
- *Would I complain with dewy leaves of words*: 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.” [Return to reference words](#)

5. *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](#),^o 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*](#)^o 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](#).° 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*](#).°

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.](#)”°

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.](#)'"° 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.](#)’° 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](#)° 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.](#)”°*

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.](#)'"^o

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](#)—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 heartbreaking 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 [shallows](#)°

“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?](#)”° 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.”

Shōnagon 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*](#):°

I've never been there but lament my fate

Each time I hear the name "Musashino" . . .

The place where little murasaki 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.

Notes

- *Prince Hyōbu, who was Minister of War at the time*: 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. [Return to reference time](#)
- *he read the dharani*: *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. [Return to reference dharani](#)
- *he presented Genji with a tokko*: An abbreviation of *tokkosho* (Sanskrit, *vajra*). [Return to reference tokko](#)
- *double-reed hichiriki and the seventeen-pipe shō*: The *hichiriki* is a type of flageolet. The *shō* is a mouth organ, similar to panpipes, made of bamboo. [Return to reference double-reed](#)
- *in this troubled realm of the rising sun*: 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 Japanese *shōbō*) and the age of the imitated Dharma (像法 Japanese *zōbō*). This doctrine was extremely influential during the Heian period, when it was believed that *mappō* would begin in the year 1052 CE. [Return to reference sun](#)

- ‘*How hurtful it is to be ignored*’: The source has not been identified. [Return to reference ignored](#)
- ‘*I fear the wind that blows in the night*’: *Shūishū* 29: “Anxious that the wind during the night may have scattered the blossoms of plum, I rise early to view them.” [Return to reference night](#)
- *She is not even capable of writing the Naniwazu*: 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!” [Return to reference Naniwazu](#)
- *when you peek into the mountain spring*: 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 *Kokin rokujō* 985 and 987, respectively. [Return to reference spring](#)
- ‘*I always yearn to go back to the same person*’: *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.” [Return to reference person](#)
- *An image of wakamurasaki*: 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 *fuji*, 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.” [Return to reference wakamurasaki](#)

- *Would it not be set adrift upon the shallows*: Both poems play on the homophone *waka*, meaning “youthful.” [Return to reference shallows](#)
- “*Why does the day when we may finally meet never come?*”: *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?” [Return to reference come](#)
- *was taken from* *Kokin rokujō*: *Kokin rokujō* 3507 (Anonymous). [Return to reference from](#)

6. *Suetsumuhana* The Safflower

[Summary: *Taifu no Myōbu*, the daughter of Genji's former nurse *Saemon*, tries to arrange a tryst between Genji and the *Hitachi Princess*. The Princess's father passed away, leaving his daughter to live in genteel poverty. One moonlit evening in early autumn, Genji goes to the Princess's villa and secretly listens to her playing the *koto*, which sparks his romantic interest. There he runs into *Tō no Chūjō*, who is also interested in the *Hitachi Princess*, and together they return to the palace and play music with the Minister of the Left. *Tō no Chūjō* and Genji both write to the *Hitachi Princess*, but she does not respond to either of them. *Taifu no Myōbu* then arranges for Genji to speak to the Princess with curtains between them. Shy, inexperienced, and awkward, the *Hitachi Princess* does not respond to Genji's advances. Growing impatient with her silence, he barges into her quarters, but then takes pity on her innocent and sheltered lifestyle and leaves in the middle of the night. On a later visit he overhears some of her women talking about the hardships they suffer as a result of the Princess's poverty. In the morning, following a snowfall, Genji is with the Princess and finally gets a proper look at her. He is disappointed by her unattractive appearance, especially her unusually long, red nose, but he vows to be loyal to her anyway and to provide material assistance. The chapter title (*Suetsumuhana*, "The Safflower") plays on the element *hana*, a homonym that could mean either "nose" or "flower." This teasing reference to her red nose provides the *Hitachi Princess*'s alternate name, *Princess Safflower*.]

7. *Momiji no ga* An Imperial Celebration of Autumn Foliage

[Summary: The Emperor arranges a dress rehearsal of the procession to the Suzaku Palace to allow Fujitsubo to see it, since she is not permitted to leave the palace. During the rehearsal, Genji and Tō no Chūjō stage a magnificent performance of the dance “Waves of the Blue Sea.” The procession is a success and Genji is promoted to senior third rank. Genji continues to raise Murasaki with great care and Murasaki learns from her nurse that she is Genji’s wife, even though they are not yet formally married. Fujitsubo gives birth to a Prince who closely resembles Genji. She is alarmed by the resemblance, afraid that their affair will be exposed, and so she avoids him as much as possible. When the child is named Crown Prince, Fujitsubo becomes Empress. Genji begins an affair with a much older woman, Naishi, but Tō no Chūjō sneaks in on the two of them and playfully threatens to expose the affair. Although Tō no Chūjō does not mention the affair to other people, he teases Genji about his undeserved reputation as an upright courtier despite his promiscuous behavior.]

8. *Hana no en* A Banquet Celebrating Cherry Blossoms

[Summary: The Emperor sponsors a banquet to celebrate the viewing of the cherry blossoms at the palace in which poems are composed, music is played, and dances are performed. After the banquet, Genji wants to find a way to visit Fujitsubo, but in his intoxicated state he wanders into the Kokiden and discovers a young woman, a younger sister of his political nemesis, the Kokiden Consort. He initiates an affair with her, and because their tryst takes place on an evening where the moon is shrouded with mist, he calls her Oborozukiyo, his lady of the evening of the misty moon. Their tryst is interrupted before Genji learns the woman's identity, though he suspects she is one of the Minister of the Right's daughters. Genji later attends a banquet held by the Minister of the Right, who wants to show off the wisteriablossoms at his villa, and he recognizes the voice of Oborozukiyo among the ladies viewing the blossoms in the passageway bordering the veranda.]

9. *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](#).° 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 peek?"

"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](#).^o 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* [tree](#)^o 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?](#)”° 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.](#)”

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](#).° 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 ensure 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 unrelenting 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](#),^o 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.](#)”° 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](#)”° 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 sougning 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 [season](#)^o 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](#) . . .”^o

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 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?](#)”°

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?](#)"^o 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 dislikable. 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.

Notes

- *heart-shaped leaves of wild ginger*: *Aoi* (*Aohi* in the old orthography) is the Japanese name for wild ginger. It is also a homophone for *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 played on later in this chapter in an exchange of poems between Genji and the older lady, Naishi, who appeared in Chapter 7, *Momiji no ga*. 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. [Return to reference ginger](#)

- *the chance to gaze upon him: Kokinshū* 1080 (a sacred song for the Sun Goddess). [Return to reference him](#)
- *Branches of the sacred sakaki tree: 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. [Return to reference tree](#)
- *adrift like this, bobbing on the waves: Kokinshū* 509 (Anonymous). [Return to reference waves](#)
- *she too gets nothing but damp sleeves: Kokin rokujō* 987 (Anonymous). [Return to reference sleeves](#)
- *A person’s living spirit really can leave the body and wander about: Kokinshū* 977 (Ōshikōchi no Mitsune): “It must have wandered off, abandoning my body . . . this heart of mine that goes its own way, doing things I do not intend.” [Return to reference about](#)
- *lost in the darkness of parental grief: Yet another allusion to Fujiwara no Kanetsuke’s poem: Gosenshū* 1102. [Return to reference grief](#)
- *“young grasses of remembrance”: 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 Chapter 4, *Yūgao*, where the name carries a related meaning of “yearning love.” [Return to reference remembrance](#)
- *“Why, of all seasons”: 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. [Return to reference seasons](#)
- *a light gray winter cloak to match the season: Clothing was changed for the winter season on the first day of the tenth month.* [Return to reference](#)

[season](#)

- “*I know not if she is become the rain or the clouds . . .*”: Liu Yuxi (772–842), contemporary and acquaintance of Bai Juyi, was one of several Tang period poets who exerted tremendous influence on the development of Heian period poetry. [Return to reference clouds](#)
- “*Do chill evening rains always fall in early winter?*”: 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. [Return to reference winter](#)
- “*How can I endure a single night apart from you?*”: *Man’yōshū* 2542 (Anonymous): “Now that we are betrothed, sharing a pillow of new grasses, how can I endure a single night apart from you?” [Return to reference you](#)

10. Sakaki A Branch of Sacred Evergreen

[Summary: The lady at Rokujō decides to move to Ise along with her daughter and thus end her troubling affair with Genji. Despite his resentment of her, Genji feels guilty over the way he treated her. He decides to visit her at a temporary shrine where her daughter, the new Ise Priestess, is undergoing ritual purification. He presents the lady at Rokujō with a branch of sakaki, a sacred evergreen that signifies his everlasting feelings for her. Despite his pleas, she does not change her mind about moving to Ise.]

Genji's world is then suddenly shaken by the death of his father, the Retired Emperor, and the court is left in an uncertain state due to the increased control held by the Minister of the Right and the Kokiden Consort. Oborozukiyo is promoted to Principal Handmaid, but Genji continues his affair with her despite the fact that the new Emperor, Genji's half-brother Suzaku, also has strong feelings for her. Feeling unsettled, he retreats to the Urin'in Temple to study Tendai Buddhism. Upon his return to the capital he meets with Emperor Suzaku, but as he departs a Controller in the Chamberlain's office subtly accuses him of plotting treason. The court undergoes a radical power shift as the Minister of the Left resigns and the Minister of the Right gains greater influence. When Oborozukiyo briefly returns to her home for a visit, Genji recklessly begins visiting her. One morning, following a terrible storm, the Minister of the Right comes to check on Oborozukiyo and discovers her relationship with Genji. This discovery will lead to Genji's exile.]

11. *Hanachirusato* The Lady at the Villa of Scattering Orange Blossoms

[Summary: Knowing that he is about to be exiled, Genji pays the Reikeiden Consort a visit. Genji decides to support her financially, as the death of his father, the Retired Emperor, has left her in difficult circumstances. On the way to her residence, he passes the house of a woman with whom he previously had an affair. He hears the playing of a koto, and then the cry of a cuckoo, and decides to send her a poem. However, her reply suggests that she is uncertain about reviving her relationship with Genji. He continues on to the Reikeiden Consort's home, a villa surrounded by mandarin orange trees. Together they reminisce about the past. Later, Genji calls on her younger sister, with whom he previously had an affair. She is Hanachirusato, his lady at the villa of scattering orange blossoms.]

12. *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.](#)”° 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,](#)”° 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?](#)° 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](#).° 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 remained 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.](#)”°

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](#)’° 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

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 [Woods](#)
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, benefited 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 [he](#)°

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](#).”° 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](#).”° It was hard to hold back the tears, which fell like spray dripping from the oars of a [boat](#).”°

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 Yukihiro once sadly observed “briny water dripping from the gathered sea [tangle](#).”° 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](#)°

“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.](#)”

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 [longing](#)

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](#)’° 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](#)”°—were intensifying. Though his villa was some distance from the shore, each night the waves, which Middle Counselor Yukihiro observed were stirred by winds blowing through the barrier [pass](#),° 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](#).° 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 [Tsunenori](#)° 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](#)”°—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](#),^o 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](#),”^o 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](#).”^o

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, [Yuan](#),^o 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 Yuan'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](#)."^o

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](#).^o 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](#)."^o

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 multivocal 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 wives 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 Kiritsubo 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 [Shrine](#)° 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](#)°

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](#).° Eschewing royal colors, Genji was

dressed without ostentation, wearing a 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](#)° 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 [inviting](#).”° 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](#).”° 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](#).”° 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.

Notes

- *“I know that we shall circle round and meet again”*: 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.” [Return to reference again1](#)
- *“I shall do all I can to meet you again”*: 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.” [Return to reference again2](#)
- *Are ‘partings before dawn’ always this difficult?*: Gosenshū 719 (Ki no Tsurayuki): “By all means I want to ask someone . . . to what do I compare dreaded partings before dawn?” [Return to reference difficult](#)
- *we must live amidst some towering crags*: Kokinshū 952 (Anonymous): “Amidst what towering crags would I have to live to no longer hear of this world of woe?” [Return to reference crags](#)
- *“the tear-stained face of the moon”*: 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!” [Return to reference moon](#)

- *and sorrowful ‘tears of uncertainty’*: Gosenshū 1333 (Minamoto no Wataru): “Tears of uncertainty, of not knowing what the future holds, are sorrowful simply because they fall in plain sight.” [Return to reference uncertainty](#)
- *And pray to you gods of Tadasu Woods*: The word *Tadasu*—name of the wooded area in Kamo Shrine—also means “to set right” or “rectify.” [Return to reference Woods](#)
- *In more unknown places than even he*: Genji is referring to Qu Yuan (340–278 BCE), a poet who was exiled and had to wander from place to place. [Return to reference he](#)
- *“How enviously I watch those waves return to the capital”*: *Tales of Ise*, section 7: “Yearning to go back the way I have come, how enviously I watch those waves return.” [Return to reference capital](#)
- *“three thousand leagues from home”*: Bai Juyi, *Hakushi monjū* 695. [Return to reference home](#)
- *like spray dripping from the oars of a boat*: *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?” [Return to reference boat](#)
- *dripping from the gathered sea tangle*: *Kokinshū* 962 (Ariwara no Yukihiro): “Should anyone ask after me, tell them that I grieve on the strands at Suma, where briny water drips from the gathered sea tangle.” [Return to reference tangle](#)
- *how fares the nun pining in her hut*: 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. [Return to reference hut](#)
- *I could fill a river to overflowing with my tears*: *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.” [Return to reference tears](#)
- *I gaze sadly at the tangled ferns of longing*: “Ferns of longing” is the literal

meaning of the plant name *shinobugusa*, first mentioned in Chapter 4, *Yūgao*. [Return to reference longing](#)

- *‘while I am in this world’*: *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”). [Return to reference world](#)
- *the “season of anxious grief”*: *Kokinshū* 184 (Anonymous): “Looking upon the light of the moon filtering through the trees, I see that autumn, season of anxious grief, has arrived.” [Return to reference grief](#)
- *winds blowing through the barrier pass*: *Shoku Kokinshū* 868 (Ariwara no Yukihiro): “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. [Return to reference pass](#)
- *it seemed his pillow might float away*: *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.” [Return to reference away](#)
- *the great masters Chieda and Tsunenori*: Tsunenori flourished during the reign of Emperor Murakami (946–67). Not much is known about Chieda. [Return to reference Tsunenori](#)
- *now two thousand leagues distant*: *Hakushi monjū* 724. [Return to reference distant](#)
- *when she performed as a Gosechi dancer*: She is mentioned in passing in Chapter 11, *Hanachirusato*. [Return to reference dancer](#)
- *“Please do not reproach my forwardness”*: *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.” [Return to reference forwardness](#)
- *pulling in trawling lines on a shore like this*: *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.” [Return to reference this](#)
- *He remembered the story of the Han Emperor, Yuan*: Yuan lived from 49 BCE to 32 CE. [Return to reference Yuan](#)

- “*A dream that follows frostfall*”: *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!” [Return to reference frostfall](#)
- *from where he was seated on the floor*: *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.” [Return to reference floor](#)
- *I simply journey to the west*: *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. [Return to reference west](#)
- *send her twice each year to the Sumiyoshi Shrine*: The shrine, which was in nearby Naniwa (present-day Osaka), was dedicated to the god of the sea and of poetry. [Return to reference Shrine](#)
- *When once my cap was crowned with cherry blossoms*: *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.” [Return to reference blossoms](#)
- *as rustic and simple as Bai Juyi’s hut, was peculiarly charming*: *Hakushi monjū* 975. [Return to reference charming](#)
- *the pieces used for playing tagi*: A game that is similar to tiddlywinks, except that the object is to flip stones onto a board instead of counters into a cup. [Return to reference tagi](#)
- *he sang the words “the grasses inviting”*: This song is cited earlier, in Chapter 2, *Hahakigi*. [Return to reference inviting](#)
- *“Into the winecup in spring pour tears of drunken sorrow”*: *Hakushi monjū* 1107. [Return to reference sorrow](#)
- *a breeze coming from the direction of the capital*: The allusion is to a Chinese poem included in *Wen xuan* Folio 29, “19 Old Poems.” [Return to reference capital](#)

13. 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.](#)”°

“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.](#)° 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-racking 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 [them](#)° 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.](#)° 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 Yoshiakiyo 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 Yoshiakiyo 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 . . .](#),”^o 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,”](#)^o 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](#),^o 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 [Saga](#)^o 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 [lute](#) . . . 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 [lover](#)°

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.](#)"° 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.](#)”°

*How wretched my uncertain heart
Knowing there is no one who asks
“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](#).”^o 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.](#)”° 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.](#)”° 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 sighing 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 [hills](#)°

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 . . .](#)”° 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 [pillars](#)°
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 [Lectures](#)° 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.

Notes

- *like the poet whose river of tears “overflowed its banks”*: *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.” [Return to reference banks](#)
- *the Sutra for Benevolent Rulers to protect against a disaster*: This

congregation, called *Ninnōe*, was held in the palace in the fall and spring or in times of emergency to protect the realm. [Return to reference disaster](#)

- *spent all my time after death atoning for them*: 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. [Return to reference them](#)
- *a fisherman's boat arrives*: *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." [Return to reference arrives](#)
- *"Ah, how far away it seems . . ."*: *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?" [Return to reference seems](#)
- *Genji performed a tune titled "Kōryō"*: A "secret" song composed by the legendary musician Reirin for the Yellow Emperor. [Return to reference "Kōryō,"](#)
- *a disciple of the Engi period Emperor, Daigo*: Daigo (885–930) ruled 897–930 CE; his reign included the Engi period, from 901 to 923 CE. [Return to reference Daigo](#)
- *Emperor Saga*: Ruled 809–23 CE. [Return to reference Saga](#)
- *who won praise for her talent with the lute*: "Lute Song," *Hakushi monjū* 603. [Return to reference lute](#)
- *Unable to weave a dream and join my lover*: 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. [Return to reference lover](#)
- *"My longing for you has overwhelmed my secret love"*: *Kokinshū* 503 (Anonymous): "Though I never wanted to let the colors of my love show, my longing for you has overwhelmed my secret." [Return to reference love](#)
- *"I've never seen a letter by proxy before"*: The word Genji uses, *senjigaki*, refers to a letter dictated by the Emperor or by an aristocrat. [Return to](#)

[reference before](#)

- “*bear this foolish game*”: *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.” [Return to reference game](#)
- “*On an evening too precious to waste*”: *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.” [Return to reference waste](#)
- “*dear companions*”: 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?” [Return to reference companions](#)
- *Than waves could break over pine-covered hills*: 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.” [Return to reference hills](#)
- “*Unconcerned about myself . . .*”: *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?” [Return to reference myself](#)
- *Now that we have gone around the sacred pillars*: 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. [Return to reference pillars](#)
- *Rite of the Eight Lectures*: This ritual involved reading and explicating the eight scrolls of the *Lotus Sutra* over four consecutive days, one scroll in the morning and one in the afternoon each day. [Return to reference Lectures](#)

14. Miotsukushi Channel Markers

[Summary: Genji returns to the court and is named Palace Minister. Emperor Suzaku abdicates the throne to the new Emperor Reizei, the son of Genji and Fujitsubo. Suzaku's son by the Shōkyōden Consort is named the new Crown Prince. The former Minister of the Left is named Chancellor. The Akashi lady gives birth to a girl, who Genji believes is the daughter a Korean diviner predicted would be mother of an Emperor. He tries to assuage Murasaki's jealousy toward the Akashi lady. He visits Hanachirusato, whose residence has grown more dilapidated, and decides to construct a villa to house all of his women and children. He makes a pilgrimage to the Sumiyoshi Shrine on a day when, by coincidence, the Akashi lady is also visiting. Feeling inferior in the presence of such an elaborate procession, she withdraws. The lady at Rokujō returns to the capital with her daughter after a new High Priestess of Ise is appointed with the change in government. She falls ill, takes vows as a nun, and asks Genji to look after her daughter. However, she also requests that he not pursue a romantic relationship with her daughter. A few days later, she succumbs to her illness. Genji arranges to have her daughter, the former High Priestess of Ise, serve Emperor Reizei, ignoring Suzaku's desire to have her serve him.]

15. *Yomogiu* A Ruined Villa of Tangled Gardens

[Summary: During Genji's exile, the Hitachi Princess's circumstances grow more desperate and many of the attendants leave her service. Her residence becomes overgrown with weeds and is so dilapidated that spirits of the forest have begun to appear on the grounds. The husband of one of the Princess's maternal aunts has been appointed to serve as Assistant Governor General in Kyūshū. The aunt, who has a troubled relationship with the Princess, tries to convince her to go to Kyūshū, but she refuses to leave her residence. In the end, even her most faithful attendant, Jijū, is forced to abandon the Hitachi Princess and go to Kyūshū. Sometime after Genji's return from exile, he passes by the ruined villa of the Hitachi Princess and discovers her wretched circumstances. He assures her that he remains loyal and feels remorse for his neglect. He has her land and villa restored, and two years later moves her to his own villa in Nijō.]

16. Sekiya The Barrier Gate

[Summary: During the period of Genji's exile the former Vice Governor of Iyo was appointed Vice Governor of Hitachi. After a four-year term of service, he eventually returns to the capital with his young wife, Genji's lady of the molted cicada shell (who first appears in Chapters 2 and 3). On their journey back they reach the Ōsaka Pass at the same time as Genji and his entourage, who are on a pilgrimage to Ishiyama Temple. Genji meets the wife's brother, formerly Genji's page and now an Assistant Commander in the Right Gate Guard, and gives the young man a letter addressed to his sister—an action suggesting that Genji still has feelings for her. Soon after these events the young wife's elderly husband falls ill and passes away. His last wish is that his wife be allowed to do as she pleases. Left in difficult circumstances and facing the advances of her late husband's son (the former Governor of Kii who first appears in Chapter 2, now the Governor of Kawachi), the lady chooses to become a nun.]

17. Eawase A Contest of Illustrations

[Summary: Umetsubo, the former High Priestess at Ise, goes into service for Emperor Reizei despite Genji's desire for her to reside at Nijō. The Retired Emperor Suzaku is disappointed by her move because he is in love with her. Genji feels sorry for him. Emperor Reizei, who was accustomed to being with Tō no Chūjō's daughter, now serving as the new consort in the Kokiden, begins seeing Umetsubo more frequently due to their shared passion for painting. Hoping to draw Reizei back to the chambers of his daughter, Tō no Chūjō commissions master painters to illustrate various tales for her collection. Genji sorts through his own illustrations with Murasaki to give to Umetsubo. This sparks a debate among the ladies-in-waiting from both sides about the aesthetic and moral merits of the various illustrations and the literary texts that they represent. This debate culminated in a formal contest held before the Emperor Reizei. Genji's younger half-brother, Prince Sochinomiya, serves as a judge. Although the competition is very close, Genji's scroll depicting his exile in Suma moves everyone to tears and Umetsubo's side is victorious. The event helps complete the restoration of Genji's power and standing at the court.]

18. Matsukaze Wind in the Pines

[Summary: With the completion of the annex at Genji's Nijō villa, which he built for his many women, he summons the Akashi lady to the capital. However, she is nervous about her status and her uncertain prospects at court. Her father, the novitiate, arranges to first move her into a villa in Ōi before moving her into Genji's annex. Genji agrees to this transitional plan and has the villa repaired. Sometime after she settles down, Genji visits her. On this trip, he also visits his Katsura villa but is discovered by some of his retainers, who keep him there longer than he anticipated. Together they hold a banquet. Upon his return to Nijō, Murasaki complains about his extended absence, feeling jealous toward the Akashi lady. Genji then reveals to her his plan to have Murasaki raise the Akashi lady's daughter.]

19. Usugumo A Thin Veil of Clouds

[Summary: Genji asks the Akashi lady to move her daughter to Genji's Nijō villa, where she will be raised by Murasaki. Although devastated, she agrees for the sake of her daughter's future as a princess. Murasaki spends all of her time caring for her precious Akashi Princess. The ceremony of the donning of first trousers is held for the little girl. Genji, feeling sorry for the Akashi lady, tries to console her by sending her letters. The narrative then shifts as a succession of deaths occurs: the Minister of the Left (Genji's former father-in-law), Fujitsubo, and Prince Shikibu. An old cleric who had served successive reigns and often conducted rites and prayers for Fujitsubo reveals to Emperor Reizei that Genji is his true father. Genji worries that his secret affair with Fujitsubo has been uncovered, for Emperor Reizei, who is worried about natural omens suggesting that the political world is out of balance, says that he wants to yield the throne to Genji. Genji refuses. Troubled, Genji calls on the Umetsubo Consort and asks her to help look after his daughter, the Akashi Princess, once he retires from the world. On that occasion, Genji makes romantic advances toward Umetsubo, but she does not respond to him. He later regrets his actions.]

20. Asagao Bellflowers

[Summary: Princess Asagao, who has stepped down as the Kamo Priestess, moves into the Momozono estate of her aunt, the Fifth Princess, following the death of her father, Prince Shikibu. Genji, under the pretext of paying respect to the Fifth Princess, visits Asagao, for whom he has long had strong feelings. He speaks to her through an intermediary and interprets her responses as a rejection of his suit. However, rumors about a relationship between them reach Murasaki, who is seriously concerned that she may now have a socially superior rival for Genji's affection. When Genji calls on the Fifth Princess's household on another occasion, he runs into the old woman Naishi, who first appeared in Chapter 7 and who has since taken vows. He takes the opportunity of this visit to confess his feelings to Princess Asagao again, but she believes that at her age an affair with him would be inappropriate and continues to reject his advances. Genji returns to Murasaki and tries to reassure her of his devotion. He finally realizes that Murasaki, who so resembles Fujitsubo, is his ideal woman. Later that night, while sleeping in her chambers, Genji has a dream in which Fujitsubo appears and admonishes him for allowing Emperor Reizei to find out the secret of his birth. In the afterlife, she is suffering for this sin, and Genji prays that he may be reborn with her on the same lotus in Amida's Pure Land.]

21. *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](#).° 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 [Yamato](#)° 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 [ceremony](#)° 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 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.](#)^o 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.](#)^o 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.](#)"^o 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 . . .](#)"° 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](#),^o 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 [skies](#)° as melancholy as I?”

Sensing signs of her presence and catching the sound of her youthful,

enchanted 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 childish 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](#).° 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 [goddess](#)°

Forget not that I have stretched around you

A sacred rope to claim you as my own

“You who are inside the sacred [enclosure](#),”° 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 [hikage](#)° 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](#).°

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 to 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](#),^o 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 [heron](#)—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 Maiden.” 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](#),^o 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 to 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 [southwest](#) 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](#),° which would have white blooms in summer, enclosed the garden where mandarin orange trees, their fragrance bringing back memories of the [past](#),° 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](#).^o 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 [Tatsuta](#)^o 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.

Notes

- *the academy in the Ministry of Ceremonials*: 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. [Return to reference Ceremonials](#)

- *a court infused with the spirit of Yamato*: 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. [Return to reference Yamato](#)
- *he had occupied at the matriculation ceremony*: The arrangement would have been based on the custom of seating according to age, not rank. [Return to reference ceremony](#)
- *another girl called Kumoinokari*: This daughter's name will be explained below. [Return to reference Kumoinokari](#)
- *the principal wife of the Azechi Major Counselor*: *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. [Return to reference Counselor](#)
- *though its power is ever so slight*: Lu Ji, "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. [Return to reference slight](#)
- *dyed with the flowers of the bush clover*: 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. [Return to reference clover](#)
- *there's no one who knows a child like the father*: 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. [Return to reference father](#)

- *Are those geese in the cloudy skies: 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. [Return to reference skies](#)
- *at the upcoming Gosechi Festival*: The Gosechi Festival (also referred to as *Ninamesai*, 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. [Return to reference Festival](#)
- *You who serve the Toyooka goddess*: This goddess has been identified with the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu. [Return to reference goddess](#)
- *“You who are inside the sacred enclosure”*: *Shūishū* 1210 (Hitomaro): “Ages ago I began to yearn for you, O maiden of the dance, twirling your sleeves inside the sacred enclosure.” [Return to reference enclosure](#)
- *When I donned that hikage*: 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. [Return to reference hikage](#)

- *like the hundredfold petals of a crinum*: 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*). [Return to reference crinum](#)
- *Following the example set by Yoshifusa*: Fujiwara Yoshifusa (804–872) was the first Fujiwara to serve as both chancellor and regent. [Return to reference Yoshifusa](#)
- *the other with the head of a blue heron*: A similar scene is described in Chapter 7, *Momiji no ga*. [Return to reference heron](#)
- *and so he acquired four parcels of land*: 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 14.4 acres), which was certainly an impressive estate. [Return to reference land](#)
- *expected to occupy the southwest*: 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. [Return to reference southwest](#)
- *A hedge of hareflower shrub*: 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. [Return to reference shrub](#)
- *their fragrance bringing back memories of the past*: *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 Chapter 11, *Hanachirusato*. [Return to reference past](#)
- *a diaphanous outer robe of pale russet*: *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. [Return to reference russet](#)

- *I wonder if our Princess Tatsuta*: Genji refers to Umetsubo as Tatsuta-hime, the goddess of fall, who weaves the brocade of autumn foliage on Mount Tatsuta. [Return to reference Tatsuta](#)

22. *Tamakazura* A Lovely [Garland](#)^o

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 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](#).^o 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](#),^o 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 . . .](#)”^o 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](#),^o 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](#),”^o 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](#).^o 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 [Matsuura](#)^o

“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 [Ateki°](#) 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 [Hibiki](#)°

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.](#)’ ”°

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](#).° 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](#).° 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](#).^o 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 pleases 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 Nijō to formally announce his departure just before he left for Kyūshū. In spite of all that, I assumed that our late mistress’s little girl would remain at that house in Gojō 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 [River](#)°*

“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-e°](#)

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 Rokujō 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](#).° 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 [love](#)°

"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 the 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](#).° 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](#)'° 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."

Notes

- *A Lovely Garland: 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. [Return to reference Garland](#)

- *she looked with envy at the returning waves: Tales of Ise*, section 7: “Yearning to go back the way I have come, how enviously I watch those waves return” (alluded to in Chapter 12, *Suma*, as well). [Return to reference waves](#)
- *Since they were going off to distant provinces: 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 Chapter 12, *Suma*. [Return to reference provinces](#)
- *“I shall not forget you . . .”*: *Man’yōshū* 1230 (Anonymous): “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. [Return to reference you](#)
- *A certain gentleman of the fifth rank, Taifu no Gen*: 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). [Return to reference Gen](#)
- *“surreptitious lovers”*: The word used in the original is *yobai*, which literally means “to creep/crawl in at night.” [Return to reference lovers](#)
- *even if he had come on an autumn evening: 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 Chapter 19, *Usugumo*. [Return to reference evening](#)
- *To the god of the godly mirror of Matsuura*: 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). [Return to reference Matsuura](#)
- *Hyōbu, who had been called Ateki*: A childhood name, not to be confused

with the name of the little girl, Atekimi, who appears in Chapter 9, Aoi.

[Return to reference Ateki](#)

- *The roaring waters at Hibiki*: The place-name *Hibiki no Nada* (straits at Hibiki) permits a play on the word *hibiki*, which means “to reverberate” or “to echo (loudly).” [Return to reference Hibiki](#)
- *In vain have I abandoned wife and children in barbarian lands*: *Hakushi monjū* 144, from “The Prisoner’s Song.” [Return to reference lands](#)
- *There is a shrine to Hachiman nearby in Yawata*: 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. [Return to reference Yawata](#)
- *pray to Kannon at the Hasedera Temple there*: 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. [Return to reference there](#)
- *on behalf of the Fujiwara Princess, Ruri*: This is probably the young lady’s childhood name, which is written with the characters for lapis lazuli. [Return to reference Ruri](#)
- *On the banks of the Hatsuse River*: *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 in Chapters 10 and 15, *Sakaki* and *Yomogiu*. [Return to reference River](#)
- *Like stems of mikuri reed at Mishima-e*: 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. [Return to reference Mishima](#)

- *unable to stand on my own after three years*: The story of the Leech Child appears in Chapters 13 and 18, *Akashi* and *Matsukaze*, above. [Return to reference years](#)
- *Fated always to yearn for a lost love*: 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. [Return to reference love](#)
- *people of her rank were permitted to wear*: Shades of purple and crimson were “forbidden colors”—i.e., they were colors only people of imperial lineage were allowed to wear. [Return to reference wear](#)
- *‘Oh cruel lover’*: The five syllables in Japanese are *a-da-hi-to-no*. [Return to reference lover](#)

23. *Hatsune* First Song of Spring

[Summary: As part of the New Year celebration, Genji calls on all his ladies: Murasaki, the Akashi Princess, the Akashi lady, Hanachirusato, Tamakazura, Princess Safflower (the Hitachi Princess), and the lady of the molted cicada shell. However, rather than spending the evening with Murasaki, he stays with the Akashi lady. Murasaki is annoyed and outraged. The next day, there is an otokotōka—a celebration of music and dance performed by male courtiers, who process from the imperial palace to the Suzaku Palace and finally to the estate at Rokujō. The celebration is spectacular and when it is over, Genji reflects that the present age holds people (including especially his son) with superior artistic and intellectual gifts and talents. Genji hopes to sponsor a concert in the coming month.]

24. Kochō Butterflies

[Summary: Genji has Chinese-style pleasure boats constructed. He invites the Umetsubo Empress's ladies-in-waiting to ride the boats and view Murasaki's beautiful spring garden. Tamakazura has grown even more beautiful and has attracted the attention of many men, including Genji's younger brother, Prince Sochinomiya. The Umetsubo Empress commissions a ceremonial reading of the Sutra of the Perfection of Wisdom, and Murasaki has her page girls dress as birds or butterflies and bring offerings of flowers. Here, Murasaki responds to the poem praising autumn sent earlier as a challenge by Umetsubo (the poem appears at the end of Chapter 21) with her own poem about spring. Letters from various suitors continue to be sent to Tamakazura, including ones from Prince Sochinomiya, the Major Captain of the Right, and Tō no Chūjō's oldest son, Kashiwagi. However, Genji develops an attraction for Tamakazura; and one night he confesses his love for her, slips off his outer robe, and lies beside her. She finds his behavior detestable, and he leaves her thinking she is cold.]

25. *Hotaru* Fireflies

[Summary: Tamakazura is increasingly troubled about Genji's advances and about the eccentric manner in which he encourages various suitors to pursue a relationship with her. When Prince Sochinomiya sends a letter expressing an interest in meeting, Genji has Tamakazura's lady-in-waiting, Saishō, write a response for her. Spurred on by this apparent show of interest from Tamakazura, Sochinomiya pays her a visit. Genji spies on the two of them and releases fireflies to allow Sochinomiya to catch a glimpse of Tamakazura. Her beauty arouses his passion, but she slips away, an action he interprets as a sign of aloofness. Still, he is utterly smitten.]

When the day of the Sweet Flag Festival arrives, Genji holds an archery competition for the Left Palace Guard. Following this event, as the tedium of the rainy season sets in, the women at the Rokujō estate pass the time reading illustrated tales. Genji teases Tamakazura for reading these tales instead of tending to her appearance, but he is unaware that she is reading them to find out if anybody in the past has confronted the outrageous situation she now faces of a stepfather who is making advances. When his criticism of her reading tales fails to impress, Genji changes tactics and presents a theory of the monogatari that provides a sophisticated defense of tales. All the same, this defense is still an attempt at seduction, but Tamakazura successfully rebuffs him by reminding him of his parental duties. Shamed, Genji withdraws and soon after hypocritically abandons his own theory by telling Murasaki that she must not let his real daughter, the Akashi Princess, read tales of a romantic nature. The chapter ends with Tō no Chūjō speaking to a diviner who predicts that he will soon find a lost child who is being looked after by someone else.]

26. Tokonatsu Wild Pinks

[Summary: Genji speaks with Tō no Chūjō's son, Kōbai, and discusses the diviner's interpretation of Tō no Chūjō's dream about his long-lost daughter. Genji begins instructing Tamakazura on the koto. Tō no Chūjō discovers a long-lost daughter in Ōmi but remains in the dark about Tamakazura. He becomes jealous of Genji because Genji appears to be raising two beautiful daughters, Tamakazura and the Akashi Princess. Tō no Chūjō still resents Kumoinokari's relationship with Genji's son, as he sees the relationship as a barrier for her to attract suitors of higher birth. He visits his newfound daughter, the lady of Ōmi, and finds her provincial and lacking proper manners. He decides to place her in service to his daughter, who is serving Reizei as the Kokiden Consort. The lady of Ōmi writes a letter to the Kokiden Consort, her half-sister, attempting to show off her knowledge of poetry, but her lack of skill is evident. The Kokiden Consort's attendants find her letter amusing and send back a reply that matches her inelegant style.]

27. *Kagaribi* Cresset Fires

[Summary: Genji hears the rumors about Tō no Chūjō's provincial daughter and believes Tō no Chūjō showed a lack of judgment by bringing her to the capital. After hearing about the lady of Ōmi's travails, Tamakazura feels relieved at having Genji look after her. Genji continues to visit Tamakazura and play the koto with her. He has passionate feelings for her, which he expresses to her often during their lessons, but he keeps his desires under control and does not sleep with her. After one such visit, he joins Tō no Chūjō's sons, Kashiwagi and Kōbai, and his own son in an informal musical concert. Kashiwagi feels nervous knowing Tamakazura is nearby but maintains his composure.]

28. Nowaki An Autumn Tempest

[Summary: A storm hits the capital and strong winds blow open Murasaki's blinds. Genji's son catches a glimpse of her for the first time and is mesmerized. He thinks to himself that his father and Murasaki are an ideal couple. As the storm gets stronger, Genji's son checks on his grandmother, Princess Ōmiya, and then Hanachirusato, who has looked after him for much of his life. The next morning, after the storm, Genji and his son go around calling on the various ladies at the Rokujō estate. Genji's son is disturbed when he catches a glimpse of his father flirting with Tamakazura, since he believes she is his half-sister. After Genji's son calls on the Akashi Princess, he compares her with Murasaki and Tamakazura and envies his father for being surrounded by such beautiful women. He becomes restless and frustrated thinking about his own situation with Kumoinokari.]

29. Miyuki An Imperial Excursion

[Summary: Emperor Reizei decides to go on an excursion to the shrine at Ōharano. Tamakazura watches the imperial procession to catch a glimpse of her real father, Tō no Chūjō. She finds the Emperor Reizei splendid, but the other men are a disappointment to her. Genji plans to use the ceremonial donning of her train as the opportune time to tell Tō no Chūjō the truth about Tamakazura, and so he asks Tō no Chūjō to participate in the ritual. Tō no Chūjō initially declines the request. Because Princess Ōmiya is now ill, Genji realizes that it is urgently important to tell Tō no Chūjō before the ceremony in case Tamakazura needs to go into mourning for her grandmother. Genji visits Princess Ōmiya and then summons Tō no Chūjō to her residence, where he reveals the truth. Tamakazura's ceremony takes place and Tō no Chūjō, knowing at last that he is her father, ties the waist cords for her.]

30. *Fujibakama* Mistflowers

[Summary: Tō no Chūjō and Genji pressure Tamakazura to enter court service. She is troubled over Genji's advances toward her since they could harm her reputation should she become Principal Handmaid for Emperor Reizei. She expresses her desire not to enter court service. Princess Ōmiya passes away, and Genji's son calls on Tamakazura to talk about their common loss. He gives her mistflowers and confesses his feelings for her, but his advances make her uncomfortable and she retreats. Genji and his son discuss Tamakazura's future, and Genji's son warns his father of the gossip surrounding his inappropriate feelings for Tamakazura. Kashiwagi delivers a message from Tō no Chūjō to Tamakazura and also conveys to her that he now sees himself as her brother and no longer as a suitor. Sochinomiya, the Major Captain of the Right, and the Commander of the Left Palace Guard all continue to send letters to Tamakazura in hopes of winning her before she enters court service.]

31. Makibashira A Beloved Pillar of Cypress

[Summary: The Major Captain of the Right initiates an affair with Tamakazura, wrecking Genji's plans for her to enter court service. Tamakazura regrets the marriage and falls into depression. Genji calls on her and decides that she can still serve as Principal Handmaid. The Major Captain prepares his residence for Tamakazura and neglects his principal wife, a distinguished woman. He and his principal wife discuss his relationship with Tamakazura. She dumps incense ashes on his head right before he is to leave to visit his young bride. Her attendants are appalled and attribute her action to a malignant spirit that has possessed her. An exorcism is performed. This incident prevents the Major Captain from seeing Tamakazura that night. The Major Captain subsequently tries to smooth things over with his principal wife, but her father, Prince Hyōbu, rejects his efforts. An otokotōka celebration is held for the New Year and Tamakazura plans to move into the palace to go into service for Reizei. When Reizei calls on her, the Major Captain grows jealous and worries that Tamakazura will not want to leave. He thus takes her from the palace directly to his residence without passing by the Rokujō estate. Later that year Tamakazura gives birth to a boy and thus cannot move to the palace.]

32. Umegae A Branch of Plum

[Summary: Genji begins preparations for the Akashi Princess's approaching ceremony of donning her first train. Genji, Murasaki, Hanachirusato, the Akashi lady, and Princess Asagao prepare a variety of incenses that are then judged by Prince Sochinomiya. The next day the ceremony is held, and soon after a coming-of-age ceremony is held for Suzaku's son, the Crown Prince. The Akashi Princess then goes into service for the Crown Prince. Genji prepares the Kiritsubo for her and provides various works to help her practice calligraphy. He requests samples of calligraphy from Sochinomiya and Tō no Chūjō's brother. Genji has his son, Prince Hyōbu's son, and Kashiwagi draw illustrations with kana poetry worked into the scene. Genji also produces works of calligraphy, and he and Sochinomiya together examine the works of various master calligraphers. Genji urges his son to take a bride, but the young gentleman remains devoted to Kumoinokari. He sends her a love note, but she has heard rumors that he is to marry Prince Nakatsukasa's daughter and is disappointed that he did not address the rumors in his letter.]

33. *Fuji no uraba* Shoots of Wisteria Leaves

[Summary: Genji prepares for the Akashi Princess's move to the palace. Meanwhile, Genji's son, still in love with Kumoinokari, is uncertain how to deal with the situation due to Tō no Chūjō's harsh attitude toward him. Now that Kumoinokari is older and Genji's son has risen in rank, Tō no Chūjō swallows his pride and accepts their relationship. He approaches Genji's son, quietly seeking a reconciliation. Later, he invites the young gentleman to his residence, ostensibly to view wisteria blossoms. They compose poems and drink, and any remaining resentment between the two dissipates. Tō no Chūjō, his sons, and Genji's son continue to drink wine and play music, and at the end of the night, he is shown to Kumoinokari's bedchamber, where he consummates their marriage.]

The day of the Kamo Festival arrives and the Akashi Princess moves to the palace. Murasaki and Genji agree that the Akashi lady should accompany her daughter to help look after her. With his son happily married and his daughter thriving in the palace, Genji considers retreating from the world to practice religious devotions. He is subsequently promoted to an honorary rank equivalent to that of a Retired Emperor. Tō no Chūjō is promoted to Chancellor, and Genji's son to Middle Counselor. Genji's son and Kumoinokari move into the Sanjō residence, where the late Minister of the Left and Princess Ōmiya once resided.]

34. *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 [Counselor](#) . . . 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 [Pavilion](#)° 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 deserts. 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 [greens](#)° 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 [seedlings](#)° 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 . . . ”°

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 . . . ”° 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!”° 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 [you](#)°

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](#).°

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 . . .](#)”° 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](#).° 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](#)"° there was no restoring our reputations. He would go to her, following the trail marked through the Shinoda Woods in [Izumi](#).°

"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 unstopped . . . yet the road to Ōmi

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 [wisteria](#)°

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 Kiritsubo, 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 [autumn](#)°

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-tinged wings of the mandarin duck

Have not changed colors at all, though I hear

The lower leaves of the bush clover [have](#)°

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](#),° 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*](#),^o 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](#),^o 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](#).^o 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 “Two 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 anymore, 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 [Captain](#)° 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

Dispelled 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 [Peak](#)°—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 [Princess](#)° 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](#),”° 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](#)”^o 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*](#),^o 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](#)."^o

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](#).^o

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](#).° 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 [hue](#)°

“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.](#)”° 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 . . . “not yet 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.”

Notes

- *Then there is the Fujiwara Major Counselor*: This character does not appear elsewhere in the work. [Return to reference Counselor](#)
- *The west side of the Oak Pavilion*: The space was called the Kaedono. [Return to reference Pavilion](#)
- *Tamakazura brought early spring greens*: 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. [Return to reference greens](#)
- *I have brought along the pine seedlings*: 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. [Return to reference seedlings](#)
- *“The darkness tries in vain . . .”*: *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?” [Return to reference vain](#)
- *“The snow that lingers, hidden below the fortress wall . . .”*: *Hakushi monjū* 911, “Gazing at dawn from Yu tower.” [Return to reference wall](#)
- *even though I’ve done nothing wrong!*: 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.” [Return to reference wrong](#)
- *Agitates my heart by keeping me from you*: *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.” [Return to reference you](#)
- *waiting there like welcoming companions*: *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.” [Return to reference companions](#)

- *“My sleeves are scented . . .”*: *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?”
[Return to reference scented](#)
- *no one would pay attention to any other flower*: 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. [Return to reference flower](#)
- *“like a flock of birds”*: *Kokinshū* 674 (Anonymous): “How can I pretend that nothing has happened now, when rumors about me rise up like a flock of birds?” [Return to reference birds](#)
- *the Shinoda Woods in Izumi*: This sentence simply means that Genji will make use of Chūnagon’s brother, the former governor of Izumi, to get to Oborozukiyo. [Return to reference Izumi](#)
- *Ready to hurl myself into waves of wisteria*: Genji’s poem and Oborozukiyo’s reply below both turn on a wordplay made possible by an orthographic convention that allowed *fuji* (“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. [Return to reference wisteria](#)
- *Has he grown tired of me . . . I feel autumn*: The poem plays on the word *aki*, which means “autumn,” but which could also mean “to grow tired of.”
[Return to reference autumn](#)
- *The lower leaves of the bush clover have*: 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?” [Return to reference have](#)
- *We wear the same garland on our heads*: *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. [Return to reference heads](#)

- *Golden Light Sutra of the Most Victorious Kings, the Diamond Sutra*: The *Diamond Sutra* is a short section of the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*. [Return to reference Sutra](#)
- *the twenty-third day of the month*: 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. [Return to reference month](#)
- *decorations of gold birds on silver branches*: 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). [Return to reference branches](#)
- *a certain Major Captain*: This character is not Tamakazura's husband, but a different major captain who is not otherwise mentioned in the tale. [Return to reference Captain](#)
- *acquired unwavering faith on Eagle Peak*: This is Mount Grdhrakuta 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. [Return to reference Peak](#)
- *The Akashi Princess*: 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 was 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. [Return to reference Princess](#)

- *so remote that no birds sing there: 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?” [Return to reference there](#)
- *“sow seeds in the blessed garden”*: 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. [Return to reference garden](#)
- *to play a game of kemari*: *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. [Return to reference kemari](#)
- *remember how the poet entreated the spring breeze: 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.” [Return to reference breeze](#)
- *offerings to Saohime, the goddess of spring*: 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 Chapter 4, *Yūgao*, 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. [Return to reference spring](#)
- *Murasaki’s quarters in the east hall*: 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. [Return to reference hall](#)
- *Ever grow weary of the cherry’s hue*: 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. [Return to reference hue](#)

- *pass my days lost in melancholy thought: 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." [Return to reference thought](#)

35. *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 Kiritsubo, 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](#).° 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](#),° 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 unequalled 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.](#)° 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;](#)° 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.](#)° 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 sighing 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,”](#)° 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 Kiritsubo 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](#).
◦ 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](#).^o 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 anymore. 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 twilight 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](#).° 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](#).°

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](#).°

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](#).^o 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 a 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 Kiritsubo 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.](#)”°

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 anymore! 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 [leaf](#)° 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?](#)'" 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 [Precepts](#)° 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 gemlike dewdrops 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](#)'?"° 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](#).°

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 [shores](#)°

“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](#).° 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 anymore 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 Kiritsubo 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.](#)° 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,](#)”° 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 enthralling. 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 [Nyorai](#)° was read out at the temple where Suzaku resided.

Notes

- *the highest rank as Imperial Mother*: Had she lived, her status as Imperial Mother would have been effectively equivalent to that of an empress. [Return to reference Mother](#)
- *promoted from Major Captain of the Right to Major Counselor*: 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. [Return to reference Counselor](#)
- *and thus knew all that had happened*: This nurse appears in Chapter 14, *Miotsukushi*. She is selected by Genji to go to Akashi as nurse to his daughter. [Return to reference happened](#)
- *vines twining about the sacred enclosure of the shrine had turned color*: *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.” [Return to reference color](#)

- *rustling wind in the pine trees above them: 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?” [Return to reference them](#)
- *“Mount Hira as well”*: Ono no Takamura (802–853) was a poet and scholar of Chinese. The poem may be misattributed here. According to *Fukurosōshi* (*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. [Return to reference well](#)
- *who was born of the Principal Handmaid*: 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 Chapter 21, *Otome*. [Return to reference Handmaid](#)
- *modes that suggested coldness or warmth*: 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. [Return to reference warmth](#)
- *a sweet aroma that would surely entice the warbler: 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.” [Return to reference warbler](#)
- *he tuned the tonic string to the ichikotsu mode*: One of the six modes of court music (*gagaku*), *ichikotsu* corresponds to the key of D. [Return to reference mode](#)
- *heavy with flowers and fruit: 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 Chapters 11

and 21, *Hanachirusato* and *Otome*). [Return to reference fruit](#)

- *bringing high status to those who were lowly and poor*: 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 Chapter 17, *E awase*). [Return to reference poor](#)
- *“Inconsolable, I gaze at the moon shining on Mount Obasute”*: *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. [Return to reference Obasute](#)
- *Why did I pick this fallen leaf*: 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. [Return to reference leaf](#)
- *why would we treasure them over other flowers?*: *Kokinshū* 70 (Anonymous). [Return to reference flowers](#)
- *a lay devotee who promised to uphold the Five Precepts*: 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. [Return to reference Precepts](#)
- *“Doesn’t the poet say ‘Wait for the moon’?”*: 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 Chapter 3, *Utsusemi*, as well). A similar poem is *Man'yōshū* 709. [Return to reference moon](#)

- *censure others for straying on the mountain path of love: Kokin rokujō* 1980 (Anonymous): “How deep the recesses of the mountain of love . . . it seems that people who enter them always lose their way.” [Return to reference love](#)
- *Fishing along Akashi's shores*: 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. [Return to reference shores](#)
- *a branch of Japanese star anise*: 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. [Return to reference anise](#)
- *making everyone think that spring was right next door: Kokinshū* 1021 (Kiyowara Fukayabu): “Though it is still winter, spring is right next door, which is why white blossoms scatter over the enclosure.” [Return to reference door](#)
- *“The Masked Warrior King”*: 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. [Return to reference King](#)
- *The sutra to Dainichi Nyorai*: 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. [Return to](#)

[reference Nyorai](#)

36. *Kashiwagi* The Oak Tree

[Summary: Kashiwagi continues to suffer from his illness and reflects on his life. He sends a letter to the Third Princess and to Kojijū. Kojijū convinces the Third Princess to respond, which brings him some comfort. Soon after, Kashiwagi's condition worsens, and the Third Princess goes into labor and gives birth to a boy. Genji has a difficult time feeling any affection for the child since he knows that Kashiwagi is the true father. The Third Princess remains in a weakened state after giving birth and, certain that she will not survive much longer, asks for permission to take religious vows. Her father, Retired Emperor Suzaku, visits her and agrees to her request. The day after the Third Princess becomes a nun, the spirit of the lady at Rokujō reveals itself and admits to having possessed both Murasaki and the Third Princess in revenge for perceived slights from Genji. As Kashiwagi nears death, Genji's son pays him a visit. Kashiwagi asks him to tell Genji that he respects him and hopes for his forgiveness. Soon after, Kashiwagi passes away. The Third Princess recovers, but she has already taken vows despite her youth. Genji's son pays his respects to Kashiwagi's widow, the Second Princess, and soon thereafter memorial services are held. Genji's son calls on the Second Princess again and this time hints at his affection for her.]

37. Yokobue The Transverse Flute

[Summary: The ceremony honoring the first anniversary of Kashiwagi's death is held. Kaoru, the son of the Third Princess and Kashiwagi, is quite handsome and Genji opens up more to the boy. Genji's son calls on the Second Princess and her mother and spends the night playing music with them. He again hints at his feelings for the Second Princess. Her mother gives him Kashiwagi's transverse flute. That night Genji's son has a dream in which Kashiwagi's spirit tells him that the flute was meant for someone else. Genji's son goes to his father and plays with Kaoru and Genji's grandson, Prince Niou—the third son of the Emperor by Genji's daughter (the Akashi Princess who is now the Kiritsubo Consort). Genji's son talks with his father about his dream and relays Kashiwagi's request to be forgiven for the offense he committed.]

38. *Suzumushi* Bell Crickets

[Summary: Genji holds a ceremony to dedicate the sacred images he has commissioned for the Third Princess to assist her in her daily devotions. Despite his resentment of her for taking vows, he continues to look after her. The banquet honoring the Harvest Moon had been canceled, so Genji begins playing music at his Rokujō estate, which leads to a gathering of court gentlemen. After receiving a letter from Retired Emperor Reizei, however, Genji decides to move the occasion to Reizei's villa. While there, Genji speaks with the Umetsubo Empress and the two discuss their desires to one day take vows and retreat from the world. The Umetsubo Empress expresses her worries about the spirit of her deceased mother, the lady at Rokujō, who continues to suffer for her sins. Genji convinces Umetsubo to commission rites and good works to release her mother's spirit from suffering.]

39. Yūgiri Evening Mist

[Summary: Genji's son decides the Second Princess is ideal for him and continues to look after her and her mother. The Second Princess's mother falls ill, so Genji's son helps her travel to Ono to receive treatment by a master priest. Worried about gossip spreading about a suspected affair, the mother sends a letter to Genji's son implying she would accept his marriage to her daughter, but before he can read it, his jealous wife, Kumoinokari, snatches it away and hides it. The Second Princess's mother, believing that Genji's son has abandoned her daughter, suffers a seizure and dies. Genji's son travels to the Ono villa, but the Second Princess is too grief-stricken to see him. He begins writing to her, but she does not respond. Genji's son takes care of the memorial services for the Second Princess's mother and then arranges for the Second Princess to move back to her Ichijō villa. However, she does not want to leave the Ono villa and is considering taking vows as a nun. She is forced to move back to Ichijō by Genji's son, who intends to marry her. On the night she returns to Ichijō, he barges into her bedchambers. She locks herself in her inner sanctum, refusing to yield to him. He continues to call on her and eventually the Second Princess's attendant, Koshōshō, leads Genji's son into the inner sanctum, where he consummates their affair. When Kumoinokari gets word of their marriage, she leaves for Tō no Chūjō's villa believing that her marriage is over. Genji's son is left wondering why anyone pursues romantic affairs.]

40. *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,](#)^o 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.](#)"^o

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](#),^o 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 enthralling, the dancers began “The Masked Warrior [King](#).”^o 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 [come](#)°*

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 [Empress](#) 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 [reading](#)° 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 [sorrows](#)°—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 [wind](#)°

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*](#),^o 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 [body](#)—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](#):°

*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](#).° 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 sighing 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

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.

Notes

- *the empresses*: The empresses are Umetsubo and the Akashi Princess, Genji's daughter who has been the consort of the Kiritsubo. This wording suggests that the inevitable promotion has been made and she is now the Akashi Empress. [Return to reference empresses](#)
- *She must have made this vow to the Buddha ages ago*: 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. [Return to reference ago](#)
- *the story of the Buddha's cutting of firewood*: 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. [Return to reference firewood](#)
- *"The Masked Warrior King"*: Described in Chapter 35, *Wakana*, Part 2. [Return to reference King](#)
- *That karma will bind us through all the worlds to come*: 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. [Return to reference come](#)
- *the Akashi Empress*: As noted above, Genji's daughter, the Akashi Princess who becomes the Kiritsubo 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. [Return to reference Empress](#)
- *A sutra reading*: 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. [Return to reference reading](#)

- *cutting winds that bring only sorrows: Shikashū* 109 (Izumi Shikibu):
“What sort of wind is it, this wind that blows in autumn . . . how cutting it is, bringing only sorrow.” [Return to reference sorrows](#)
- *Before being blown off and scattered by the wind*: Murasaki’s poem plays on two senses of the word *oku*—“to be up/to sit up” and “to settle.” [Return to reference wind](#)
- *the Contemplation Sutra*: 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*. [Return to reference Sutra](#)
- *gaze on the empty shell of her body: 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!” [Return to reference body](#)
- *Genji replied*: 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. [Return to reference replied](#)
- *when his first wife died*: 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 Chapter 9, *Aoi*.) [Return to reference died](#)

41. *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 [spring](#)°—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!](#)”° 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 . . .](#)"

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](#).° 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 [name](#)°

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](#),"° 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](#)."° 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](#)."°

"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](#).° 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?](#)”°

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?](#)”° 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.](#)° 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.](#)[°]

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 . . .](#)”° He stared enviously at a flock of wild geese, each bird with its mate winging its way across the sky.

Taoist [summoner](#)° 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](#).° 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.](#)”° 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

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.

Notes

- *the cry of a bird to remind him of spring: 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?” [Return to reference spring](#)
- *the man who wanted to cover the sky with his sleeves: 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 Chapters 14 and 28, *Miotsukushi* and *Nowaki*). [Return to reference sleeves](#)
- *“No spring comes to this dark valley . . .”: 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.” [Return to reference valley](#)
- *cherry trees blooming on the plains of Fukakusa: 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 Chapters 19 and 36, *Usugumo* and *Kashiwagi*). [Return to reference Fukakusa](#)
- *That promise a tryst, only to find you forgot their name*: 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 “a sin” and “to pluck.” [Return to reference name](#)
- *“the cuckoo’s voice, which calls out for a thousand years”: 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.”

[Return to reference years](#)

- “*The sound of the rain at the window.*”: *Hakushi monjū* 131 (Bai juyi).

[Return to reference window](#)

- “*from my beloved’s hedge*”: The source of the poem is uncertain. It is cited in later commentaries. [Return to reference hedge](#)
- *the old man was in no mood for entertainment*: *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?” [Return to reference entertainment](#)
- “*How could it have known?*”: *Kokin rokujō* 2804 (Anonymous): “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 Chapter 11, *Hanachirusato*, as well). [Return to reference known](#)
- “*How can there be so many tears?*”: *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?” [Return to reference tears](#)
- *which were aglow in the slanting light at sunset*: *Kokinshū* 244 (Sosei): “Am I the only one who finds them moving . . . these Japanese pinks aglow in the light of sunset when crickets cry?” [Return to reference sunset](#)
- *flowers wrapped in cotton cloth to catch the dew*: 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. [Return to reference dew](#)
- “*Though the rains fall as they always have . . .*”: 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). [Return to reference have](#)
- *Taoist summoner*: 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 Chapter 1, *Kiritsubo*, 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. [Return to reference summoner](#)

- *traditional headband of bluish-green corded silk*: *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 Chapter 21, *Otome*. [Return to reference silk](#)
- *with countless tears I return them to you*: *Gosenshū* 1143. [Return to reference you](#)

42. *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](#).°

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](#).° 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](#),° 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](#).° I hesitate to even think about the five [susceptibilities](#)° 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,](#)° his scent would mingle with theirs and intoxicate many whose sleeves were dampened by the spring rain dripping from those [branches.](#)° 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.](#)°

Because Kaoru was suffused with this mysterious essence, which everyone found so wondrously [strange,](#)° 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,](#)° and the dew-covered bush clover, which so appeals to the stag looking for a [mate;](#)° instead, he'd opt to use chrysanthemums, which pay no heed to old [age,](#)° 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](#)”° 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!](#)”°

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.](#)”°

Notes

- *not one among all of his descendants shone with the same glorious light:* By the end of the twelfth century, certain copies of the text of *The Tale of Genji* 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 story line. 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 *The Tale of Genji*. 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 story line is the development of Murasaki Shikibu as a literary artist of considerable range and sophistication.

[Return to reference light](#)

- *he was named Minister of War*: 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). [Return to reference War](#)
- *the daughter of the late Tō no Chūjō*: This is the first mention of Tō no Chūjō's death. [Return to reference Chūjō](#).
- *If only I were enlightened like Prince Zengyō*: 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. [Return to reference Zengyō](#)
- *into a jewel of salvation*: *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?" [Return to reference salvation](#)
- *the five susceptibilities*: Kaoru is circumspect in talking about his mother here. The "susceptibilities" that he refers to 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. [Return to reference susceptibilities](#)
- *brushed up against the blossoms of the plum trees in the garden*: *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?" [Return to reference garden](#)
- *dripping from those branches*: *Kokin rokujō* 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.” [Return to reference branches](#)

- *from the breeze that trailed after him: 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. [Return to reference him](#)
- *which everyone found so wondrously strange: Kokinshū 35 (Anonymous):* “After drawing near the plum blossoms but briefly, my robes were infused with a scent that people may consider suspicious.” [Return to reference strange](#)
- *which others praise so highly: 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.” [Return to reference highly](#)
- *which so appeals to the stag looking for a mate: 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. [Return to reference mate](#)
- *which pay no heed to old age: Kokin rokujō 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. [Return to reference age](#)
- *“The Lover I Seek”:* 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 Chapter 35, *Wakana*, Part 2. [Return to reference Seek](#)
- *but that fragrance . . . how incomparable!: 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 Chapter 34, *Wakana*, Part 1. [Return to reference incomparable](#)
- *“Where the gods descend”:* 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. [Return to reference descend](#)

43. *Kōbai* Red Plum

[Summary: The principal wife of Kōbai, Tō no Chūjō's second son, has passed away, leaving him with two daughters. He eventually remarries, taking as his new wife the daughter of Tamakazura's late husband, the Major Captain, who, we learn, had risen to the highest post of Chancellor before passing away (this daughter first appears in Chapter 31). Kōbai's new wife was herself previously married to Genji's brother Sochinomiya and has a daughter from that marriage. Kōbai adopts the girl and later his new wife gives birth to a son.]

Kōbai sends his oldest daughter to serve the Crown Prince and hopes to marry his second daughter to Prince Niou. He is also determined to look after the well-being of his adopted daughter and as a result is curious about her looks and talents. Prince Niou is close to Kōbai's young son, now a page at court, and often uses him to deliver messages. Kōbai sends a letter with red plum blossoms (his namesake) attached to try to arrange a meeting between Prince Niou and his second daughter. Prince Niou, however, has no interest in pursuing this relationship and instead sends letters to Kōbai's adopted daughter. She is not interested in marrying Niou and does not respond to his entreaties. Her mother approves of the match at first, but later changes her mind, expressing concerns about Niou's promiscuity.]

44. Takekawa Bamboo River

[Summary: Tamakazura and her late husband (the Major Captain) have three sons and two daughters. Both the Emperor and Retired Emperor Reizei are interested in Tamakazura's oldest daughter. One day Kumoinokari's son, the Lesser Captain, comes to visit Tamakazura's son and accidentally catches a glimpse of Tamakazura's two daughters playing Go. He falls for the older daughter. But Tamakazura ignores him and eventually decides to give her to Reizei. She gives birth to a Princess, which endears her to Reizei, who does not have many children. Having dissatisfied the Emperor by giving her daughter to Reizei, Tamakazura decides to step down as Principal Handmaid and allow her younger daughter to take her place. A few years later, Tamakazura's older daughter gives birth to a Prince. As a result, Reizei shows her greater affection and attention, causing a falling out between the older daughter and Reizei's other women. Meanwhile, the younger daughter finds success at the court. Tamakazura realizes that her older daughter might have been happier with the Lesser Captain, who leads a privileged life. She also laments that the death of her husband has left her sons with diminished prospects at court.]

45. Hashihime The Divine Princess at Uji Bridge

[Summary: Hachinomiya, a prince of the blood no longer considered a member of court society, lives a life devoted to his principal wife, who gave him two daughters. However, during the second childbirth she passed away and he is left to raise the daughters on his own. His circumstances become more desolate as the years pass and his attendants gradually leave the family. Hachinomiya devotes himself to religion and does not consider remarrying. After his residence burns down, he moves to Uji, on the outskirts of the capital. A saintly ascetic living in the mountains of Uji helps Hachinomiya with his religious studies and devotions. Reizei hears about the situation at Uji and desires to take in Hachinomiya's daughters. Meanwhile, Kaoru hopes to study under Hachinomiya. He travels to Uji for three years to learn the teachings of Buddhism there. One night, Kaoru makes his way to the Uji villa in disguise, and when he arrives, he hears Hachinomiya's daughters playing music. He manages to catch a glimpse of them and finds them refined and beautiful. Later, Kaoru tells Niou about the Uji Princesses, sparking Niou's interest. Kaoru returns to Uji and promises Hachinomiya that he will look after his daughters when Hachinomiya passes away. He also speaks with an attendant, Bennokimi, and learns from her that Kashiwagi was his true father. She gives him a pouch with Kashiwagi's letters in it. Kaoru returns to the capital and reads the letters.]

46. Shiigamoto At the Foot of the Oak Tree

[Summary: Prince Niou goes on a pilgrimage to Hatsuse. On his way back, he rests at Genji's son's residence in Uji. Niou sends a letter to the Uji Princesses but does not get the chance to convey his feelings to them. As Hachinomiya reaches the unlucky age of sixty-one, he worries what will happen to his daughters when he is gone and asks Kaoru to look after them. Kaoru agrees, but does not feel the same passion as Niou to make one of them his wife. Hachinomiya goes on a retreat to a mountain temple but falls ill there and passes away. Niou sends the daughters a letter after the mourning period; the older daughter responds, but views Niou as promiscuous and fickle. Kaoru visits the daughters and tries to persuade them of Niou's good intentions, and to encourage one of them to accept his proposal. The older daughter tells Kaoru that the younger sister has been the one corresponding with Niou. Kaoru feels attracted to the older sister and hints at his feelings, but she pretends not to understand.]

47. Agemaki A Bowknot Tied in Maiden's Loops

[Summary: Kaoru visits the Uji Princesses on the one-year anniversary of Hachinomiya's death. He expresses his affection for the older princess and speaks on behalf of Niou, who is interested in the younger princess. The older princess does not acknowledge Kaoru and hopes to arrange a match between Kaoru and her younger sister instead. Kaoru confides in the princess's attendant, Bennokimi, who supports a match between Kaoru and the older princess and leads him into the princesses' bedchamber one night. The older princess hears him enter and retreats, leaving her sleeping sister behind. Kaoru does not force himself on the younger sister, but converses with her until dawn. He does not want to give up on the older sister, though he finds the younger sister attractive. One night, he devises a plan to have Niou secretly visit the Uji villa. That night Kaoru manages to have the older princess speak to him by making her believe that he has shifted his affections onto her younger sister; he uses the opportunity to slip behind her blinds. Meanwhile, Niou is led by Bennokimi into the younger sister's bedchamber.

Kaoru and Niou return to the capital, and the younger princess is furious with her sister, believing that she was involved in the plot. Niou visits the next two nights to consummate his marriage to the younger princess. However, constrained by his duties at the palace, he is not able to visit her for a long time after the marriage, causing her to grieve. Kaoru and Niou travel to the Uji villa together onenight in late autumn. The older princess still does not yield to Kaoru because she worries about the unhappiness that she has observed in courtly relationships. Kaoru resents the treatment he receives and feels that he is being treated with disrespect.

Niou wants to move his wife closer to the capital but cannot because Genji's son wants to give his daughter, Roku no kimi, to Niou. Kaoru renovates his Sanjō villa, intending to move the older princess there. The young men next arrange to visit Uji under the pretext of viewing the fall foliage. When word reaches the

Akashi Empress, she sends the necessary number of escorts to accompany someone of Niou's status. The size of the gathering makes it impossible for Niou to slip away undetected to visit his wife, the younger princess. Additionally, the Emperor and the Akashi Empress learn about Niou's affair and admonish his frivolous behavior. The Emperor instead arranges for Niou to marry Roku no kimi, the attractive daughter of Genji's son.

Kaoru visits the ailing older Uji Princess. During his visit, she overhears one of his escorts gossiping with her attendant about Niou's arranged marriage to Roku no kimi. She falls into despair over Niou's deceit and refuses to eat. Niou remains away for over a month and his mother, the Akashi Empress, suggests he bring the younger princess into service at the palace. He rejects this proposal. The older princess, who is now starving herself, grows weaker. Kaoru rushes to her and commissions healing rites and sutra readings. Being close to death, the older princess allows Kaoru to see her face-to-face; and in the end she recognizes his honest nature as opposed to Niou's insincerity. She tells him that he should think of her sister as he thinks of her, then passes away. Kaoru is shattered by the death of the only woman he has ever loved. He remains in Uji and refuses to go back to the capital.

One snowy night, Niou arrives disguised in hunting robes. The younger princess initially refuses to speak to him until Kaoru sends her a letter advising her to open up to the prince. However, she keeps the blinds up and retires to her bedchamber alone. Niou is chastened, but before he returns to the capital he observes Kaoru and is moved by his sorrow. However, he also notes that grief has, if anything, made Kaoru more attractive and begins to feel jealous and competitive toward him as a potential rival. Following the forty-nine-day mourning period, Kaoru moves back to the capital. Seeing Kaoru's grief over the older princess, the Akashi Empress comes to see the younger princess as someone of consequence and accepts her son's marriage. She agrees to allow Niou to bring the princess to his Nijō villa.]

48. *Sawarabi* Early Fiddlehead Greens

[Summary: The New Year arrives, and the younger Uji Princess and Kaoru continue to grieve. Kaoru speaks with Niou after the imperial banquet on the Day of the Rat, and the two discuss their relationships with the Uji Princesses. Kaoru regrets not taking the younger princess as his wife and arranges to move her to the capital. The day before the younger princess is due to arrive at the Nijō villa, Kaoru assures her that she can always rely on him. She expresses her anxiety about moving, but upon reaching Niou's residence it is clear that the prince has lavished attention on her quarters. Kaoru moves back to his Sanjō residence to be closer to Nijō.]

Genji's son had hoped to marry his daughter, Roku no kimi, to Niou, but when he learns about Niou's treatment of the Uji Princess, he instead proposes that Kaoru marry Roku no kimi. Kaoru, who is still grieving, rejects the proposal. Kaoru later visits Niou and then calls on the Uji Princess. She speaks to him through an intermediary and has him sit outside her blinds. Niou tells her that she should not treat Kaoru so coldly after all he has done for her, but then, in a fit of jealousy, warns her of Kaoru's base intentions. Confused by his contradictory remarks, the Uji Princess finds herself at a loss, not knowing how to show Kaoru her appreciation while also respecting her duties to her husband.]

49. *Yadoriki* Trees Encoiled in Vines of Ivy

[Summary: The Fujitsubo Consort has given the reigning Emperor a daughter, the Fujitsubo Princess. The Fujitsubo Consort arranges for her daughter's coming-of-age ceremony to be an extraordinary event, but passes away the summer before it is scheduled to take place. The Emperor, worried about the future of his daughter, decides to arrange a match for her with Kaoru. Kaoru accepts, not wanting to appear eccentric or discourteous.

Hoping that Niou will be named Crown Prince after his father abdicates, his mother, the Akashi Empress, advises him to accept a marriage with Roku no kimi in order to maintain a good relationship with the Minister, Genji's son. The Uji Princess hears about Niou's arranged marriage to Roku no kimi and resents him, though Niou continues to shower her with his affections. Kaoru pities the Uji Princess and regrets not taking her as his wife. He calls on her, using her illness as a reason for his visit. Niou departs for the First Night of his marriage to Roku no kimi—a ceremony he was dreading but which, in the end, he finds very pleasant.

The Uji Princess frets about her fate, but Niou promises to demonstrate his affection for her once he is placed in the line of imperial succession. She is now pregnant with his child. The princess desires to visit the Uji villa and sends a letter to Kaoru asking to speak with him in person. Kaoru, secretly in love with the princess, calls on her, and she permits him to sit inside her blinds. While talking about her hope to go to Uji secretly, Kaoru confesses his feelings for her. She finds his behavior atrocious and Kaoru leaves close to dawn, regretting his actions. When Niou returns to Nijō, he smells Kaoru's distinctive scent on the Uji Princess's robes and accuses her of having an affair. He reproaches her, but then takes pity when she begins to weep.

Kaoru again visits the princess, and she tells him of a young woman from a remote province who came to visit her during the past summer. This woman turns out to be her half-sister, Ukifune. Because she closely resembles the older Uji Princess, Kaoru is intrigued at the thought of finding someone who could replace his lost love. Niou remains suspicious of an affair between Kaoru and the

Uji Princess and so he stays with her for several days, instructing her on the koto. Genji's son comes to Nijō to check up on Niou and together they depart with an elaborate escort to Rokujō, a clear sign of Roku no kimi's higher status relative to the Uji Princess. After the New Year, the Uji Princess experiences difficulty with her pregnancy just as the preparations for the Fujitsubo Princess's coming-of-age ceremony are taking place. As a result, Kaoru pays greater attention to the Uji Princess than to his soon-to-be wife. The Uji Princess gives birth to a boy and various celebrations are held at Nijō. Soon after, the Fujitsubo Princess dons her first train and Kaoru takes her as his bride. The Fujitsubo Princess is moved to Kaoru's residence with an exquisite procession, and Kaoru finds her more appealing after getting to know her better. Still, he continues to long for the late Uji Princess. He goes to check on the construction of the temple he has commissioned in Uji, and on the way comes across a carriage from the Eastern Provinces. In it is Ukifune, the half-sister of the two Uji Princesses. She has come to stay at Uji after a pilgrimage to Hatsuse. Kaoru spies on her and determines that she does indeed resemble his lost love.]

50. *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](#).^o 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](#).^o 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](#),^o 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 [Musicians](#)° 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 you should 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](#).^o 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 [Ceremonials](#)° 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 off-putting. 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 hems 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](#),^o 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 noisy, 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?](#)° 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](#)’ . . .”°

Now in tears, Chūjō no kimi went on to relate all the hardships her daughter had suffered. Figuring that the attendants at Nijō 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](#).° “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](#)’° 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 off-putting. 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](#),° 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 [heart](#)° 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](#)°*

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,](#)’”° she added. “I feel sorry for Ukifune.”

“I don’t have to tell you that ‘in the end there is only one [rapids.](#)’° The sorrow I experience over your cruel behavior is comparable to foam on a stream that never dissipates, but constantly flows [along.](#)° 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](#).° 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](#).° 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](#).° 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 [somewhere](#)° 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 Nijō, 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!](#)"°

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.](#)"

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 [Myōō](#)° 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 off-putting. 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](#)’° . . . 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](#),^o 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 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 do 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's he 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.](#)’” 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 [fade](#)°

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

“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 [joy](#)°

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 [Atago°](#) 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.°](#) 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.](#)”°

“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 familiar 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](#),”° 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](#)°

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 [door](#) and slid it open a mere crack.

“I resent those master carpenters of [Hida](#) 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](#).”°

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 Hōshō [ji](#)° 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](#).° 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 [sorrow](#)°

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 sniffing, 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](#).°

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.](#)’^o Surely you’ve at least had some training on it, have you not?”

“I’ve never even learned the Yamato dialect [properly.](#)”^o 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.](#)”^o

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 illfated 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 [woe](#)^o
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.

Notes

- *Mount Tsukuba in Hitachi Province: 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 *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. [Return to reference Province](#)

- *an alien vocabulary and a slight accent: 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. [Return to reference accent](#)
- *all through the night of Kōshin*: 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. [Return to reference shin](#)
- *the Bureau of Female Dancers and Musicians*: In Chapter 6, *Suetsumuhana*, 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. [Return to reference Musicians](#)
- *the Lesser Captain will be appointed the next Head Chamberlain*: There were two of these positions (*Kurōdo no Tō*), which were important stepping-stones 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. [Return to reference Chamberlain](#)
- *The Minister, the Major Counselor, and the Minister of Ceremonials*: 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. [Return to reference Ceremonials](#)
- *as a result of a prohibition*: This prohibition, which is a pretext for moving

Ukifune, most likely refers to a directional taboo. [Return to reference prohibition](#)

- *Was I not related to Hachinomiya's wife?*: 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. [Return to reference wife](#)
- *which prompts him to consider her 'this one'*: *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., Chapters 5, 20, and 24, *Wakamurasaki*, *Asagao*, and *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. [Return to reference one](#)
- *the moving sorrows they had experienced at Ukishima*: 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 poetic place-name 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." [Return to reference Ukishima](#)
- *'I alone'*: *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 Chapter 15, *Yomogiu*). 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 Chapters 48 and 49, *Sawarabi* and *Yadoriki*). [Return to reference alone](#)
- *like some insensate piece of wood or rock*: *Hakushi monjū* 160 (Bai Juyi). [Return to reference rock](#)
- *her wish to try to cleanse his heart*: *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. [Return to reference heart](#)

- *Each time I feel the surging rapids of desire*: 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.” [Return to reference desire](#)
- *‘So many hands reach out’*: *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. [Return to reference out](#)
- *‘in the end there is only one rapids’*: *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. [Return to reference rapids](#)
- *a stream that never dissipates, but constantly flows along*: *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.” [Return to reference along](#)

- *the chapter on the Medicine King*: 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. [Return to reference King](#)
- *where not even the cries of birds could be heard*: *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 Chapter 34, *Wakana*, Part 1). [Return to reference heard](#)
- *her status will sow the seeds of future misery*: *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.” [Return to reference misery](#)
- *live amidst some crags somewhere*: *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 Chapters 12, 47, and 49, *Suma*, *Agemaki*, and *Yadoriki*). [Return to reference somewhere](#)
- *Stop raising unfounded accusations about me!*: *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.” [Return to reference me](#)
- *can’t very well do it during the ninth and tenth months*: 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. [Return to reference months](#)
- *just like Fudō Myōō*: *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. [Return to reference Myōō](#)

- *‘though we met, we were not truly together’*: 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.” [Return to reference together](#)
- *I am by nature as wary and restless as a weasel*: “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. [Return to reference weasel](#)
- *‘Sadly they have already turned their autumn hues’*: *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.” [Return to reference hues](#)
- *What dew, then, could have caused the lower leaves to fade*: 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. [Return to reference fade](#)
- *Of the young bush clover in Miyagino*: 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. [Return to reference Miyagino](#)

- *Then would I experience absolute joy: 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.” [Return to reference joy](#)
- *the holy men of Mount Atago*: 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). [Return to reference Atago](#)
- *It’s not for me to help lovers cross over to meet: 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.” [Return to reference meet](#)
- *like that foxy crone of Iga*: 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. [Return to reference Iga](#)
- *“There is no refuge at the crossing at Sano”*: *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.” [Return to reference Sano](#)
- *At this hut in the Eastern Provinces*: 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 Chapter 7, *Momiji no ga*. [Return to reference Provinces](#)

- *She unlocked the shabby, humble-looking door*: 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. [Return to reference door](#)
- *master carpenters of Hida*: 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. [Return to reference Hida](#)
- *so this is not an unlucky time*: Under the lunar calendar, the winter solstice would have shifted from year to year, so Bennokimi's statement is not implausible. Moreover, in Chapter 22, *Tamakazura*, 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. [Return to reference time](#)
- *in the vicinity of the Hōshōji*: Founded in 925 by Fujiwara no Tadahira, this temple (Hōshōji in the text) stood on the site now occupied by the Tōfukuji Temple. [Return to reference ji](#)
- *mourning robes dyed in futaai*: *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 Chapter 33, *Fuji no uraba*, Genji expresses distaste for the color, which he sees as appropriate only for "nondescript" people. [Return to reference futaai](#)
- *It weighs them down like oppressive sorrow*: 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. [Return to reference sorrow](#)

- *as if it would fill the vastness of the sky itself: 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.” [Return to reference itself](#)
- *‘My darling wife’:* 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 is used in the final line of the *saibara* “The Hut in the Eastern Provinces.” [Return to reference wife](#)
- *“I’ve never even learned the Yamato dialect properly”:* Ukifune responds with her own wordplay: “Yamato dialect” is *Yamato kotoba*, while the six-string koto Kaoru is pressing on her is *Yamato koto*. [Return to reference properly](#)
- *on the terrace of Emperor Cheng: Wakan rōei shū 380 (Tachibana no Arisura, known also by his priestly name, Songyō, and his posthumous name, Zairetsu).* This poem refers to the relationship between Emperor Cheng of the Han dynasty (r. 33–7 BCE) and Ban Jieyu (Consort Ban). Ban fell out of favor because she did not produce a male heir. Ukifune’s white fan reminds Kaoru of this poem and the story of the illfated love affair behind it. Women use white silk fans in summer but cast them aside as unnecessary when autumn arrives. The fan evokes rejection and abandonment and is thus an inauspicious symbol. [Return to reference Cheng](#)
- *The name of this place bespeaking a world of woe:* 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. [Return to reference woe](#)

51. 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 of 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](#).°

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 [berries](#)° 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 [life](#)°

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 [Scrivener](#)° 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](#),° then switched to a horse.

Hastening onward, he arrived somewhat quicker than expected, just past the early hours of the [evening](#).° 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](#),^o 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 [well](#)^o 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](#).° 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 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](#),^o 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](#).°

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 [inadequate](#)°
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 [robes](#)° 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 [man](#)[°] 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](#).[°]

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 [sandbar](#)^o 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.](#)"° 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.](#)"° and the figure he cut as he murmured a snatch of verse, "Will she wait for me this night as [well.](#)"° 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?](#)° 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](#),^o 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](#),”° 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.](#)”° 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 . . .](#)”°

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](#),^o 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 [path](#)° to Uji, and he felt as constrained as a silkworm confined to a cocoon of its parent's [making](#).° 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 [nun](#)°

"If I mingled to [disappear . . .](#),"° 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 [tears](#)°

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](#).° 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](#),° he would no doubt find me, and the two of us will surely suffer the ruinous [consequences](#).° 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 [daughter](#)^o 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](#),^o 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](#).° 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](#)."°

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 another 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.](#)° 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](#),^o 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 [it](#)°

“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 [majordomo](#) 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, gravelly 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](#),^o 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](#).^o 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](#).° 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](#),^o 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 [clouds](#)°

“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](#)° 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 mewould 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](#).°

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 [me](#)°*

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.

Notes

- *prohibited him from traveling that road: Tales of Ise*, section 71: “If you long for me so, then come—the august gods have placed no prohibition on

traveling the road here.” [Return to reference road](#)

- *ardisia berries*: 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. [Return to reference berries](#)
- *With heartfelt wishes for your son’s long life*: Ukifune’s poem contains two wordplays: *mataburi* (“forked branch”)/*madafurinu* (“not yet grown old”) and the conventional *matsu* (“pine tree” and “to pine/to long for”). As symbols of long life, an artificial pine seedling was an auspicious gift for a child during the New Year season. [Return to reference life](#)
- *a certain Master Scrivener*: This man is identified by his position as *Dainaiki* in the Central Affairs Ministry (*Nakatsukasashō*). [Return to reference Scrivener](#)
- *He traveled by carriage as far as Hōshōji Temple*: 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. [Return to reference Temple](#)
- *just past the early hours of the evening*: 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. [Return to reference evening](#)
- *I was startled to hear from my man, Nakanobu*: This man is the father-in-law of the Master Scrivener. His relationship to Kaoru will be explained later in the narrative. [Return to reference Nakanobu](#)
- *imitating Kaoru’s manner so well*: The resemblance between the two men is noted earlier, in Chapter 47, *Agemaki*, 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. [Return to reference well](#)
- *Niou could not sate his desire to gaze at his young lady*: *Kokinshū* 684 (Ki

no Tomonori): “I cannot sate my desire to gaze at the cherry trees blooming on the mountainsides amidst wispy lines of spring haze . . . and I never tire of gazing at you.” [Return to reference lady](#)

- *We’ve naturally always had close ties as relatives*: The secret of Kaoru’s birth has not been exposed within the world of the narrative. [Return to reference relatives](#)
- *lingering within her sleeves*: *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.” [Return to reference sleeves](#)
- *If these sleeves of mine are inadequate*: 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. [Return to reference inadequate](#)
- *it felt as though both of their robes*: *Kokinshū* 637 (Anonymous): “When the faint rays of dawn begin to spread across the eastern sky, how sorrowful are both our robes!” [Return to reference robes](#)
- *the very thought of seeing this man*: 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. [Return to reference man](#)
- *than any passionate outpouring of eloquent phrases*: *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 Chapter 37, *Yokobue*). [Return to reference phrases](#)
- *crowned herons flocking together on a chill-looking sandbar*: *Wakan rōei shū* 604 (Chang Tu/Zhang Du): “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.”

[Return to reference sandbar](#)

- “*A Branch of Plum*”: This song is mentioned earlier, in Chapter 32, *Umegae*: “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!” [Return to reference Plum](#)
- “*The darkness of a spring night tries in vain to obscure things*”: *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 Chapter 34, *Wakana*, Part 1). [Return to reference things](#)
- “*Will she wait for me this night as well*”: *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 Chapters 45 and 47, *Hashihime* and *Agemaki*. Niou’s thoughts following Kaoru’s recitation of this line allude to this poem as well, as if capping a verse. [Return to reference well](#)
- *was it because he was two or three years older?*: 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. [Return to reference older](#)
- *as if waiting there like welcoming companions*: *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 Chapter 34, *Wakana*, Part 1). [Return to reference companions](#)
- “*This is the Isle of Tachibana*”: *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 Chapter 11, *Hanachirusato*. [Return to reference Tachibana](#)

- “*Whoever she is, you must not mention my name*”: *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 Chapter 7, *Momiji no ga*. [Return to reference name](#)
- “*Though I have a horse at the village of Kohata . . .*”: *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 Chapter 47, *Agemaki*, when he is advising Niou on the best way to travel to Uji to meet the younger Princess there. [Return to reference Kohata](#)
- *all of his resentments and tearful sorrows*: *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.” [Return to reference sorrows](#)
- *crossing over that mountain path*: 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. [Return to reference path](#)
- *a silkworm confined to a cocoon of its parent’s making*: *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!” [Return to reference making](#)
- *That shroud mountain peaks like the dark robes of a nun*: 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 harks 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. [Return to reference nun](#)

- *"If I mingled to disappear . . ."*: Several possible sources for this line have been identified. *Shinchokusenshū* 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. [Return to reference disappear](#)
- *To wet these sleeves already soaked with my tears*: 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." [Return to reference tears](#)
- *even if there had been beckoning waters*: *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.” [Return to reference waters](#)

- *mountains covered in eightfold white clouds*: 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?” [Return to reference clouds](#)
- *surely suffer the ruinous consequences*: 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. [Return to reference consequences](#)
- *Taifu’s daughter*: This character, Ukon, appears in Chapter 50, *Azumaya*. 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). [Return to reference daughter](#)
- *cleansed of her love at a purification stream*: *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 Chapter 20, *Asagao*). [Return to reference stream](#)
- *even if you were to move to distant Takefu*: 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. [Return to reference Takefu](#)

- *drifting off in an unforeseen direction: 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 Chapter 31, *Makibashira*). [Return to reference direction](#)
- *they made their way over to the residence in the northeast quadrant*: 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. [Return to reference quadrant](#)
- *an unusually powerful bond of friendship*: 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. [Return to reference friendship](#)
- *Unaware that waves have broken over it: 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 Chapter 13, *Akashi*. [Return to reference it](#)
- *related to the majordomo*: 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. [Return to reference majordomo](#)

- *like patches of moss on a pine tree: 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 I will see you again.” *Kokin rokujō* 3962 is almost identical to this poem. [Return to reference tree](#)
- *threw themselves into a river and drowned*: 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). [Return to reference drowned](#)
- *fill the vast, empty skies: 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 Chapter 50, *Azumaya*. [Return to reference skies](#)
- *Tokikata took a fleece saddle blanket*: 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). [Return to reference blanket](#)
- *Through mountains that are ever shrouded by white clouds: 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”). [Return to reference clouds](#)

- *she loosely fastened her robes with a kake-obi*: 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*). [Return to reference kake-obi](#)
- *like a sheep being taken to slaughter*: 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. [Return to reference slaughter](#)
- *To seek my grave and pour out your complaints to me*: *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?” [Return to reference me](#)

52. 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](#),^o 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](#).° 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 [demon](#)° 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 Fujitsubo 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.](#)"°

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,](#)"° 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 [dead](#)°*

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 [past](#)°*

"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 Nijō.

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?](#)*

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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 [Risshi.](#)° 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.](#)"° 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?](#)*° 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 [sight](#) so that I can no longer see to write anymore.

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 [horn](#) 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](#).° 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 afterward 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](#).° 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](#),° 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.](#)° 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.](#)° 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 [brother](#)—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](#).⁹ 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](#).° 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*,^o 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 dewes that would ruin my good [name](#)°*

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](#).”° 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?](#)"° 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 impertinent 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 off-putting. 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](#)’ 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 off-putting, 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](#),’ 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 may be 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 Ukifune, 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](#)°

It is said that Kaoru, as was his wont, murmured this poem to himself, and then added, "Were they there, were they not [there?](#)"°

Notes

- *those who are too sorely lamented by others*: 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. [Return to reference others](#)

- *while having to stand outside the whole time*: 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 Chapter 4, *Yūgao*. [Return to reference time](#)
- *a young lady being devoured by a demon*: See, e.g., *Tales of Ise*, section 6. [Return to reference demon](#)
- “No man is an insensate piece of wood or rock, all have feelings”: *Hakushi monjū* 160. This line from Bai Juyi is cited earlier, in Chapters 47 and 50, *Agemaki* and *Azumaya*. [Return to reference feelings](#)
- “If you travel to her abode”: *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.” [Return to reference abode](#)
- *Of rice paddies in the realm of the dead*: 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?” [Return to reference dead](#)
- *Must be mindful, for its cry too calls up the past*: *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 Chapters 11, 21, 35, and 48, *Hanachirusato*, *Otome*, *Wakana*, Part 2, and *Sawarabi*). [Return to reference past](#)

- *had I not left her in a place as forsaken as this?: 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!” [Return to reference this](#)
- *attained the title of Risshi: Risshi* were appointed by the government to act as instructors in the rules of discipline for other priests and nuns. [Return to reference Risshi](#)
- *shall just remain here, lying facedown: Kokinshū 1068* (Anonymous): “Turning my back on this hateful world, I draw near the foot of a tree to take shelter, lying facedown 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.” [Return to reference facedown](#)
- *she now lie amidst empty shells in some watery depths: 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?” [Return to reference depths](#)
- *my tears fall in plain sight: 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 Chapters 12 and 47, *Suma* and *Agemaki*). [Return to reference sight](#)
- *obi sash studded with mottled rhinoceros horn: 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 was not appropriate for Kaoru. However, the rarity of rhinoceros horn would have made the gift suitable. A similar exception is depicted in Chapter 7, *Momiji no ga*: 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. [Return to reference horn](#)
- *a period of mourning for her late uncle: 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. [Return to reference uncle](#)

- *leaning against a rather shabby-looking door*: 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 Chapter 50, *Azumaya*) 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. [Return to reference door](#)
- *was read on the evening of the third day*: The fifth scroll is revered because it contains the famous story of how the Buddha gathered wood, fruit, and water to gain the *Lotus Sutra* from his master. [Return to reference day](#)
- *as though they were made of mud*: This description is possibly an allusion to a line in Bai Juyi's *Song of Everlasting Sorrow*. [Return to reference mud](#)
- *an occasion when I caught a glimpse of her*: Kaoru's glimpse of the First Princess is mentioned in passing in Chapter 46, *Shiigamoto*, 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. [Return to reference her](#)
- *as your younger brother*: 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. [Return to reference brother](#)
- *story of Tōgimi, the son of the Serikawa Major Captain*: This tale has been lost, but it is mentioned in other sources of the period, including *The Sarashina Diary*, 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. [Return to reference Captain](#)
- *unworldly roar of the nearby rapids portended happier times ahead*: *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?” [Return to reference ahead](#)

- *the name Miya no kimi*: The name Miya is an acknowledgment of this young lady’s imperial lineage. [Return to reference kimi](#)
- *In those wanton dewdrops that would ruin my good name*: *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?” [Return to reference name](#)
- *“It is the autumn sky that most stirs the soul to melancholy.”*: *Hakushi monjū* 790. [Return to reference melancholy](#)
- *“Do you assume that I also have an older brother who resembles me?”*: 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. [Return to reference me](#)
- *‘I long for you’*: *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.” [Return to reference you](#)
- *‘even the ageless pines of Takasago are not the same companions of old’*: *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 Chapter 18, *Matsukaze*). [Return to reference old](#)
- *These ephemerids, vanished I know not where*: *Kokin rokujō* 825 (Anonymous): “I realize that life is ever unknowable, as impalpable as ephemerids . . . 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 ephemerids.” [Return to reference where](#)

- “*Were they there, were they not there?*”: *Gosenshū* 1191 (Anonymous): “In this world, all things, even our sorrows and tribulations, are as insubstantial as ephemerids 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 ephemerids . . . are they there, are they not there?” [Return to reference there](#)

53. *Tenarai* Practicing Calligraphy

In those days, there was an exceptionally pious priest residing at Yokawa on Mount [Hiei](#)°—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](#).° 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](#).° 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 [mudra](#) 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 shape-shifter, 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](#).°

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 someroom, 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](#)," 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.](#)° 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.](#)° 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 [hundred](#)° 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](#).° 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](#)°

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 absentmindedly, 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](#)”° 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](#).”° 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—a nobleman's lovely [daughter](#)°—as she gazed out in reverie, so many things reminding her that "I am still [myself](#)."° 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](#),^o 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 . . .](#)”°

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](#),° 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 Middle 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](#).° 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](#)°

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 [kestrels](#)° 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](#).”°

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 [unpleasant](#)° 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.](#)"° 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.](#)"° 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,](#)"° 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 . . . ,](#)"° 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 sougning 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 anymore. 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.](#)*"° 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](#)°

“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 [Furukawa](#)°

“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!](#)° 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 sougning 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](#).° 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](#).°

“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 off-putting.

“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 [abbot](#)° 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 [Minister](#)° 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.](#)”°

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](#)° 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 . . .](#),”° 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 [shore](#)°

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 [relied](#)^o 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](#).^o 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](#).° 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.](#)”° 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](#).° 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](#).° 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

That the years of your life may pile up as [well](#)°

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?](#)”° She was especially fond of the red plum, which she preferred to all other blossoms, perhaps because its ever-enchancing [fragrance](#)° 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 [fragrance](#)°

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](#).°

"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 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 [breeze](#)^o 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?

Notes

- *Yokawa on Mount Hiei:* 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.” [Return to reference Hiei](#)

- *disturbed by the possibility that she might die on the road*: It has been argued that the character of the bishop of Yokawa is based on the historical figure Genshin (942–1017), who was the 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. [Return to reference road](#)
- *an old imperial villa formerly used by the late Emperor Suzaku was nearby, just north of the Uji River*: 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. [Return to reference River](#)
- *mudra*: 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. [Return to reference mudra](#)
- *in order to appease the local deities before he commenced with the healing rites*: 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. [Return to reference rites](#)
- *the man whom people addressed as “Your Lordship”*: 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 Chapter 51, *Ukifune*, 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. [Return to reference Lordship](#)

- *the Five Precepts*: The Five Precepts constitute a vow against killing, stealing, lying, promiscuity, and intemperance. The vows to become a true nun are more numerous. [Return to reference Precepts](#)
- *who seemed like a dream come true to her*: The phrasing of this line calls to mind the dream the nun had at Hatsuse, implying that her prayers were answered. [Return to reference her](#)
- *who all seemed to be just a year shy of one hundred*: *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 *tsukumogami*, which is sometimes written with Chinese characters meaning “ninety-nine.” [Return to reference hundred](#)
- *after the death of Kashiwagi*: This story is told in Chapter 39, *Yūgiri*. [Return to reference Kashiwagi](#)
- *Of that river of tears where I cast my body*: 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.” [Return to reference body](#)
- *“birds of the capital”*: *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. [Return to reference capital](#)
- *“If only I could find a retreat from this world”*: *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 Chapter 50, *Azumaya*. [Return to reference world](#)

- *Ukifune looked truly adorable—a nobleman’s lovely daughter*: 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. [Return to reference daughter](#)
- *“I am still myself”*: *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 allusion 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 Chapter 14, *Miotsukushi*, 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. [Return to reference myself](#)
- *her visitor*: The word for guest or visitor, *marōto*, echoes the use of *himekimi* above, adding a romantic overtone. [Return to reference visitor](#)
- *“Is their lambent beauty . . .”*: *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. [Return to reference beauty](#)
- *Although there must be people in this world who mourn you*: This line could be interpreted to mean “Though there must be people in this world that you [i.e., Ukifune] are still worried about . . .” [Return to reference you](#)
- *hidden away in a deep valley*: *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. [Return to reference valley](#)

- *I shall bind us with sacred ropes drawn around you*: 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. [Return to reference you](#)
- *hunt small game birds with kestrels*: *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 Chapter 39, *Yūgiri*, is also attributed to Kiyohara no Motosuke, *Goshūishū* 314. [Return to reference kestrels](#)
- *“I look at her and am reminded of Mount Matsuchi”*: *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 . . .” [Return to reference Matsuchi](#)
- *she finds it disturbingly unpleasant*: *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.” [Return to reference unpleasant](#)
- *“. . . the cry of the stag”*: *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 Chapter 39, *Yūgiri*). [Return to reference stag](#)
- *nestled among these mountain recesses*: *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 Chapter 15, *Yomogiu*). [Return to reference recesses](#)

- *Will you not view the moon on an evening too precious to waste:* *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 Chapter 13, *Akashi*). [Return to reference waste](#)
- *I tested the feelings of the one who lives in that distant village:* The phrase *ochinaru sato mo* (“distant village”) appears in a poem that Kaoru sends to Uji in Chapter 51, *Ukifune*. 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?” [Return to reference village](#)
- *“Takefu . . . chichiri, chichiri . . . taritanna”:* 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 Chapter 51, *Ukifune*, 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. [Return to reference taritanna](#)
- *And now her aloofness also moves me to tears:* The Middle Captain’s poem plays on the words *koto* (referring to the instrument and to “things”) and *fushi* (“melodies” and “times/occasions”). [Return to reference tears](#)
- *Standing by the shallows of the Furukawa:* *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 Chapter 10, *Sakaki*. 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. [Return to reference Furukawa](#)

- *as if he were the equal of Tachibana Yoshitoshi himself*: 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*). [Return to reference himself](#)
- *and has to return home*: Most commentaries speculate that this sentence refers to a folktale or perhaps a Buddhist sermon. However, the source has not been identified. [Return to reference home](#)
- *a gesture that made her look every bit like a scythe-weasel*: 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 Chapter 50, *Azumaya*. [Return to reference scythe](#)
- *The chief abbot*: 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. [Return to reference abbot](#)
- *a son of the Minister*: The text reads “Minister of the Right” and is referring to Genji’s powerful son. [Return to reference Minister](#)
- “. . . hoping that it would come to this”: *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.” [Return to reference this](#)
- *the Buddha himself*: 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. [Return to reference himself](#)
- *wandering through the Three Realms where all is in flux*: This line comes from the *Fayuan zhulin* (Japanese *Hōōnjurin*, Forest of Pearls in the Dharma Garden), 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.” [Return to reference flux](#)

- *Rows away, bearing a nun to that distant shore*: This poem (and the reply that follows) plays on the word *ama*, which can mean both “fisherman (or diver)” and “nun.” [Return to reference shore](#)
- *Out of all the priests I have relied*: 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. [Return to reference relied](#)
- *Commander of the Guards*: 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. [Return to reference Guards](#)
- *even the daughter of the dragon king may be reborn as a bodhisattva*: 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. [Return to reference bodhisattva](#)
- *until dawn breaks over the pines at the gate*: *Hakushi monjū* 161. [Return to reference gate](#)
- *as if she were a withered tree hidden deep in mountain recesses*: This sentence echoes a poetic allusion by the character Bennokimi in Chapter 45, *Hashihime*. The text has only the words “withered tree,” but that image only makes sense if we recall the earlier allusion to *Kokinshū* 875 (Kengei). [Return to reference recesses](#)
- *he was “lost in wild longing” for her*: Ukifune is remembering words from a poem by Niou that appears in Chapter 51, *Ukifune*. [Return to reference her](#)

- *That the years of your life may pile up as well*: This poem plays on the word *tsumu*, which may mean either “to pick/to pluck” or “to pile up/to 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.” [Return to reference well](#)
- *“Is this spring not the spring of old?”: 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 Chapter 48, *Sawarabi*). [Return to reference old](#)
- *perhaps because its ever-enchanted fragrance: 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. [Return to reference fragrance](#)
- *He whose sleeves once touched mine, imparting their fragrance: 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 Chapter 42, *Niou miya*, where it refers explicitly to Kaoru). [Return to reference fragrance](#)
- *Apparently, he was referring to his younger sister*: The Governor of Kii is obviously referring to the current Vice Governor, not the husband of Ukifune’s mother, who held the position previously. [Return to reference sister](#)
- *then some chance breeze*: 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*). [Return to reference breeze](#)

***54. 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 interme diary 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 her self 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 off-putting 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 [committed](#)°—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.

Notes

- *weighed down by the various sins you have committed*: 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. [Return to reference committed](#)

Translator's Note on the Ending of the Tale

Starting in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries (the early Kamakura period), some versions of the manuscript conclude with the words *hon ni habemeru* (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 *The Tale of Genji* 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 [Chapter 54, 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 [Chapter 19, Usugumo, p. 237](#)). 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.

Notes

CHAPTER 1: KIRITSUBO

3 *thrown the Chinese state into chaos*: The courtiers are referring to *Song of Everlasting Sorrow* (長恨歌) by the Tang dynasty poet Bai Juyi (白居易, 772–846). 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.

4 *where the birth had taken place*: 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.

9 *now that she's gone, I yearn for her*: The source of this poem has not been identified.

9 *reality in the darkness was no better than dreams*: *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.”

11 *And concerns for the young bush clover at your home*: 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.”

11 *the ancient pines of Takasago*: *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.

12 *I long to speak with you to lift that darkness*: A reference to a poem by Fujiwara no Kanetsuke, *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!”

16 *and the beaded curtains have been drawn up*: *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.

[19](#) *he decided to confer on the boy the clan name of Minamoto—Genji*: The name “Genji” is the reading of the characters for Minamoto (*gen*) and “family name” (*shi/ji*).

[25](#) *This young man, Tō no Chūjō*: 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.

CHAPTER 4: YŪGAO

28 *“What home can I call my own?”: 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.”*

29 *what do you call these flowers?: 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?”*

29 *They’re called evening faces: 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.*

30 *hoping his mother might live a thousand years: 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.*

44 *a certain riverside villa nearby: 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.*

44 *a plant whose very name called to mind yearning passions: 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 偲ぶ.*

46 *like the waters of the Okinaga River, would flow on forever: Man’yōshū 4482 (Umanofuhito Kunihiro): “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.

46 *“a bleak moor in autumn”*: *Kokinshū* 248 (Bishop Henjō): “The house is desolate, the lady grown old, the garden and enclosure have become a bleak moor in autumn.”

47 *“I am but a fisher’s child”*: *Wakan rōeishū* 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.”

47 *whose name, warekara, means ‘it’s my own fault’*: *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.”

62 *blocking the direction to that village for her this year*: This is a reference to a long-term (though not permanent) *kataimi*, a directional taboo or prohibition.

63 *like a Yamato-e—style painting*: This term refers to a native Japanese style of painting, distinguishing it from Chinese styles.

64 *“How truly long are the nights of the eighth and ninth months!”*: Bai Juyi, *Hakushi monjū* 1287.

64 *truly I suffer more than you*: *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.”

65 *Would I complain with dewy leaves of words*: 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.”

CHAPTER 5: WAKAMURASAKI

79 *Prince Hyōbu, who was Minister of War at the time:* 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.

84 *he read the dharani:* *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.

85 *he presented Genji with a tokko:* An abbreviation of *tokkoshō* (Sanskrit, *vajra*).

86 *double-reed hichiriki and the seventeen-pipe shō:* The *hichiriki* is a type of flageolet. The *shō* is a mouth organ, similar to panpipes, made of bamboo.

87 *in this troubled realm of the rising sun:* 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 Japanese *shōbō*) and the age of the imitated Dharma (像法 Japanese *zōbō*). This doctrine was extremely influential during the Heian period, when it was believed that *mappō* would begin in the year 1052 CE.

88 *'How hurtful it is to be ignored':* The source has not been identified.

89 *'I fear the wind that blows in the night':* *Shūishū* 29: "Anxious that the wind during the night may have scattered the blossoms of plum, I rise early to view them."

90 *She is not even capable of writing the Naniwazu:* 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!”

90 *when you peek into the mountain spring*: 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 *Kokin rokujō* 985 and 987, respectively.

96 *‘I always yearn to go back to the same person’*: *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.”

97 *An image of wakamurasaki*: 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 *fuji*, 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.”

98 *Would it not be set adrift upon the shallows*: Both poems play on the homophone *waka*, meaning “youthful.”

99 *“Why does the day when we may finally meet never come?”*: *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?”

109 *was taken from* *Kokin rokujō*: *Kokin rokujō* 3507 (Anonymous).

CHAPTER 9: AOI

115 *heart-shaped leaves of wild ginger: Aoi* (*Aohi* in the old orthography) is the Japanese name for wild ginger. It is also a homophone for *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 played on later in this chapter in an exchange of poems between Genji and the older lady, Naishi, who appeared in Chapter 7, *Momiji no ga*. 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.

118 *the chance to gaze upon him: Kokinshū* 1080 (a sacred song for the Sun Goddess).

120 *Branches of the sacred sakaki tree: 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.

124 *adrift like this, bobbing on the waves: Kokinshū* 509 (Anonymous).

126 *she too gets nothing but damp sleeves: Kokin rokujō* 987 (Anonymous).

128 *A person’s living spirit really can leave the body and wander about: Kokinshū* 977 (Ōshikōchi no Mitsune): “It must have wandered off, abandoning my body . . . this heart of mine that goes its own way, doing things I do not intend.”

135 *lost in the darkness of parental grief: Yet another allusion to Fujiwara no Kanetsuke’s poem: Gosenshū* 1102.

136 *“young grasses of remembrance”*: *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 Chapter 4, *Yūgao*, where the name carries a related meaning of “yearning love.”

137 *“Why, of all seasons”*: *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.

140 *a light gray winter cloak to match the season*: Clothing was changed for the winter season on the first day of the tenth month.

140 *“I know not if she is become the rain or the clouds . . .”*: Liu Yuxi (772–842), contemporary and acquaintance of Bai Juyi, was one of several Tang period poets who exerted tremendous influence on the development of Heian period poetry.

142 *“Do chill evening rains always fall in early winter?”*: 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.

154 *“How can I endure a single night apart from you?”*: *Man’yōshū* 2542 (Anonymous): “Now that we are betrothed, sharing a pillow of new grasses, how can I endure a single night apart from you?”

CHAPTER 12: SUMA

159 *“I know that we shall circle round and meet again”*: 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.”

159 *“I shall do all I can to meet you again”*: 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.”

163 *Are ‘partings before dawn’ always this difficult?*: Gosenshū 719 (Ki no Tsurayuki): “By all means I want to ask someone . . . to what do I compare dreaded partings before dawn?”

165 *we must live amidst some towering crags*: Kokinshū 952 (Anonymous): “Amidst what towering crags would I have to live to no longer hear of this world of woe?”

167 *“the tear-stained face of the moon”*: 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!”

167 *and sorrowful ‘tears of uncertainty’*: Gosenshū 1333 (Minamoto no Wataru): “Tears of uncertainty, of not knowing what the future holds, are sorrowful simply because they fall in plain sight.”

171 *And pray to you gods of Tadasu Woods*: The word *Tadasu*—name of the wooded area in Kamo Shrine—also means “to set right” or “rectify.”

175 *In more unknown places than even he*: Genji is referring to Qu Yuan (340–278 BCE), a poet who was exiled and had to wander from place to place.

175 *“How enviously I watch those waves return to the capital”*: *Tales of Ise*, section 7: “Yearning to go back the way I have come, how enviously I watch those waves return.”

175 *“three thousand leagues from home”*: Bai Juyi, *Hakushi monjū* 695.

175 *like spray dripping from the oars of a boat*: 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?”

175 *dripping from the gathered sea tangle: Kokinshū 962* (Ariwara no Yukihiro): “Should anyone ask after me, tell them that I grieve on the strands at Suma, where briny water drips from the gathered sea tangle.”

176 *how fares the nun pining in her hut: 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.

176 *I could fill a river to overflowing with my tears: 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.”

181 *I gaze sadly at the tangled ferns of longing: “Ferns of longing” is the literal meaning of the plant name shinobugusa, first mentioned in Chapter 4, Yūgao.*

182 *‘while I am in this world’: 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”).

183 *the “season of anxious grief”: Kokinshū 184* (Anonymous): “Looking upon the light of the moon filtering through the trees, I see that autumn, season of anxious grief, has arrived.”

183 *winds blowing through the barrier pass: Shoku Kokinshū 868* (Ariwara no Yukihiro): “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.

183 *it seemed his pillow might float away: 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.”

184 *the great masters Chieda and Tsunenori: Tsunenori flourished during the reign of Emperor Murakami (946–67). Not much is known about Chieda.*

185 *now two thousand leagues distant: Hakushi monjū 724.*

186 *when she performed as a Gosechi dancer*: She is mentioned in passing in Chapter 11, *Hanachirusato*.

187 *“Please do not reproach my forwardness”*: *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.”

188 *pulling in trawling lines on a shore like this*: *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.”

189 *He remembered the story of the Han Emperor, Yuan*: Yuan lived from 49 BCE to 32 CE.

189 *“A dream that follows frostfall”*: *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!”

190 *from where he was seated on the floor*: *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.”

190 *I simply journey to the west*: *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.

192 *send her twice each year to the Sumiyoshi Shrine*: The shrine, which was in nearby Naniwa (present-day Osaka), was dedicated to the god of the sea and of poetry.

192 *When once my cap was crowned with cherry blossoms*: *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.”

193 *as rustic and simple as Bai Juyi’s hut, was peculiarly charming*: *Hakushi monjū* 975.

193 *the pieces used for playing tagi*: A game that is similar to tiddlywinks, except that the object is to flip stones onto a board instead of counters into a

cup.

194 *he sang the words “the grasses inviting”*: This song is cited earlier, in Chapter 2, *Hahakigi*.

194 *“Into the winecup in spring pour tears of drunken sorrow”*: *Hakushi monjū* 1107.

195 *a breeze coming from the direction of the capital*: The allusion is to a Chinese poem included in *Wen xuan* Folio 29, “19 Old Poems.”

CHAPTER 13: AKASHI

198 *like the poet whose river of tears “overflowed its banks”*: *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.”

199 *the Sutra for Benevolent Rulers to protect against a disaster*: This congregation, called *Ninnōe*, was held in the palace in the fall and spring or in times of emergency to protect the realm.

202 *spent all my time after death atoning for them*: 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.

204 *a fisherman’s boat arrives*: *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.”

208 *“Ah, how far away it seems . . .”*: *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?”

209 *Genji performed a tune titled “Kōryō”*: A “secret” song composed by the legendary musician Reirin for the Yellow Emperor.

210 *a disciple of the Engi period Emperor, Daigo*: Daigo (885–930) ruled 897–930 CE; his reign included the Engi period, from 901 to 923 CE.

210 *Emperor Saga*: Ruled 809–23 CE.

211 *who won praise for her talent with the lute*: “Lute Song,” *Hakushi monjū* 603.

213 *Unable to weave a dream and join my lover*: 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.

214 *“My longing for you has overwhelmed my secret love”*: *Kokinshū* 503 (Anonymous): “Though I never wanted to let the colors of my love show, my longing for you has overwhelmed my secret.”

215 *“I’ve never seen a letter by proxy before”*: The word Genji uses, *senjigaki*, refers to a letter dictated by the Emperor or by an aristocrat.

216 *“bear this foolish game”*: *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.”

219 *“On an evening too precious to waste”*: *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.”

219 *“dear companions”*: 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?”

223 *Than waves could break over pine-covered hills*: 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.”

232 *“Unconcerned about myself . . .”*: *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?”

233 *Now that we have gone around the sacred pillars*: 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.

233 *Rite of the Eight Lectures*: This ritual involved reading and explicating the eight scrolls of the *Lotus Sutra* over four consecutive days, one scroll in the morning and one in the afternoon each day.

CHAPTER 21: OTOME

241 *the academy in the Ministry of Ceremonials*: 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.

242 *a court infused with the spirit of Yamato*: 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.

247 *he had occupied at the matriculation ceremony*: The arrangement would have been based on the custom of seating according to age, not rank.

248 *another girl called Kumoinokari*: This daughter's name will be explained below.

248 *the principal wife of the Azechi Major Counselor*: *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.

251 *though its power is ever so slight*: Lu Ji, "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.

252 *dyed with the flowers of the bush clover*: 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.

253 *there's no one who knows a child like the father*: 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.

258 *Are those geese in the cloudy skies*: *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.

265 *at the upcoming Gosechi Festival*: 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.

267 *You who serve the Toyooka goddess*: This goddess has been identified with the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu.

267 *"You who are inside the sacred enclosure"*: *Shūishū* 1210 (Hitomaro): "Ages ago I began to yearn for you, O maiden of the dance, twirling your sleeves inside the sacred enclosure."

268 *When I donned that hikage*: 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.

272 *like the hundredfold petals of a crinum*: 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*).

273 *Following the example set by Yoshifusa*: Fujiwara Yoshifusa (804–872) was the first Fujiwara to serve as both chancellor and regent.

274 *the other with the head of a blue heron*: A similar scene is described in Chapter 7, *Momiji no ga*.

277 *and so he acquired four parcels of land*: 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 14.4 acres), which was certainly an impressive estate.

278 *expected to occupy the southwest*: 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.

279 *A hedge of hareflower shrub*: 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.

279 *their fragrance bringing back memories of the past*: *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 Chapter 11, *Hanachirusato*.

281 *a diaphanous outer robe of pale russet: 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.

281 *I wonder if our Princess Tatsuta*: Genji refers to Umetsubo as Tatsuta-hime, the goddess of fall, who weaves the brocade of autumn foliage on Mount Tatsuta.

CHAPTER 22: TAMAKAZURA

282 *A Lovely Garland: 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.

284 *she looked with envy at the returning waves: Tales of Ise*, section 7: “Yearning to go back the way I have come, how enviously I watch those waves return” (alluded to in Chapter 12, *Suma*, as well).

284 *Since they were going off to distant provinces: 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 Chapter 12, *Suma*.

284 *“I shall not forget you . . .”*: *Man’yōshū* 1230 (Anonymous): “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.

286 *A certain gentleman of the fifth rank, Taifu no Gen*: 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).

288 *“surreptitious lovers”*: The word used in the original is *yobai*, which literally means “to creep/crawl in at night.”

288 *even if he had come on an autumn evening: 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 Chapter 19, *Usugumo*.

289 *To the god of the godly mirror of Matsuura*: 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).

290 *Hyōbu, who had been called Ateki*: A childhood name, not to be confused with the name of the little girl, Atekimi, who appears in Chapter 9, *Aoi*.

291 *The roaring waters at Hibiki*: The place-name *Hibiki no Nada* (straits at Hibiki) permits a play on the word *hibiki*, which means “to reverberate” or “to echo (loudly).”

292 *In vain have I abandoned wife and children in barbarian lands*: *Hakushi monjū* 144, from “The Prisoner’s Song.”

293 *There is a shrine to Hachiman nearby in Yawata*: 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.

293 *pray to Kannon at the Hasedera Temple there*: 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.

299 *on behalf of the Fujiwara Princess, Ruri*: This is probably the young lady’s childhood name, which is written with the characters for lapis lazuli.

301 *On the banks of the Hatsuse River*: *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 in Chapters 10 and 15, *Sakaki* and *Yomogiu*.

306 *Like stems of mikuri reed at Mishima-e*: 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.

310 *unable to stand on my own after three years*: The story of the Leech Child appears in Chapters 13 and 18, *Akashi* and *Matsukaze*, above.

311 *Fated always to yearn for a lost love*: 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.

314 *people of her rank were permitted to wear*: Shades of purple and crimson were “forbidden colors”—i.e., they were colors only people of imperial lineage were allowed to wear.

315 *‘Oh cruel lover’*: The five syllables in Japanese are *a-da-hi-to-no*.

CHAPTER 34: WAKANA

332 *Then there is the Fujiwara Major Counselor:* This character does not appear elsewhere in the work.

336 *The west side of the Oak Pavilion:* The space was called the Kaedono.

343 *Tamakazura brought early spring greens:* 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.

344 *I have brought along the pine seedlings:* 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.

351 *“The darkness tries in vain . . .”: 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?”

351 *“The snow that lingers, hidden below the fortress wall . . .”: Hakushi monjū 911, “Gazing at dawn from Yu tower.”*

351 *even though I’ve done nothing wrong!:* 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.”

352 *Agitates my heart by keeping me from you: 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.”

353 *waiting there like welcoming companions: 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.”

353 *“My sleeves are scented . . .”*: *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?”

353 *no one would pay attention to any other flower*: 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.

357 *“like a flock of birds”*: *Kokinshū* 674 (Anonymous): “How can I pretend that nothing has happened now, when rumors about me rise up like a flock of birds?”

357 *the Shinoda Woods in Izumi*: This sentence simply means that Genji will make use of Chūnagon’s brother, the former governor of Izumi, to get to Oborozukiyo.

360 *Ready to hurl myself into waves of wisteria*: Genji’s poem and Oborozukiyo’s reply below both turn on a wordplay made possible by an orthographic convention that allowed *fuji* (“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.

363 *Has he grown tired of me . . . I feel autumn*: The poem plays on the word *aki*, which means “autumn,” but which could also mean “to grow tired of.”

363 *The lower leaves of the bush clover have*: 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?”

364 *We wear the same garland on our heads*: *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.

365 *Golden Light Sutra of the Most Victorious Kings, the Diamond Sutra*: The *Diamond Sutra* is a short section of the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*.

365 *the twenty-third day of the month*: 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.

366 *decorations of gold birds on silver branches*: 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).

369 *a certain Major Captain*: This character is not Tamakazura's husband, but a different major captain who is not otherwise mentioned in the tale.

380 *acquired unwavering faith on Eagle Peak*: This is Mount Grdhrakuta 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.

382 *The Akashi Princess*: 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 was 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.

385 *so remote that no birds sing there*: *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?”

388 *“sow seeds in the blessed garden”*: 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.

390 *to play a game of kemari*: *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.

392 *remember how the poet entreated the spring breeze*: *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.”

392 *offerings to Saohime, the goddess of spring*: 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 Chapter 4, *Yūgao*, 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.

394 *Murasaki’s quarters in the east hall*: 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.

396 *Ever grow weary of the cherry’s hue*: 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.

397 *pass my days lost in melancholy thought*: *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."

CHAPTER 35: WAKANA

[406](#) *the highest rank as Imperial Mother*: Had she lived, her status as Imperial Mother would have been effectively equivalent to that of an empress.

[406](#) *promoted from Major Captain of the Right to Major Counselor*: 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.

[409](#) *and thus knew all that had happened*: This nurse appears in Chapter 14, *Miotsukushi*. She is selected by Genji to go to Akashi as nurse to his daughter.

[409](#) *vines twining about the sacred enclosure of the shrine had turned color*: *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."

[409](#) *rustling wind in the pine trees above them*: *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?"

[411](#) *"Mount Hira as well"*: Ono no Takamura (802–853) was a poet and scholar of Chinese. The poem may be misattributed here. According to *Fukurosōshi* (*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.

[414](#) *who was born of the Principal Handmaid*: 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 Chapter 21, *Otome*.

[416](#) *modes that suggested coldness or warmth*: 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.

421 *a sweet aroma that would surely entice the warbler: 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.”

421 *he tuned the tonic string to the ichikotsu mode:* One of the six modes of court music (*gagaku*), *ichikotsu* corresponds to the key of D.

423 *heavy with flowers and fruit: 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 Chapters 11 and 21, *Hanachirusato* and *Otome*).

426 *bringing high status to those who were lowly and poor:* 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 Chapter 17, *Eawase*).

437 *“Inconsolable, I gaze at the moon shining on Mount Obasute”:* *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.

445 *Why did I pick this fallen leaf:* 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.

449 *why would we treasure them over other flowers?: Kokinshū 70*

(Anonymous).

451 *a lay devotee who promised to uphold the Five Precepts*: 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.

455 *“Doesn’t the poet say ‘Wait for the moon’?”*: 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 Chapter 3, *Utsusemi*, as well). A similar poem is *Man’yōshū* 709.

458 *censure others for straying on the mountain path of love*: *Kokin rokujō* 1980 (Anonymous): “How deep the recesses of the mountain of love . . . it seems that people who enter them always lose their way.”

462 *Fishing along Akashi’s shores*: 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.

463 *a branch of Japanese star anise*: 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.

472 *making everyone think that spring was right next door*: *Kokinshū* 1021 (Kiyowara Fukayabu): “Though it is still winter, spring is right next door, which is why white blossoms scatter over the enclosure.”

472 *“The Masked Warrior King”*: 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.

475 *The sutra to Dainichi Nyorai*: 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.

CHAPTER 40: MINORI

479 *the empresses*: The empresses are Umetsubo and the Akashi Princess, Genji's daughter who has been the consort of the Kiritsubo. This wording suggests that the inevitable promotion has been made and she is now the Akashi Empress.

479 *She must have made this vow to the Buddha ages ago*: 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.

480 *the story of the Buddha's cutting of firewood*: 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.

480 *"The Masked Warrior King"*: Described in Chapter 35, *Wakana*, Part 2.

481 *That karma will bind us through all the worlds to come*: 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.

482 *the Akashi Empress*: As noted above, Genji's daughter, the Akashi Princess who becomes the Kiritsubo 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.

483 *A sutra reading*: 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.

483 *cutting winds that bring only sorrows: Shikashū* 109 (Izumi Shikibu):
“What sort of wind is it, this wind that blows in autumn . . . how cutting it is,
bringing only sorrow.”

484 *Before being blown off and scattered by the wind:* Murasaki’s poem plays
on two senses of the word *oku*—“to be up/to sit up” and “to settle.”

486 *the Contemplation Sutra:* The *Kanmuryōjūkyō* 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*.

488 *gaze on the empty shell of her body: 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!”

490 *Genji replied:* 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.

491 *when his first wife died:* 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 Chapter 9, *Aoi*.)

CHAPTER 41: MABOROSHI

497 *the cry of a bird to remind him of spring: 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?”

498 *the man who wanted to cover the sky with his sleeves: 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 Chapters 14 and 28, *Miotsukushi* and *Nowaki*).

499 *“No spring comes to this dark valley . . .”: 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.”

501 *cherry trees blooming on the plains of Fukakusa: 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 Chapters 19 and 36, *Usugumo* and *Kashiwagi*).

503 *That promise a tryst, only to find you forgot their name:* 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 “a sin” and “to pluck.”

503 *“the cuckoo’s voice, which calls out for a thousand years”: 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.”

504 *“The sound of the rain at the window.”: Hakushi monjū 131 (Bai juyi).*

504 *“from my beloved’s hedge”:* The source of the poem is uncertain. It is cited in later commentaries.

504 *the old man was in no mood for entertainment: 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?”

505 “*How could it have known?*”: *Kokin rokujō* 2804 (Anonymous): “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 Chapter 11, *Hanachirusato*, as well).

505 “*How can there be so many tears?*”: *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?”

505 *which were aglow in the slanting light at sunset*: *Kokinshū* 244 (Sosei): “Am I the only one who finds them moving . . . these Japanese pinks aglow in the light of sunset when crickets cry?”

507 *flowers wrapped in cotton cloth to catch the dew*: 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.

507 “*Though the rains fall as they always have . . .*”: 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).

507 *Taoist summoner*: 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 Chapter 1, *Kiritsubo*, 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.

508 *traditional headband of bluish-green corded silk*: *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 Chapter 21, *Otome*.

[508](#) *with countless tears I return them to you: Gosenshū* 1143.

CHAPTER 42: NIOU MIYA

511 *not one among all of his descendants shone with the same glorious light:*

By the end of the twelfth century, certain copies of the text of *The Tale of Genji* 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 (*Yatsunashi*, *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 story line. 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 *The Tale of Genji*. 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 story line is the development of Murasaki Shikibu as a literary artist of considerable range and sophistication.

512 *he was named Minister of War*: 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).

515 *the daughter of the late Tō no Chūjō*: This is the first mention of Tō no Chūjō's death.

515 *If only I were enlightened like Prince Zengyō*: 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.

516 *into a jewel of salvation: 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?"

516 *the five susceptibilities*: Kaoru is circumspect in talking about his mother here. The "susceptibilities" that he refers to 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.

518 *brushed up against the blossoms of the plum trees in the garden: 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?"

518 *dripping from those branches: Kokin rokujō 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."

518 *from the breeze that trailed after him: 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.

518 *which everyone found so wondrously strange: Kokinshū 35 (Anonymous):* “After drawing near the plum blossoms but briefly, my robes were infused with a scent that people may consider suspicious.”

518 *which others praise so highly: 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.”

518 *which so appeals to the stag looking for a mate: 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.

518 *which pay no heed to old age: Kokin rokujō 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.

522 *“The Lover I Seek”:* 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 Chapter 35, *Wakana*, Part 2.

522 *but that fragrance . . . how incomparable!: 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 Chapter 34, *Wakana*, Part 1.

522 *“Where the gods descend”:* 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.

CHAPTER 50: AZUMAYA

529 *Mount Tsukuba in Hitachi Province: 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 *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.

530 *an alien vocabulary and a slight accent: 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.

531 *all through the night of Kōshin*: 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.

532 *the Bureau of Female Dancers and Musicians*: In Chapter 6, *Suetsumuhana*, 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.

537 *the Lesser Captain will be appointed the next Head Chamberlain*: There were two of these positions (*Kurōdo no Tō*), which were important stepping-stones 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.

541 *The Minister, the Major Counselor, and the Minister of Ceremonials*: 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.

543 *as a result of a prohibition*: This prohibition, which is a pretext for moving Ukifune, most likely refers to a directional taboo.

545 *Was I not related to Hachinomiya's wife?*: 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.

549 *which prompts him to consider her 'this one'*: *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., Chapters 5, 20, and 24, *Wakamurasaki*, *Asagao*, and *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.

550 *the moving sorrows they had experienced at Ukishima*: 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 poetic place-name 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."

550 *'I alone'*: *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 Chapter 15, *Yomogiu*). 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 Chapters 48 and 49, *Sawarabi* and *Yadoriki*).

552 *like some insensate piece of wood or rock*: *Hakushi monjū* 160 (Bai Juyi).

552 *her wish to try to cleanse his heart*: *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.

553 *Each time I feel the surging rapids of desire*: 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.”

553 *‘So many hands reach out’*: *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.

553 *‘in the end there is only one rapids’*: *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.

553 *a stream that never dissipates, but constantly flows along*: *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.”

554 *the chapter on the Medicine King*: 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.

555 *where not even the cries of birds could be heard*: *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 Chapter 34, *Wakana*, Part 1).

555 *her status will sow the seeds of future misery*: *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.”

556 *live amidst some crags somewhere*: *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 Chapters 12, 47, and 49, *Suma*, *Agemaki*, and *Yadoriki*).

557 *Stop raising unfounded accusations about me!*: *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.”

557 *can’t very well do it during the ninth and tenth months*: 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.

562 *just like Fudō Myōō*: *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.

566 *‘though we met, we were not truly together’*: 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.”

567 *I am by nature as wary and restless as a weasel*: “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.

570 *‘Sadly they have already turned their autumn hues’*: *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.”

570 *What dew, then, could have caused the lower leaves to fade*: 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.

571 *Of the young bush clover in Miyagino*: 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.

572 *Then would I experience absolute joy: 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.”

574 *the holy men of Mount Atago*: 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).

574 *It’s not for me to help lovers cross over to meet: 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.”

575 *like that foxy crone of Iga*: 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.

577 *“There is no refuge at the crossing at Sano”*: *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.”

577 *At this hut in the Eastern Provinces*: 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 Chapter 7, *Momiji no ga*.

578 *She unlocked the shabby, humble-looking door*: 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.

578 *master carpenters of Hida*: 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.

579 *so this is not an unlucky time*: Under the lunar calendar, the winter solstice would have shifted from year to year, so Bennokimi's statement is not implausible. Moreover, in Chapter 22, *Tamakazura*, 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.

579 *in the vicinity of the Hōshōji*: Founded in 925 by Fujiwara no Tadahira, this temple (Hōshōji in the text) stood on the site now occupied by the Tōfukuji Temple.

580 *mourning robes dyed in futaai*: *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 Chapter 33, *Fuji no uraba*, Genji expresses distaste for the color, which he sees as appropriate only for "nondescript" people.

580 *It weighs them down like oppressive sorrow*: 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.

581 *as if it would fill the vastness of the sky itself*: *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."

583 *'My darling wife'*: 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 is used in the final line of the *saibara* “The Hut in the Eastern Provinces.”

583 *“I’ve never even learned the Yamato dialect properly”*: Ukifune responds with her own wordplay: “Yamato dialect” is *Yamato kotoba*, while the six-string koto Kaoru is pressing on her is *Yamato koto*.

583 *on the terrace of Emperor Cheng: Wakan rōei shū* 380 (Tachibana no Arisura, known also by his priestly name, Songyō, and his posthumous name, Zairetsu). This poem refers to the relationship between Emperor Cheng of the Han dynasty (r. 33–7 BCE) and Ban Jieyu (Consort Ban). Ban fell out of favor because she did not produce a male heir. Ukifune’s white fan reminds Kaoru of this poem and the story of the ill-fated love affair behind it. Women use white silk fans in summer but cast them aside as unnecessary when autumn arrives. The fan evokes rejection and abandonment and is thus an inauspicious symbol.

584 *The name of this place bespeaking a world of woe*: 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.

CHAPTER 51: UKIFUNE

585 *prohibited him from traveling that road: Tales of Ise*, section 71: “If you long for me so, then come—the august gods have placed no prohibition on traveling the road here.”

585 *ardisia berries*: 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.

589 *With heartfelt wishes for your son’s long life*: Ukifune’s poem contains two wordplays: *mataburi* (“forked branch”)/*madafurinu* (“not yet grown old”) and the conventional *matsu* (“pine tree” and “to pine/to long for”). As symbols of long life, an artificial pine seedling was an auspicious gift for a child during the New Year season.

590 *a certain Master Scrivener*: This man is identified by his position as *Dainaiki* in the Central Affairs Ministry (*Nakatsukasashō*).

593 *He traveled by carriage as far as Hōshōji Temple*: 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.

593 *just past the early hours of the evening*: 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.

596 *I was startled to hear from my man, Nakanobu*: This man is the father-in-law of the Master Scrivener. His relationship to Kaoru will be explained later in the narrative.

596 *imitating Kaoru’s manner so well*: The resemblance between the two men

is noted earlier, in Chapter 47, *Agemaki*, 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.

601 *Niou could not sate his desire to gaze at his young lady: Kokinshū 684* (Ki no Tomonori): “I cannot sate my desire to gaze at the cherry trees blooming on the mountainsides amidst wispy lines of spring haze . . . and I never tire of gazing at you.”

603 *We’ve naturally always had close ties as relatives:* The secret of Kaoru’s birth has not been exposed within the world of the narrative.

603 *lingering within her sleeves: 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.”

604 *If these sleeves of mine are inadequate:* 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.

604 *it felt as though both of their robes: Kokinshū 637* (Anonymous): “When the faint rays of dawn begin to spread across the eastern sky, how sorrowful are both our robes!”

607 *the very thought of seeing this man:* 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.

608 *than any passionate outpouring of eloquent phrases: 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 Chapter 37, *Yokobue*).

609 *crowned herons flocking together on a chill-looking sandbar: Wakan rōei shū 604* (Chang Tu/Zhang Du): “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.*”

610 “*A Branch of Plum*”: This song is mentioned earlier, in Chapter 32, *Umegae*: “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!”

611 “*The darkness of a spring night tries in vain to obscure things*”: *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 Chapter 34, *Wakana*, Part 1).

611 “*Will she wait for me this night as well*”: *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 Chapters 45 and 47, *Hashihime* and *Agemaki*. Niou’s thoughts following Kaoru’s recitation of this line allude to this poem as well, as if capping a verse.

611 *was it because he was two or three years older?*: 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.

611 *as if waiting there like welcoming companions*: *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 Chapter 34, *Wakana*, Part 1).

613 “*This is the Isle of Tachibana*”: *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 Chapter 11, *Hanachirusato*.

614 “Whoever she is, you must not mention my name”: *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 Chapter 7, *Momiji no ga*.

615 “Though I have a horse at the village of Kohata . . .”: *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 Chapter 47, *Agemaki*, when he is advising Niou on the best way to travel to Uji to meet the younger Princess there.

616 *all of his resentments and tearful sorrows*: *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.”

617 *crossing over that mountain path*: 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.

618 *a silkworm confined to a cocoon of its parent’s making*: *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!”

620 *That shroud mountain peaks like the dark robes of a nun*: 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 harks 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.

620 *"If I mingled to disappear . . ."*: Several possible sources for this line have been identified. *Shinchokusenshū* 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.

620 *To wet these sleeves already soaked with my tears*: 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."

622 *even if there had been beckoning waters*: *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."

623 *mountains covered in eightfold white clouds*: 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?"

623 *surely suffer the ruinous consequences*: 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.

624 *Taifu’s daughter*: This character, Ukon, appears in Chapter 50, *Azumaya*. 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).

625 *cleansed of her love at a purification stream*: *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 Chapter 20, *Asagao*).

626 *even if you were to move to distant Takefu*: 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.

626 *drifting off in an unforeseen direction*: *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 Chapter 31, *Makibashira*).

628 *they made their way over to the residence in the northeast quadrant*: 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.

630 *an unusually powerful bond of friendship*: 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.

631 *Unaware that waves have broken over it*: *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 Chapter 13, *Akashi*.

634 *related to the majordomo*: 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.

636 *like patches of moss on a pine tree: 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 I will see you again.” *Kokin rokujō* 3962 is almost identical to this poem.

636 *threw themselves into a river and drowned*: 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).

638 *fill the vast, empty skies: 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 Chapter 50, *Azumaya*.

640 *Tokikata took a fleece saddle blanket*: 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).

641 *Through mountains that are ever shrouded by white clouds: 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”).

641 *she loosely fastened her robes with a kake-obi*: 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*).

642 *like a sheep being taken to slaughter*: 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.

642 *To seek my grave and pour out your complaints to me: 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?”

CHAPTER 52: KAGERŌ

648 *those who are too sorely lamented by others*: 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.

649 *while having to stand outside the whole time*: 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 Chapter 4, *Yūgao*.

649 *a young lady being devoured by a demon*: See, e.g., *Tales of Ise*, section 6.

658 “No man is an insensate piece of wood or rock, all have feelings”: *Hakushi monjū* 160. This line from Bai Juyi is cited earlier, in Chapters 47 and 50, *Agemaki* and *Azumaya*.

658 “If you travel to her abode”: *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.”

658 *Of rice paddies in the realm of the dead*: 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?”

659 *Must be mindful, for its cry too calls up the past: 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 Chapters 11, 21, 35, and 48, *Hanachirusato*, *Otome*, *Wakana*, Part 2, and *Sawarabi*).

666 *had I not left her in a place as forsaken as this?: 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!”

667 *attained the title of Risshi: Risshi* were appointed by the government to act as instructors in the rules of discipline for other priests and nuns.

667 *shall just remain here, lying facedown: Kokinshū* 1068 (Anonymous):

“Turning my back on this hateful world, I draw near the foot of a tree to take shelter, lying facedown 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.”

667 *she now lie amidst empty shells in some watery depths: 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?”

669 *my tears fall in plain sight: 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 Chapters 12 and 47, *Suma* and *Agemaki*).

669 *obi sash studded with mottled rhinoceros horn: 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 was not appropriate for Kaoru. However, the rarity of rhinoceros horn would have made the gift suitable. A similar exception is depicted in Chapter 7, *Momiji no ga*: 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.

672 *a period of mourning for her late uncle*: 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.

674 *leaning against a rather shabby-looking door*: 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 Chapter 50, *Azumaya*) 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.

674 *was read on the evening of the third day*: The fifth scroll is revered because it contains the famous story of how the Buddha gathered wood, fruit, and water to gain the *Lotus Sutra* from his master.

675 *as though they were made of mud*: This description is possibly an allusion to a line in Bai Juyi's *Song of Everlasting Sorrow*.

676 *an occasion when I caught a glimpse of her*: Kaoru's glimpse of the First Princess is mentioned in passing in Chapter 46, *Shiigamoto*, 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.

679 *as your younger brother*: 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.

682 *story of Tōgimi, the son of the Serikawa Major Captain*: This tale has been lost, but it is mentioned in other sources of the period, including *The Sarashina Diary*, 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.

684 *unworldly roar of the nearby rapids portended happier times ahead*:

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?”

686 *the name Miya no kimi*: The name Miya is an acknowledgment of this young lady’s imperial lineage.

688 *In those wanton dewes that would ruin my good name*: *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?”

689 *“It is the autumn sky that most stirs the soul to melancholy.”*: *Hakushi monjū* 790.

691 *“Do you assume that I also have an older brother who resembles me?”*: 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.

692 *‘I long for you’*: *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.”

693 *‘even the ageless pines of Takasago are not the same companions of old’*: *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 Chapter 18, *Matsukaze*).

693 *These ephemerids, vanished I know not where*: *Kokin rokujō* 825 (Anonymous): “I realize that life is ever unknowable, as impalpable as ephemerids . . . 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 ephemerids.”

693 *“Were they there, were they not there?”*: *Gosenshū* 1191 (Anonymous):

“In this world, all things, even our sorrows and tribulations, are as insubstantial as ephemerids 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 ephemerids . . . are they there, are they not there?”

CHAPTER 53: TENARAI

694 *Yokawa on Mount Hiei*: 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."

694 *disturbed by the possibility that she might die on the road*: It has been argued that the character of the bishop of Yokawa is based on the historical figure Genshin (942–1017), who was the 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.

695 *an old imperial villa formerly used by the late Emperor Suzaku was nearby, just north of the Uji River*: 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.

696 *mudra*: 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.

700 *in order to appease the local deities before he commenced with the healing rites*: 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.

707 *the man whom people addressed as “Your Lordship”*: 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 Chapter 51, *Ukifune*, 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.

708 *the Five Precepts*: The Five Precepts constitute a vow against killing, stealing, lying, promiscuity, and intemperance. The vows to become a true nun are more numerous.

708 *who seemed like a dream come true to her*: The phrasing of this line calls to mind the dream the nun had at Hatsuse, implying that her prayers were answered.

708 *who all seemed to be just a year shy of one hundred*: *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 *tsukumogami*, which is sometimes written with Chinese characters meaning “ninety-nine.”

710 *after the death of Kashiwagi*: This story is told in Chapter 39, *Yūgiri*.

710 *Of that river of tears where I cast my body*: 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.”

711 *“birds of the capital”*: *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.

711 *"If only I could find a retreat from this world": 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 Chapter 50, *Azumaya*.

713 *Ukifune looked truly adorable—a nobleman's lovely daughter:* 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.

713 *"I am still myself": 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 allusion 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 Chapter 14, *Miotsukushi*, 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.

714 *her visitor:* The word for guest or visitor, *marōto*, echoes the use of *himekimi* above, adding a romantic overtone.

715 *"Is their lambent beauty . . .": 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.

715 *Although there must be people in this world who mourn you:* This line could be interpreted to mean "Though there must be people in this world that you [i.e., Ukifune] are still worried about . . ."

717 *hidden away in a deep valley: 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.

717 *I shall bind us with sacred ropes drawn around you*: 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.

718 *hunt small game birds with kestrels*: *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 Chapter 39, *Yūgiri*, is also attributed to Kiyohara no Motosuke, *Goshūishū* 314.

718 *“I look at her and am reminded of Mount Matsuchi”*: *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 . . .”

719 *she finds it disturbingly unpleasant*: *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.”

721 *“. . . the cry of the stag”*: *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 Chapter 39, *Yūgiri*).

721 *nestled among these mountain recesses*: *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 Chapter 15, *Yomogiu*).

721 *Will you not view the moon on an evening too precious to waste:*
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 Chapter 13, *Akashi*).

721 *I tested the feelings of the one who lives in that distant village:* The phrase *ochinaru sato mo* (“distant village”) appears in a poem that Kaoru sends to Uji in Chapter 51, *Ukifune*. 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?”

723 *“Takefu . . . chichiri, chichiri . . . taritanna”:* 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 Chapter 51, *Ukifune*, 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.

724 *And now her aloofness also moves me to tears:* The Middle Captain’s poem plays on the words *koto* (referring to the instrument and to “things”) and *fushi* (“melodies” and “times/opportunities”).

726 *Standing by the shallows of the Furukawa:* *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 Chapter 10, *Sakaki*. 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.

727 *as if he were the equal of Tachibana Yoshitoshi himself*: 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*).

730 *and has to return home*: Most commentaries speculate that this sentence refers to a folktale or perhaps a Buddhist sermon. However, the source has not been identified.

730 *a gesture that made her look every bit like a scythe-weasel*: 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 Chapter 50, *Azumaya*.

732 *The chief abbot*: 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.

732 *a son of the Minister*: The text reads “Minister of the Right” and is referring to Genji’s powerful son.

732 “. . . hoping that it would come to this”: *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.”

734 *the Buddha himself*: 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.

735 *wandering through the Three Realms where all is in flux*: This line comes from the *Fayuan zhulin* (Japanese *Hōōnjurin*, Forest of Pearls in the Dharma Garden), 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.”

737 *Rows away, bearing a nun to that distant shore*: This poem (and the reply that follows) plays on the word *ama*, which can mean both “fisherman (or

diver)” and “nun.”

739 *Out of all the priests I have relied:* 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.

740 *Commander of the Guards:* 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.

740 *even the daughter of the dragon king may be reborn as a bodhisattva:* 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.

741 *until dawn breaks over the pines at the gate: Hakushi monjū* 161.

745 *as if she were a withered tree hidden deep in mountain recesses:* This sentence echoes a poetic allusion by the character Bennokimi in Chapter 45, *Hashihime*. The text has only the words “withered tree,” but that image only makes sense if we recall the earlier allusion to *Kokinshū* 875 (Kengei).

745 *he was “lost in wild longing” for her:* Ukifune is remembering words from a poem by Niou that appears in Chapter 51, *Ukifune*.

746 *That the years of your life may pile up as well:* This poem plays on the word *tsumu*, which may mean either “to pick/to pluck” or “to pile up/to 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.”

746 *“Is this spring not the spring of old?”: 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 Chapter 48, *Sawarabi*).

746 *perhaps because its ever-enchancing fragrance: 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.

746 *He whose sleeves once touched mine, imparting their fragrance: 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 Chapter 42, *Niou miya*, where it refers explicitly to Kaoru).

747 *Apparently, he was referring to his younger sister:* The Governor of Kii is obviously referring to the current Vice Governor, not the husband of Ukifune’s mother, who held the position previously.

753 *then some chance breeze:* 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*).

CHAPTER 54: YUME NO UKIHASHI

[767](#) *weighed down by the various sins you have committed*: 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.

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