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# Ririro

IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

## The Tale of Genji: Utsusemi (3/9)

Genji was still sleepless. 'No one has ever disliked me before' he whispered to the boy. 'It is more than I can bear. I am sick of myself and of the world, and do not want to go on living any more.' This sounded so tragic that the boy began to weep. The smallness and delicacy of his build, even the way in which his hair was cropped, gave him an astonishing resemblance to his sister, thought Genji, who found his sympathy very endearing. At times he had half thought of creeping away from the boy's side and searching on his own account for the lady's hiding-place; but soon abandoned a project which would only have involved him in the most appalling scandal. So he lay, waiting for the dawn. At last, while it was still dark, so full of his own thoughts that he quite forgot to make his usual parting speech to his young page, he left the house. The boy's feelings were very much hurt, and all that day he felt lonely and injured. The lady, when no answer came from Genji, thought that he had changed his mind, and though she would have been very angry if he had persisted in his suit, she was not quite prepared to lose him with so little ado.

But this was a good opportunity once and for all to lock up her heart against him. She thought that she had done so successfully, but found to her surprise that he still occupied an uncommonly large share of her

thoughts. Genji, though he felt it would have been much better to put the whole business out of his head, knew that he had not the strength of mind to do so and at last, unable to bear his wretchedness any longer he said to the boy 'I am feeling very unhappy. I keep on trying to think of other things, but my thoughts will not obey me. I can struggle no longer. You must watch for a suitable occasion, and then contrive some way of bringing me into the presence of your sister.' This worried the boy, but he was inwardly flattered at the confidence which Genji placed in him. And an opportunity soon presented itself.

Ki no Kami had been called away to the provinces, and there were only women in the house. One evening when dusk had settled upon the quiet streets the boy brought a carriage to fetch him. He knew that the lad would do his best, but not feeling quite safe in the hands of so young an accomplice, he put on a disguise, and then in his impatience, not waiting even to see the gates closed behind him, he drove off at top speed. They entered unobserved at a side-gate, and here he bade Genji descend. The brother knew that as he was only a boy, the watchman and gardeners would not pay any particular attention to his movements, and so he was not at all uneasy. Hiding Genji in the porch of the double-door of the eastern wing, he purposely banged against the sliding partition which separated this wing from the main part of the house, and that the maids might have the impression he did not mind who heard him enter he called out crossly 'Why is the door shut on a hot night like this?' "My lady of the West" has

been here since this morning, and she is playing go with my other lady.' Longing to catch sight of her, even though she were with a companion, Genji stole from his hiding-place, and crept through a gap in the curtains. The partition door through which the boy had passed was still open, and he could see through it, right along the corridor into the room on the other side. The screen which protected the entrance of this room was partly folded, and the curtains which usually concealed the divan had, owing to the great heat, been hooked up out of the way, so that he had an excellent view.

The lady sitting near the lamp, half-leaning against the middle pillar must, he supposed, be his beloved. He looked closely at her. She seemed to be wearing an unlined, dark purple dress, with some kind of scarf thrown over her shoulders. The poise of her head was graceful, but her extreme smallness had the effect of making her seem somewhat insignificant. She seemed to be trying all the while to hide her face from her companion, and there was something furtive about the movements of her slender hands, which she seemed never to show for more than a moment.

Her companion was sitting right opposite him, and he could see her perfectly. She wore an underdress of thin white stuff, and thrown carelessly over it a cloak embroidered with red and blue flowers. The dress was not fastened in front, showing a bare neck and breast, showing even the little red sash which held up her drawers. She had indeed an engagingly free and easy air. Her skin was very white and delicate, she was rather plump, but tall and well built. The poise of her

head and angle of her brow were faultless, the expression of her mouth and eyes was very pleasing and her appearance altogether most delightful. Her hair grew very thick, but was cut short so as to hang on a level with her shoulders. It was very fine and smooth. How exciting it must be to have such a girl for one's daughter! Small wonder if Iyo no Kami was proud of her. If she was a little less restless, he thought, she would be quite perfect.

The game was nearly over, she was clearing away the unwanted pieces. She seemed to be very excitable and was making a quite unnecessary commotion about the business. 'Wait a little' said her companion very quietly, 'here there is a stalemate. My only move is to counter-attack over there....' 'It is all over' said the other impatiently 'I am beaten, let us count the score;' and she began counting, 'ten, twenty, thirty, forty' on her fingers. Genji could not help remembering the old song about the wash-house at Iyo ('eight tubs to the left, nine tubs to the right') and as this lady of Iyo, determined that nothing should be left unsettled, went on stolidly counting her losses and gains, he thought her for the moment slightly common. It was strange to contrast her with Utsusemi, who sat silent, her face half-covered, so that he could scarcely discern her features. But when he looked at her fixedly, she, as though uneasy under this gaze of which she was not actually aware, shifted in her seat, and showed him her full profile. Her eyelids gave the impression of being a little swollen, and there was at places a certain lack of delicacy in the lines of her features, while her good

points were not visible. But when she began to speak, it was as though she were determined to make amends for the deficiencies of her appearance and show that she had, if not so much beauty, at any rate more sense than her companion.

The latter was now flaunting her charms with more and more careless abandonment. Her continual laughter and high spirits were certainly rather engaging, and she seemed in her way to be a most entertaining person. He did not imagine that she was very virtuous, but that was far from being altogether a disadvantage.

It amused him very much to see people behaving quite naturally together. He had lived in an atmosphere of ceremony and reserve. This peep at everyday life was a most exciting novelty, and though he felt slightly uneasy at spying in this deliberate way upon two persons who had no notion that they were observed, he would gladly have gone on looking, when suddenly the boy, who had been sitting by his sister's side, got up, and Genji slipped back again into his proper hiding-place. The boy was full of apologies at having left him waiting for so long: 'But I am afraid nothing can be done to-day; there is still a visitor in her room.' 'And am I now to go home again?' said Genji; 'that is really too much to ask.' 'No, no, stay here, I will try what can be done, when the visitor has gone.' Genji felt quite sure that the boy would manage to find some way of cajoling his sister, for he had noticed that though a mere child, he had a way of quietly observing situations and characters, and making use of his knowledge.

The game of go must now be over. A rustling of skirts and pattering of feet showed that the household was not retiring to rest. 'Where is the young master?' Genji heard a servant saying, 'I am going to fasten this partition door,' and there was the sound of bolts being slipped. 'They have all gone to bed' said Genji, 'now is the time to think of a plan.' The boy knew that it would be no use arguing with his sister or trying beforehand in any way to bend her obstinate resolution. The best thing to be done under the circumstances was to wait till no one was about, and then lead Genji straight to her. 'Is Ki no Kami's sister still here?' asked Genji, 'I should like just to catch a glimpse of her.' 'But that is impossible' said the boy 'She is in my sister's room.' 'Indeed' said Genji, affecting surprise. For though he knew very well where she was he did not wish to show that he had already seen her. Becoming very impatient of all these delays, he pointed out that it was growing very late, and there was no time to be lost. The boy nodded, and tapping on the main door of the women's quarters, he entered.

Everyone was sound asleep. 'I am going to sleep in the ante-room' the boy said out loud; 'I shall leave the door open so as to make a draught;' and so saying he spread his mattress on the ground, and for a while pretended to be asleep. Soon however, he got up and spread a screen as though to protect him from the light, and under its shadow Genji slipped softly into the room.



Not knowing what was to happen next, and much doubting whether any good would come of the venture, with great trepidation he followed the boy to the curtain that screened the main bedroom, and pulling it aside entered on tip-toe. But even in the drab garments which he had chosen for his disguise, he seemed to the boy to cut a terribly conspicuous figure as he passed through the midnight quietness of the house.

Utsusemi meanwhile had persuaded herself that she was very glad Genji had forgotten to pay his threatened visit. But she was still haunted by the memory of their one strange and dreamlike meeting, and was in no mood for sleep. But near her, as she lay tossing, the lady of the go party, delighted by her visit and all the opportunities it had afforded for chattering to her heart's content, was already asleep. And as she was young and had no troubles she slept very soundly. The princely scent which still clung to Genji's person reached the bed. Utsusemi raised her head, and fancied that she saw something move behind a part of the curtain that was only of one thickness. Though it was very dark she recognized Genji's figure. Filled with a sudden terror and utter bewilderment, she sprang from the bed, threw a fragile gauze mantle over her shoulders, and fled silently from the room.

A moment later Genji entered. He saw with delight that there was only one person in the room, and that the bed was arranged for two. He threw off his cloak, and advanced towards the sleeping figure. She seemed a more imposing figure than he had expected, but this



did not trouble him. It did indeed seem rather strange that she should be so sound asleep. Gradually he realized with horror that it was not she at all. 'It is no use' thought Genji 'saying that I have come to the wrong room, for I have no business anywhere here. Nor is it worth while pursuing my real lady, for she would not have vanished like this if she cared a straw about me.' What if it were the lady he had seen by the lamplight? She might not after all prove a bad exchange! But no sooner had he thought this than he was horrified at his own frivolity.

She opened her eyes. She was naturally somewhat startled, but did not seem to be at all seriously put out. She was a thoughtless creature in whose life no very strong emotion had ever played a part. Hers was the flippancy that goes with inexperience, and even this sudden visitation did not seem very much to perturb her.

He meant at first to explain that it was not to see her that he had come. But to do so would have been to give away the secret which Utsusemi so jealously guarded from the world. There was nothing for it, but to pretend that his repeated visits to the house, of which the lady was well aware, had been made in the hope of meeting her! This was a story which would not have withstood the most cursory examination; but, outrageous as it was, the girl accepted it without hesitation.

He did not by any means dislike her, but at that moment all his thoughts were busy with the lady who had so mysteriously vanished. No doubt she was congratulating herself in some safe hiding-place upon the absurd

situation in which she had left him. Really, she was the most obstinate creature in the world! What was the use of running after her? But all the same she continued to obsess him.

But the girl in front of him was young and gay and charming. They were soon getting on very well together.

'Is not this kind of thing much more amusing than what happens with people whom one knows?' asked Genji a little later. 'Do not think unkindly of me. Our meeting must for the present remain a secret. I am in a position which does not always allow me to act as I please. Your people too would no doubt interfere if they should hear of it, which would be very tiresome. Wait patiently, and do not forget me.' These rather tepid injunctions did not strike her as at all unsatisfactory, and she answered very seriously 'I am afraid it will not be very easy for me even to write to you. People would think it very odd.' 'Of course we must not let ordinary people into our secret' he answered, 'but there is no reason why this little page should not sometimes carry a message. Meanwhile not a word to anyone!' And with that he left her, taking as he did so Utsusemi's thin scarf which had slipped from her shoulders when she fled from the room.

He went to wake his page who was lying not far away. The boy sprang instantly to his feet, for he was sleeping very lightly, not knowing when his help might be required. He opened the door as quietly as he could. 'Who is that?' someone called out in great alarm. It was the voice of an old woman who worked in the

house. 'It is I' answered the boy uneasily. 'What are you walking about here for at this time of night?' and scolding as she came, she began to advance towards the door. 'Bother her' thought the boy, but he answered hastily 'It's all right, I am only going outside for a minute;' but just as Genji passed through the door, the moon of dawn suddenly emerged in all her brightness. Seeing a grown man's figure appear in the doorway 'Whom have you got with you?' the old lady asked, and then answering her own question 'Why it is Mimbu! what an outrageous height that girl has grown to!' and continuing to imagine that the boy was walking with Mimbu, a maid-servant whose lankiness was a standing joke in the house, 'and you will soon be as big as she is, little Master!' she cried, and so saying came out through the door that they had just passed through. Genji felt very uncomfortable, and making no answer on the supposed Mimbu's behalf, he stood in the shadow at the end of the corridor, hiding himself as best he could. 'You have been on duty, haven't you dear?' said the old lady as she came towards them. 'I have been terribly bad with the colic since yesterday and was lying up, but they were shorthanded last night, and I had to go and help, though I did feel very queer all the while.' And then, without waiting for them to answer, 'Oh, my pain, my poor pain' she muttered 'I can't stop here talking like this' and she hobbled past them without looking up.

So narrow an escape made Genji wonder more than ever whether the whole thing was worth while. He

drove back to his house, with the boy riding as his postillion.

Here he told him the story of his evening's adventure. 'A pretty mess you made of it!' And when he had finished scolding the boy for his incompetence, he began to rail at the sister's irritating prudishness. The poor child felt very unhappy, but could think of nothing to say in his own or his sister's defence.

'I am utterly wretched' said Genji. 'It is obvious that she would not have behaved as she did last night unless she absolutely detested me. But she might at least have the decency to send civil answers to my letters. Oh, well, I suppose Iyo no Kami is the better man....' So he spoke, thinking that she desired only to be rid of him. Yet when at last he lay down to rest, he was wearing her scarf hidden under his dress. He had put the boy by his side, and after giving much vent to his exasperation, he said at last 'I am very fond of you, but I am afraid in future I shall always think of you in connection with this hateful business, and that will put an end to our friendship.' He said it with such conviction that the boy felt quite forlorn.

For a while they rested, but Genji could not sleep, and at dawn he sent in haste for his ink-stone. He did not write a proper letter, but scribbled on a piece of folded paper, in the manner of a writing exercise, a poem in which he compared the scarf which she had dropped in her flight to the dainty husk which the cicada sheds on some bank beneath a tree.

The boy picked the paper up, and thrust it into the folds of his dress.

Genji was very much distressed at the thought of what the other lady's feelings must be; but after some reflection he decided that it would be better not to send any message.

The scarf, to which still clung the delicate perfume of its owner, he wore for long afterwards beneath his dress.

When the boy got home he found his sister waiting for him in very ill-humour. 'It was not your doing that I escaped from the odious quandary in which you landed me! And even so pray what explanation can I offer to my friend?' 'A fine little clown the Prince must think you now. I hope you are ashamed of yourself.'

Despite the fact that both parties were using him so ill, the boy drew the rescued verses from out the folds of his dress and handed them to her. She could not forbear to read them. What of this discarded mantle? Why should he speak of it? The coat that the fishers of Iseo left lying upon the shore ...those were the words that came into her mind, but they were not the clue. She was sorely puzzled.

Meanwhile the Lady of the West was feeling very ill at ease. She was longing to talk about what had happened, but must not do so, and had to bear the burden of her impatience all alone. The arrival of Utsusemi's brother put her into a great state of excitement. No letter for her? she could not understand it at all, and for the first time a cloud settled upon her gay confiding heart.

Utsusemi, though she had so fiercely steeled herself against his love, seeing such tenderness hidden under

the words of his message, again fell to longing that she were free, and though there was no undoing what was done she found it so hard to go without him that she took up the folded paper and wrote in the margin a poem in which she said that her sleeve, so often wet with tears, was like the cicada's dew-drenched wing.