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Ririro

IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

The Tale of Genji: Aoi (9/9)

The accession of the new Emperor was in many ways unfavourable to Genji's position. His recent promotion too brought with it heavy responsibilities which sadly interrupted the course of his hidden friendships, so that complaints of desertion or neglect were soon heaped upon him from more than one quarter; while, as though Fate wished to turn the tables upon him, the one being on earth for whose love he longed in vain had now utterly abandoned him. Now that the Emperor was free to live as he chose she was more constantly than ever at his side, nor was her peace any longer disturbed by the presence of a rival, for Kōkiden resenting the old Emperor's neglect now seldom left her son's Palace. A constant succession of banquets and entertainments, the magnificence of which became the talk of the whole country, helped to enliven the ex-Emperor's retirement and he was on the whole very well content with his new condition. His only regret concerned the Heir Apparent whose position, unsupported by any powerful influence outside the Palace, he regarded as extremely insecure. He constantly discussed the matter with Genji, begging him to enlist the support of the Minamoto clan. Such conversations tended to be somewhat embarrassing, but they gave Genji pleasure in so far as they enabled him to take measures for the boy's welfare.

An unexpected event now occurred. Lady Rokujō's daughter by her late husband Prince Zembō was chosen to be the new Vestal Virgin at Ise. Her mother, who at the time when the appointment was first announced happened to be particularly aggrieved at Genji's treatment of her, at once determined to make her daughter's extreme youth a pretext for leaving the Capital and settling permanently at Ise. Being at the moment, as I have said, very much out of humour, she discussed the matter openly, making no secret of her real reasons for wishing to leave the City. The story soon reached the ex-Emperor's ears, and sending for Genji he said to him 'The late Prince my brother was, as you probably know, regarded with the utmost affection and esteem and I am profoundly grieved to hear that your reckless and inconsiderate conduct has cast a slur upon his family. For his daughter indeed I feel as much responsible as if she were of my own children. I must trouble you in future to safeguard to the utmost of your power the reputation of these unfortunate ladies. If you do not learn to keep better control over your frivolous inclinations you will soon find yourself becoming extremely unpopular.' Why should his father be so much upset over the matter? And Genji, smarting under the rebuke, was about to defend himself when it occurred to him that the warning was not at all ill-merited and he maintained a respectful silence.

'Affairs of this kind,' the ex-Emperor continued, 'must be managed so that the woman, no matter who she is,

need not feel that she has been brought into a humiliating position or treated in a cynical and off-hand way. Forget this rule, and she will soon make you feel the unpleasant consequences of her resentment.' 'Wicked as he thinks me already,' said Genji to himself while this lecture was going on, 'there is a much worse enormity of which he as yet knows nothing.' And stupefied with horror at the thought of what would ensue should his father ever discover this hideous secret, he bowed and left the room.

What the ex-Emperor had said about ruining other people's reputations cut him to the quick. He realized that Rokujō's rank and widowed position entitled her to the utmost consideration. But after all it was not he who had made public property of the affair; on the contrary he had done everything in his power to prevent its becoming known. There had always been a certain condescension in her treatment of him, arising perhaps from the inequality of their ages, and his estrangement from her was solely due to the coldness with which she had for a long time received him. That their private affairs were now known not only to the ex-Emperor but also presumably to the whole Court showed a lack of reticence which seemed to him deplorable.

Among others who heard of the business was Princess Asagao. Determined that she at least would not submit herself to such treatment she ceased to answer his letters even with the short and guarded replies that she had been in the habit of sending to him.

Nevertheless he found it hard to believe that so gentlemanly a creature was thinking unkindly of him and continued to regard her with devoted admiration.

Princess Aoi when the story reached her ears was of course distressed by this new instance of his fickleness; but she felt that it was useless, now that his infidelity was open and unabashed, to protest against one particular injury, and to his surprise she seemed to take the matter rather lightly. She was suffering much inconvenience from her condition and her spirits were very low. Her parents were delighted and at the same time surprised to hear of what was to come. But their pleasure and that of all her friends was marred by grave forebodings, and it was arranged that prayers for her health and special services of intercession should be recited in all the temples.

At such a time it was impossible for Genji to leave her and there were many who though his feelings had not in reality cooled towards them felt that they were being neglected.



The Vestal Virgin of Kamo still remained to be selected. The choice fell upon Kōkiden's daughter, San no Miya. She was a great favourite both with her brother the new Emperor and with the Empress Mother. Her retirement from the world was a bitter blow to them; but there

was no help for it since she alone of all the royal princesses fulfilled the prescribed conditions.

The actual ritual of investiture could not be altered, but the Emperor saw to it that the proceedings should be attended with the utmost Pomp and splendour; while to the customary ritual of the Kamo Festival he added so many touches that it became a spectacle of unparalleled magnificence. All this was due to his partiality for the Virgin Elect.

On the day of her purification the Virgin is attended by a fixed number of noblemen and princes. For this retinue the Emperor was at pains to choose the best built and handsomest of the young men at Court; he settled what coloured gowns they were to wear, what pattern was to be on their breeches, and even on what saddles they should ride. By a special decree he ordered that Prince Genji should join this retinue, and so great was everyone's desire to get a good view of the procession that long beforehand people were getting ready special carriages with which to line the route. The scene along the highroad of the First Ward was one of indescribable excitement. Dense crowds surged along the narrow space allotted to them, while the stands which with a wealth of ingenious fancy had been constructed all along the route of the procession, with gay cloaks and shawls hung over the balustrades, were in themselves a spectacle of astonishing beauty. It had never been Aoi's practice to be present at such occasions as this and in her present state of health she would not have dreamt of doing so had not her gentlewomen pressed round her saying 'Come Madam!

It will be no fun for us to go by ourselves and be hidden away in some corner. It is to see Prince Genji that all these people have come to-day. Why, all sorts of queer wild men from the mountains are here, and people have brought their wives and children from provinces ever so far away. If all these people who are nothing to do with him have taken the trouble to come so far, it will be too bad if you, his own lady, are not there!' Overhearing this Aoi's mother joined in. 'You are feeling much better just now,' she said; 'I think you ought to make the effort. It will be so disappointing for your gentlewomen....' At the last minute Aoi changed her mind and announced that she was going. It was now so late that there was no time to put on gala clothes. The whole of the enclosure allotted for this purpose was already lined with coaches which were packed so close that it was quite impossible to find space for the large and numerous carriages of Aoi and her train. A number of grand ladies began to make room for her, backing their coaches away from a suitable space in the reserved enclosure. Conspicuous among the rest were two basket-work carriages of a rather old-fashioned pattern but with curtains such as are used by persons of quality, very discreetly decked with draperies that barely showed beneath the curtains, yet these draperies (whether sleeve-favour, skirt or scarf) all of the handsomest colours. They seemed to belong to some exalted personage who did not wish to be recognized. When it was their turn to move, the coachmen in charge of them would not lift a finger. 'It is not for such as we to make way' they said stiffly and did not

stir. Among the attendants on both sides there was a number of young grooms who were already the worse for liquor. They were longing for a scuffle and it was impossible to keep them in hand. The staid and elderly outriders tried to call them back, but they took no notice.

The two carriages belonged to Princess Rokujō who had come secretly to the festival hoping for a while to find distraction from her troubles. Despite the steps which she had taken to conceal her identity, it was at once suspected by some of Aoi's gentlemen and they cried to the grooms that this was not an equipage which could be dealt with so high-handedly or it would be said that their lady was abusing her position as wife of the Lord Commander. But at this moment a number of Genji's servants mingled in the fray. They knew Rokujō's men by sight, but after a moment's embarrassment they decided not to give assistance to the enemy by betraying his identity.

Thus reinforced Aoi's side won the day and at length her coach and those of all her ladies were drawn up along the front row, while Rokujō's was pushed back among a miscellaneous collection of carts and gigs where she could see nothing at all. She was vexed beyond measure not only at missing what she had come to see but also that despite all her precautions she had been recognized and (as she was convinced) deliberately insulted. Her shaft-rest and other parts of her coach as well were damaged and she was obliged to prop it up against some common person's carriage wheels. Why,

she vainly asked herself, had she come among these hateful crowds? She would go home at once. What sense was there in waiting for the procession to come? But when she tried to go, she found that it was impossible to force a way through the dense crowds. She was still struggling to escape when the cry went up that the procession was in sight. Her resolution weakened. She would wait till Genji had passed by. He did not see her. How should he, for the crowds flashed by him like the hurrying images that a stream catches and breaks. She realized this, yet her disappointment was none the less.

The carriages that lined the route, decked and garlanded for this great day, were crammed to overflowing with excited ladies who though there was no room for them would not consent to be left behind. Peeping out under the blinds of their coaches they smiled at the great personages who were passing quite regardless of whether their greetings were acknowledged. But every now and then a smile would be rewarded by a quick glance or the backward turn of a head. Aoi's party was large and conspicuous. He wheeled round as he passed and saluted its members attentively. Rider after rider again as the procession went by would pause in front of Aoi's coach and salute her with the deepest respect. The humiliation of witnessing all this from an obscure corner was more than Rokujō could bear, and murmuring the lines 'Though I saw him but as a shadow that falls on hurrying waters yet knew I that at last my hour of

utmost misery was come' she burst into tears. It was hideous that her servants should see her in this state. Yet even while she struggled with her tears she could not find it in her heart to regret that she had seen him in all his glory.

The riders in the procession were indeed all magnificently appavelled, each according to his own rank; in particular the young noblemen chosen by the Emperor cut so brilliant a figure that only the lustre of Genji's beauty could have eclipsed their splendour. The Commander of this Bodyguard is not generally allotted a Palace-Officer as his special attendant, but as the occasion was of such importance the Imperial Treasurer rode at Genji's side. It seemed to those who saw so many public honours showered upon him that no flower of fortune could resist the favouring gale which blew towards his side. There were among the crowd women of quite good birth who had dressed in walking-skirts and come a long way on foot. There were nuns and other female recluses who, though in order to see anything of the procession they were obliged to endure being constantly pushed off their feet, and though they commonly regarded all such spectacles with contempt and aversion, were to-day declaring that they would not have missed it for anything. There were old men grinning through toothless gums, strange-looking girls with their hair poked away under ragged hoods and stolid peasant boys standing with hands raised as though in prayer, whose uncouth faces were suddenly transfigured with wonder and joy as the procession burst into sight. Even the daughters of remote provincial

magistrates and governors who had no acquaintances whatever in the City had expended as much coquetry upon the decoration of their persons and coaches as if they were about to submit themselves to a lover's inspection, and their equipages made a bright and varied show. If even these strangers were in such a taking, it may be imagined with what excitement, scattered here and there among the crowd, those with whom Genji was in secret communication watched the procession go by and with how many hidden sighs their bosoms heaved.

Prince Momozono had a seat in one of the stands. He was amazed to see his nephew grown up into such a prodigiously handsome young man and was alarmed lest soon the gods should cast an envious eye upon him. Princess Asagao could not but be touched by the rare persistency with which year after year Genji had pressed his suit. Even had he been positively ugly she would have found it hard to resist such importunity; so small wonder if seeing him ride by in all his splendour she marvelled that she had held out so long. But she was determined to know him much better before she committed herself. The young waiting-women who were with her were careful to belaud him in extravagant terms. To the festival itself Aoi did not go. The affray between her servants and those of Rokujō was soon reported to Genji. It vexed him beyond measure that such a thing should have occurred. That the exquisitely well-bred Aoi should have been in any way responsible for this outburst of insolent ruffianism he did not for a

moment believe; it must be the work of rough under-servants who, though they had no actual instructions, had imbibed the notion that all was not well between the two houses and imagined that they would get credit for espousing their mistress's cause. He knew well enough the unusual vanity and susceptibility of the affronted lady. Distressed to think of the pain which this incident must have caused her he hastened to her house. But her daughter, the Virgin Elect of Ise, was still in the house, and she made this a plea for turning him away after the exchange of a few formal words. He had the greatest possible sympathy for her; but he was feeling rather tired of coping with injured susceptibilities.

He could not face the idea of going straight back to the Great Hall. It was the day of the Kamo festival and going to his own palace he ordered Koremitsu to get his coach ready. 'Look at her!' he cried smiling fondly at Murasaki when she appeared in all her finery surrounded by the little children whom he had given her for playmates, 'She must needs bring her dames to wait upon her!' and stroking her lovely hair which to-day Shōnagon had dressed with more than usual care. 'It is getting rather long' he said; 'to-day would not be a bad time to have it cut' and sending for his astrologer he bade him consult his books. 'The maids-of-honour first!' he cried, nodding at the pretty troupe of babes, and their dainty tresses were trimmed so as to hang neatly over their diapered holiday gowns. 'I am going to cut yours myself' he said to Murasaki. 'What a

lot of it there is! I wonder how much longer it would have grown.' Really it was quite hard work. 'People with very long hair ought to wear it cut rather short over the temples' he said at last; 'but I have not the heart to crop you any closer' and he laid the knife down. Shōnagon's gratification knew no bounds when she heard him reciting the prayer with which the ceremony of hair-cutting should conclude. There is a sea-weed called miru which is used in the dressing of ladies' hair and playing upon this word (which also means 'to see') he recited a poem in which he said that the miru-weed which had been used in the washing of her hair was a token that he would forever fondly watch it grow. She answered that like the sea-tides which visit the miru in its cleft he came but went away, and often her tresses unwatched by him would like the hidden sea-weed grow. This she wrote very prettily on a slip of paper and though the verse had no merit in it but the charm of a childish mind it gave him great delight. To-day the crowds were as thick as ever. With great difficulty he managed to wedge in his carriage close to the Royal Stables. But here they were surrounded by somewhat turbulent young noblemen and he was looking for a quieter place when a smart carriage crammed full of ladies drew up near by and some one in it beckoned with a fan to Genji's servants. 'Will you not come over where we are?' said one of the ladies. 'We will gladly make room for you.' Such an offer was perhaps somewhat forward, but the place she had indicated was such a good one that Genji at once accepted the

invitation. 'I am afraid it is very unfair that we should take your place like this ...' Genji was beginning to say politely, when one of the ladies handed him a fan with the corner bent down. Here he found the poem: 'This flower-decked day of meeting when the great god unfolds his portents in vain have I waited, for alas another is at thy side.' Surely the handwriting was familiar. Yes, it was that of the ancient lady-of-the-bedchamber. He felt that it was time she should give up such pranks as this and answered discouragingly: 'Not ours this day of tryst when garlanded and passionate the Eighty Tribes converge.' This put the lady out of countenance and she replied: 'Now bitterly do I repent that for this cheating day my head is decked with flowers; for in name only is it a day of meeting.' Their carriages remained side by side, but Genji did not even draw up the side-curtains, which was a disappointment to more persons than one. The magnificence of his public appearance a few days ago was contrasted by everyone with the unobtrusive manner in which he now mingled with the crowd. It was agreed that his companion, whoever she might be, must certainly be some very great lady. Genji was afraid that his neighbour was going to prove troublesome. But fortunately some of her companions had more discretion than their mistress, and out of consideration for the unknown sharer of Genji's coach persuaded the voluble lady to restrain herself. Lady Rokujō's sufferings were now far worse than in previous years. Though she could no longer endure to be

treated as Genji was treating her, yet the thought of separating from him altogether and going so far away agitated her so much that she constantly deferred her journey. She felt too that she would become a laughingstock if it was thought that she had been spurred to flight by Genji's scorn; yet if at the last moment she changed her plans and stayed behind everyone would think her conduct extremely ill-balanced and unaccountable. Thus her days and nights were spent in an agony of indecision and often she repeated to herself the lines 'My heart like the fishers' float on Ise shore is danced from wave to wave.' She felt herself indeed swirled this way and that by paroxysms that sickened her but were utterly beyond her control.

Genji, though it pained him that she should feel it necessary to go so far away did not attempt to dissuade her from the journey. 'It is quite natural' he wrote, 'that tiresome creature as I am you should want to put me altogether out of your head. I only beg that even though you see no use in it, you will let me see you once more before you go. Were we to meet, you would soon realize that I care for your happiness far more than you suppose.' But she could not forget how when at the River of cleansing she sought a respite from the torture of her own doubt and indecision, rough waves had dashed her against the rocks, and she brooded more and more upon this wrong till there was room for no other thought in all her heart.

Meanwhile Princess Aoi became strangely distraught, and it seemed at times as though some hostile spirit

had entered into her. The whole household was plunged into such a state of anxiety and gloom that Genji had not the heart to absent himself for more than a few hours. It was only very occasionally that he got even as far as his own palace. After all, she was his wife; moreover, despite all the difficulties that had risen between them he cared for her very much indeed. He could no longer disguise from himself that there was something wrong with her in addition to the discomfort which naturally accompanied her condition, and he was in a state of great distress. Constant rituals of exorcism and divination were performed under his direction, and it was generally agreed that all the signs indicated possession by the spirit of some living person. Many names were tried but to none of them did the spirit respond, and it seemed as though it would be impossible to shift it. Aoi herself felt that some alien thing had entered into her, and though she was not conscious of any one definite pain or dread the sense that the thing was there never for a moment left her. The greatest healers of the day were powerless to eject it and it became apparent that this was no ordinary case of 'possession': some tremendous accumulation of malice was discharging itself upon her. It was natural that her friends should turn over in their minds the names of those whom Genji had most favoured. It was whispered that only with Lady Rokujō and the girl at the Nijō-in was he on terms of such intimacy that their jealousy would be at all likely to produce a fatal effect. But when the doctors attempted to conjure the spirit by

the use of these names, there was no visible response. She had not in all the world any enemy who might be practising conscious witchcraft against her. Such indispositions were sometimes attributed to possession by the spirit of some dead retainer or old family-nurse; or again the malice of someone whom the Minister, Aoi's father, had offended might, owing to her delicate condition, have fastened upon her instead of him. Conjecture after conjecture was accepted and then falsified. Meanwhile she lay perpetually weeping. Constantly, indeed, she would break out into fits of sobbing so violent that her breath was stopped, while those about her, in great alarm for her safety, stood by in misery not knowing what to do.

The ex-Emperor enquired after her continually. He even ordered special services to be said on her behalf, and these attentions served to remind her parents in what high estimation she was held at the Court. Not among her friends only but throughout the whole country the news of her illness caused great distress. Rokujō heard of her sufferings with deep concern. For years they had been in open rivalry for Genji's favours, but even after that wretched affair of the coaches (though it must be admitted that this had greatly incensed her) she had never gone so far as to wish evil against the Princess. She herself was very unwell. She began to feel that the violent and distracting emotions which continually assailed her had in some subtle way unhinged her mind and she determined to seek spiritual assistance at a place some miles distant from her home. Genji heard of

this and in great anxiety concerning her at once set out for the house where she was reported to be staying. It lay beyond the City precincts and he was obliged to go with the greatest secrecy. He begged her to forgive him for not having come to see her for so long. 'I have not been having a very cheerful time' he said and gave her some account of Aoi's condition. He wanted to make her feel that if he had stayed away it had been from a melancholy necessity and not because he had found more amusing company elsewhere. 'It is not so much my own anxiety that unnerves me as the spectacle of the appalling helplessness and misery into which her illness has plunged her wretched parents, and it was in the hope of forgetting for a little while all these sickroom horrors that I came to see you here to-day. If only just for this once you could overlook all my offences and be kind to me....'

His pleading had no effect. Her attitude was more hostile than before. He was not angry with her, nor indeed was he surprised. Day was already breaking when, unsoled, he set out for home. But as she watched him go his beauty suddenly made havoc of all her resolutions and again she felt that it was madness to leave him. Yet what had she to stay for? Aoi was with child and this could only be a sign that he had made his peace with her. Henceforward he could lead a life of irreproachable rectitude and if once in a way he came to make his excuse as he had come to-day, what purpose would that serve, save to keep ever fresh the torment of her desires? Thus when his letter came next day it found her more distraught than before: 'The sick

woman who for a few days past had shown some improvement is again suffering acutely and it is at present impossible for me to leave her.' Certain that this was a mere excuse she sent in reply the poem 'The fault is mine and the regret, if careless as the peasant girl who stoops too low amid the sprouting rice I soiled my sleeve in love's dark road.' At the end of her letter she reminded him of the old song: 'Now bitterly do I repent that ever I brought my pitcher to the mountain well where waters were but deep enough to soil my sleeve.' He looked at the delicate handwriting. Who was there, even among women of her high lineage and breeding, that could rival the ineffable grace and elegance with which this small note was penned? That one whose mind and person alike so strongly attracted him must now by his own act be lost to him forever, was a bitter thought. Though it was almost dark, he sat down and wrote to her: 'Do not say that the waters have but wetted your sleeve. For the shallowness is in your comparison only; not in my affections!' And to this he added the poem: 'Tis you, you only who have loitered among the shallow pools: while I till all my limbs were drenched have battled through the thickets of love's dark track.' And he ended with the words: 'Had but a ray of comfort lighted the troubles of this house, I should myself have been the bearer of this note.' Meanwhile Aoi's possession had returned in full force; she was in a state of pitiable torment. It reached Lady Rokujō's ears that the illness had been attributed by some to the operation of her 'living spirit.' Others, she

was told, believed that her father's ghost was avenging the betrayal of his daughter. She brooded constantly upon the nature of her own feelings towards Aoi, but could discover in herself nothing but intense unhappiness. Of hostility towards Aoi she could find no trace at all. Yet she could not be sure whether somewhere in the depths of a soul consumed by anguish some spark of malice had not lurked. Through all the long years during which she had loved and suffered, though it had often seemed to her that greater torment could not anywhere in the world exist, her whole being had never once been so utterly bruised and shattered as in these last days. It had begun with that hateful episode of the coaches. She had been scorned, treated as though she had no right to exist. Yes, it was true that since the Festival of Purification her mind had been buffeted by such a tempest of conflicting resolutions that sometimes it seemed as though she had lost all control over her own thoughts. She remembered how one night she had suddenly, in the midst of agonizing doubts and indecisions, found that she had been dreaming. It seemed to her that she had been in a large magnificent room, where lay a girl whom she knew to be the Princess Aoi. Snatching her by the arm she had dragged and mauled the prostrate figure, with an outburst of brutal fury such as in her waking life would have been utterly foreign to her. Since then she had had the same dream several times. How terrible! It seemed then that it was really possible for one's spirit to leave the body and break out into emotions which the waking mind would not countenance.

Even where someone's actions are all but irreproachable (she reflected) people take a malicious delight in saying nothing about the good he has done and everything about the evil. With what joy would they seize upon such a story as this! That after his death a man's ghost should pursue his enemies is a thing which seems to be of constant occurrence, yet even this is taken as a sign that the dead man was of a fiendishly venomous and malignant character and his reputation is utterly destroyed. 'What then will become of me if it is thought that while still alive I have been guilty of so hideous a crime?' She must face her fate. She had lost Genji for ever. If she were to keep any control at all over her own thoughts she must first of all find some way of putting him wholly out of mind. She kept on reminding herself not to think of him, so that this very resolve led her in the end to think of him but the more. The Virgin of Ise should by rights have entered upon her duties before the end of the year, but difficulties of various kinds arose and it was not till the autumn of the next year that she could at last be received. She was to enter the Palace in-the-Fields in the ninth month, but this was decided so late that the arrangements for her second Purification had to be made in great haste. It was very inconvenient that at this crisis her mother, so far from superintending the preparations, spent hour after hour lying dazed and helpless upon her bed. At last the priests arrived to fetch the girl away. They took a grave view of the mother's condition and gave her the benefit of their presence by offering up many prayers and incantations.

But week after week she remained in the same condition, showing no symptom which seemed actually dangerous, yet all the time (in some vague and indefinite way) obviously very ill. Genji sent constantly to enquire after her, but she saw clearly that his attention was occupied by quite other matters. Aoi's delivery was not yet due and no preparations for it had been made, when suddenly there were signs that it was close at hand. She was in great distress, but though the healers recited prayer upon prayer their utmost efforts could not shift by one jot the spiteful power which possessed her. All the greatest miracle-workers of the land were there; the utter failure of their ministrations irritated and perplexed them. At last, daunted by the potency of their incantations, the spirit that possessed her found voice and, weeping bitterly, she was heard to say: 'Give me a little respite; there is a matter of which Prince Genji and I must speak.' The healers nodded at one another as though to say 'Now we shall learn something worth knowing,' for they were convinced that the 'possession' was speaking through the mouth of the possessed, and they hurried Genji to her bedside. Her parents thinking that, her end being near, she desired to give some last secret injunction to Genji, retired to the back of the room. The priests too ceased their incantations and began to recite the Hokkekyo in low impressive tones. He raised the bed-curtain. She looked lovely as ever as she lay there, very big with child, and any man who saw her even now would have found himself strangely troubled by her beauty. How much the more then Prince Genji, whose

heart was already overflowing with tenderness and remorse! The plaited tresses of her long hair stood out in sharp contrast to her white jacket. Even to this loose, sick-room garb her natural grace imparted the air of a fashionable gown! He took her hand. 'It is terrible' he began, 'to see you looking so unhappy ...' he could say no more. Still she gazed at him, but through his tears he saw that there was no longer in her eyes the wounded scorn that he had come to know so well, but a look of forbearance and tender concern; and while she watched him weep her own eyes brimmed with tears. It would not do for him to go on crying like this. Her father and mother would be alarmed; besides, it was upsetting Aoi herself, and meaning to cheer her he said: 'Come, things are not so bad as that! You will soon be much better. But even if anything should happen, it is certain that we shall meet again in worlds to come. Your father and mother too, and many others, love you so dearly that between your fate and theirs must be some sure bond that will bring you back to them in many, many lives that are to be.' Suddenly she interrupted him: 'No, no. That is not it. But stop these prayers awhile. They do me great harm,' and drawing him nearer to her she went on 'I did not think that you would come. I have waited for you till all my soul is burnt with longing.' She spoke wistfully, tenderly; and still in the same tone recited the verse 'Bind thou, as the seam of a skirt is braided, this shred, that from my soul despair and loneliness have sundered.' The voice in which these words were said was not Aoi's; nor was the manner hers. He knew someone whose voice was very

like that. Who was it? Why, yes; surely only she,—the Lady Rokujō. Once or twice he had heard people suggest that something of this kind might be happening; but he had always rejected the idea as hideous and unthinkable, believing it to be the malicious invention of some unprincipled scandalmonger, and had even denied that such 'possession' ever took place. Now he had seen one with his own eyes. Ghastly, unbelievable as they were, such things did happen in real life. Controlling himself at last he said in a low voice: 'I am not sure who is speaking to me. Do not leave me in doubt....' Her answer proved only too conclusively that he had guessed aright. To his horror her parents now came back to the bed, but she had ceased to speak, and seeing her now lying quietly her mother thought the attack was over, and was coming towards the bed carrying a basin of hot water when Aoi suddenly started up and bore a child. For the moment all was gladness and rejoicing; but it seemed only too likely that the spirit which possessed her had but been temporarily dislodged; for a fierce fit of terror was soon upon her, as though the thing (whatever it was) were angry at having been put to the trouble of shifting, so that there was still grave anxiety about the future. The Abbot of Tendai and the other great ecclesiastics who were gathered together in the room attributed her easy delivery to the persistency of their own incantations and prayers, and as they hastily withdrew to seek refreshment and repose they wiped the sweat from their brows with an expression of

considerable self-satisfaction. Her friends who had for days been plunged in the deepest gloom now began to take heart a little, believing that although there was no apparent improvement yet now that the child was safely born she could not fail to mend. The prayers and incantations began once more, but throughout the house there was a new feeling of confidence; for the amusement of looking after the baby at least gave them some relief from the strain under which they had been living for so many days. Handsome presents were sent by the ex-Emperor, the Royal Princes and all the Court, forming an array which grew more dazzling each night. The fact that the child was a boy made the celebrations connected with his birth all the more sumptuous and elaborate.

The news of this event took Lady Rokujō somewhat aback. The last report she had heard from the Great Hall was that the confinement was bound to be very dangerous. And now they said that there had not been the slightest difficulty. She thought this very peculiar. She had herself for a long while been suffering from the most disconcerting sensations. Often she felt as though her whole personality had in some way suddenly altered. It was as though she were a stranger to herself. Recently she had noticed that a smell of mustard-seed incense for which she was at a loss to account was pervading her clothes and hair. She took a hot bath and put on other clothes; but still the same odour of incense pursued her. It was bad enough even in private to have this sensation of being as it were

estranged from oneself. But now her body was playing tricks upon her which her attendants must have noticed and were no doubt discussing behind her back. Yet there was not one person among those about her with whom she could bring herself to discuss such things and all this pent-up misery seemed only to increase the strange process of dissolution which had begun to attack her mind.

Now that Genji was somewhat less anxious about Aoi's condition the recollection of his extraordinary conversation with her at the crisis of her attack kept on recurring in his mind, and it made so painful an impression upon him that though it was now a long time since he had communicated with Rokujō and he knew that she must be deeply offended, he felt that no kind of intimacy with her would ever again be possible. Yet in the end pity prevailed and he sent her a letter. It seemed indeed that it would at present be heartless to absent himself at all from one who had just passed through days of such terrible suffering and from her friends who were still in a state of the gravest anxiety, and all his secret excursions were abandoned. Aoi still remained in a condition so serious that he was not allowed to see her. The child was as handsome an infant as you could wish to see. The great interest which Genji took in it and the zest with which he entered into all the arrangements which were made for its welfare delighted Aoi's father, inasmuch as they seemed signs of a better understanding between his daughter and Genji; and though her slow recovery caused him great

anxiety, he realized that an illness such as that through which she had just passed must inevitably leave considerable traces behind it and he persuaded himself that her condition was less dangerous than one might have supposed. The child reminded Genji of the Heir Apparent and made him long to see Fujitsubo's little son again. The desire took such strong hold upon him that at last he sent Aoi a message in which he said: 'It is a very long time since I have been to the Palace or indeed have paid any visits at all. I am beginning to feel the need of a little distraction, so to-day I am going out for a short while and should like to see you before I go. I do not want to feel that we are completely cut off from one another.' So he pleaded, and he was supported by her ladies who told her that Prince Genji was her own dear Lord and that she ought not to be so proud and stiff with him. She feared that her illness had told upon her looks and was for speaking to him with a curtain between, but this too her gentlewomen would not allow. He brought a stool close to where she was lying and began speaking to her of one thing or another. Occasionally she put in a word or two, but it was evident that she was still very weak. Nevertheless it was difficult to believe that she had so recently seemed almost at the point of death. They were talking quietly together about those worst days of her illness and how they now seemed like an evil dream when suddenly he recollected the extraordinary conversation he had had with her when she was lying apparently at her last gasp and filled with a sudden bitterness, he said to her: 'There are many other things that I must

one day talk to you about. But you seem very tired and perhaps I had better leave you.' So saying he arranged her pillows, brought her warm water to wash in and in fact played the sick-nurse so well that those about her wondered where he had acquired the art. Still peerlessly beautiful but weak and listless she seemed as she lay motionless on the bed at times almost to fade out of existence. He gazed at her with fond concern. Her hair, every ringlet still in its right place, was spread out over the pillow. Never before had her marvellous beauty so strangely impressed him. Was it conceivable that year after year he should have allowed such a woman to continue in estrangement from him? Still he stood gazing at her. 'I must start for the Palace,' he said at last; 'but I shall not be away long. Now that you are better you must try to make your mother feel less anxious about you when she comes presently; for though she tries hard not to show it, she is still terribly distressed about you. You must begin now to make an effort and sit up for a little while each day. I think it is partly because she spoils you so much that you are taking so long to get well.' As he left the room, robed in all the magnificence of his court attire she followed him with her eyes more fixedly than ever in her life before. The attendance of the officers who took part in the autumn session was required, and Aoi's father accompanied Genji to the Palace, as did also her brother who needed the Minister's assistance in making their arrangements for the coming political year. Many of their servants went too and the Great Hall wore a deserted and melancholy aspect. Suddenly Aoi was

seized with the same choking-fit as before and was soon in a desperate condition. This news was brought to Genji in the Palace and breaking off his Audience he at once made for home. The rest followed in hot haste and though it was Appointment Evening they gave up all thought of attending the proceedings, knowing that the tragic turn of affairs at the Great Hall would be considered a sufficient excuse. It was too late to get hold of the abbot from Mount Tendai or any of the dignitaries who had given their assistance before. It was appalling that just when she seemed to have taken a turn for the better she should so suddenly again be at the point of death, and the people at the Great Hall felt utterly helpless and bewildered. Soon the house was full of lackeys who were arriving from every side with messages of sympathy and enquiry; but from the inhabitants of that stricken house they could obtain no information, for they seemed to do nothing but rush about from one room to another in a state of frenzy which it was terrifying to behold.

Remembering that several times already her 'possession' had reduced her to a trance-like state, they did not for some time attempt to lay out the body or even touch her pillows, but left her lying just as she was. After two or three days however it became clear that life was extinct.

Amid the general lamentations which ensued Genji's spirit sank with the apathy of utter despair. Sorrow had followed too fast upon sorrow; life as he saw it now was but a succession of futile miseries. The messages of condolence which poured in from all the

most exalted quarters in the Court and City merely fatigued and exasperated him.

The warmth of the old ex-Emperor's messages and his evident personal distress at Aoi's death were indeed very flattering and mingled a certain feeling of gratification with her father's perpetual weeping. At the suggestion of a friend various drastic means were resorted to in the hope that it might yet be possible to kindle some spark of life in the body. But it soon became evident, even to their reluctant eyes, that all this was too late, and heavy at heart they took the body to Toribeno. Here, in the great flat cremation-ground beyond the town, the horrors that they had dreaded were only too swiftly begun. Even in this huge open space there was scarcely room for the crowds of mourners who had come from all the great palaces of the City to follow behind the bier and for the concourses of priests who, chanting their liturgies, flocked from the neighbouring temples. The ex-Emperor was of course represented; so were the Princess Kōkiden and the Heir Apparent; while many other important people came in person and mingled with the crowd. Never had any funeral aroused so universal a demonstration of interest and sympathy. Her father was not present: 'Now in my declining years to have lost one who was so young and strong is a blow too staggering ...' he said and he could no longer check the tears which he was striving to conceal. His grief was heart-rending. All night long the mournful ceremonies proceeded, but at last only a few pitiful ashes remained

upon the pyre and in the morning the mourners returned to their homes. It was in fact, save for its grandeurs, much like any other funeral; but it so happened that save in one case only death had not yet come Genji's way and the scenes of that day haunted him long afterwards with hideous persistency.

The ceremony took place in the last week of the eighth month. Seeing that from Aoi's father all the soft brightness of this autumn morning was hid in the twilight of despair and well knowing what thoughts must be passing through his mind, Genji came to him and pointing to the sky whispered the following verse: 'Because of all the mists that wreath the autumn sky I know not which ascended from my lady's bier, henceforth upon the country of the clouds from pole to pole I gaze with love.'

At last he was back in his room. He lay down, but could not sleep. His thoughts went back over the years that he had known her. Why had he been content lazily to assume that in the end all would go right and meanwhile amused himself regardless of her resentment? Why had he let year after year go by without managing even at the very end to establish any real intimacy, any sympathy between them? The bitterest remorse now filled his heart; but what use was it? His servants brought him his light grey mourner's dress and the strange thought floated into his mind 'What if I had died instead and not she? She would be getting into the woman-mourner's deep-dyed robe,' and he recited the poem: 'Though light in hue the dress which in bereavement custom bids me wear, yet

black my sorrow as the gown thou wouldst have worn;’ and as thus clad he told his rosary those about him noted that even the dull hues of mourning could not make him look peaked or drab. He read many *sūtras* in a low voice, among them the liturgy to Samantabhadra as Dispenser of the Dharmadhātu Samādhi, which he recited with an earnestness more impressive in its way than the dexterous intonation of the professional cleric. Next he visited the new-born child and took some comfort in the reflection that she had at least left behind her this memorial of their love. Genji did not attempt to go even for the day to the Nijō-in, but remained buried in recollections and regrets with no other occupation save the ordering of masses for her soul. He did however bring himself to write a few letters, among them one to Rokujō. The Virgin Elect was already in charge of the Guardsmen of the Gate and would soon be passed on by them to the Palace-in-the-Fields. Rokujō accordingly made her daughter’s situation an excuse for sending no reply. He was now so weary of life and its miseries that he seriously contemplated the taking of priestly vows, and might perhaps have done so, had there not been a new bond which seemed to tie him irrevocably to the world. But stay, there was the girl Murasaki too, waiting for him in the wing of his palace. How unhappy she must have been during all this long time! That night lying all alone within his royal curtains, though watchmen were going their rounds not far away, he felt very lonely and remembering that ‘autumn is no time to lie alone,’ he sent for the

sweetest voiced among the chaplains of the palace. His chanting mingled with the sounds of early dawn was indeed of almost unendurable beauty. But soon the melancholy of late autumn, the murmur of the rising wind took possession of him, and little used to lonely nights he found it hard to keep his bed till morning. Looking out he saw that a heavy mist lay over the garden beds; yet despite the mist it was clear that something was tied to the stem of a fine chrysanthemum not far away. It was a letter written on dark blue paper. The messenger had left it there and gone away. 'What a charming idea!' he was thinking when he suddenly recognized the hand. It was from Rokujō. She began by saying she did not think, having regard to her daughter's situation, that he would be surprised at her long delay in answering his previous note. She added an acrostic poem in which, playing upon the word chrysanthemum (kiku) she told him of her distress at hearing (kiku) of his bereavement. 'The beauty of the morning' she ended, 'turned my thoughts more than ever towards you and your sorrow; that is why I could not choose but answer you.' It was written even more elegantly than usual; but he tossed it aside. Her condolences wounded him, for after what he had seen he knew that they could not be sincere. Nevertheless he felt that it would be too harsh to break off all communication with her; that he should do so would in fact tend to incriminate her, and this was the last thing he desired. After all, it was probably not that at all which had brought about the disaster;

maybe Aoi's fate was sealed in any case. If only he had chanced never to see or hear the fatal operation of her spirit! As it was, argue with himself as he might, he doubted whether he would ever be able to efface the impression of what had been revealed to him at that hideous scene.

He had the excuse that he was still in deep mourning and that to receive a letter from him would inconvenience her at this stage of her daughter's Purification. But after turning the matter over in his mind for a long while, he decided that it would be unfeeling not to answer a letter which had evidently been written with the sole object of giving him pleasure and on a paper lightly tinted with brown he wrote:

'Though I have let so many days slip by, believe me that you have not been absent from my thoughts. If I was reluctant to answer your letter, it was because, as a mourner, I was loath to trespass upon the sanctity which now surrounds your home, and this I trusted that you would understand. Do not brood overmuch upon what has happened; for "go we late or soon, more frail our lives than dew-drops hanging in the morning light." For the present, think of it no more. I say this now, because it is not possible for us to meet.'

She received the letter at her daughter's place of preparation, but did not read it till she was back in her own house. At a glance she knew at what he was hinting. So he too accused her! And at last the hideous conviction of her own guilt forced itself upon her acceptance. Her misery increased tenfold.

If even Genji had reason to believe in her guilt, her brother-in-law, the ex-Emperor, must already have been informed. What was he thinking of her? Her dead husband, Prince Zembō, had been the brother whom he had loved best. He had accepted the guardianship of the little girl who was now about to be consecrated and at his brother's earnest entreaty had promised to undertake her education and indeed treat her as though she were his own child. The old Emperor had constantly invited the widowed lady and her daughter to live with him in the Palace, but she was reluctant to accept this offer, which indeed was somewhat impracticable. Meanwhile she allowed herself to listen to Genji's youthful addresses and was soon living in constant torment and agitation lest her indiscretion should be discovered. During the whole period of this escapade she was in such a state of mingled excitement and apprehension that she scarcely knew what she was doing. In the world at large she had the reputation of being a great beauty and this, combined with her exalted lineage, brought to the Palace-in-the-Fields, so soon as it was known that she had repaired thither with her daughter, a host of frivolous dandies from the Court, who made it their business to force upon her their fashionable attentions morning, noon and night. Genji heard of this and did not blame them. He could only think it was a thousand pities that a woman endowed with every talent and charm, should take it into her head that she had done with the world and prepare to remove herself to so remote a place. He

could not help thinking that she would find Ise extremely dull when she got there.

Though the masses for Aoi's soul were now over, he remained in retirement till the end of the seven weeks. He was not used to doing nothing and the time hung heavy on his hands. Often he sent for Tō no Chūjō to tell him all that was going on in the world, and among much serious information Chūjō would often seek to distract him by discussing the strange escapades in which they had sometimes shared.

On one of these occasions he indulged in some jokes at the expense of the ancient lady-of-the-bedchamber with whom Genji had so indiscreetly become involved. 'Poor old lady!' Genji protested; 'it is too bad to make fun of her in this way. Please do not do it.' But all the same he had to admit to himself that he could never think of her without smiling. Then Chūjō told him the whole story of how he had followed and watched him on that autumn night, the first after the full moon, and many other stories besides of his own adventures and other people's. But in the end they fell to talking of their common loss, and agreeing that taken all in all life was but a sad business they parted in tears.

Some weeks afterwards on a gloomy wet evening Chūjō strode into the room looking somewhat self-conscious in the light grey winter cloak and breeches which he was to-day wearing for the first time. Genji was leaning against the balustrade of the balcony above the main western door. For a long while he had been gazing at the frost-clad gardens which surrounded the house. A

high wind was blowing and swift showers dashed against the trees. Near to tears he murmured to himself the line 'Tell me whether her soul be in the rain or whether in the clouds above!' And as Chūjō watched him sitting there, his chin resting upon his hand, he thought the soul of one who had been wedded to so lovely a youth would not indeed have borne quite to renounce the scene of her earthly life and must surely be hovering very near him. Still gazing with eager admiration Chūjō came to Genji's side. He noticed now that though his friend had not in any other way abated the plainness of his dress, he had to-day put on a coloured sash. This streak of deep red showed up against his grey cloak (which though still a summer one was of darker colour than that which he had lately been wearing) in so attractive a way that though the effect was very different from that of the magnificent attires which Genji had affected in happier days, yet Chūjō could not for a long while take his eyes off him. At last he too gazed up at the stormy sky, and remembering the Chinese verse which he had heard Genji repeat he recited the poem: 'Though to rain her soul be turned, yet where in the clouded vault of heaven is that one mist-wreath which is she?' And Genji answered: 'Since she whom once we knew beyond the country of the clouds is fled, two months of storm and darkness now have seared the wintry earth below.' The depth of Genji's feeling was evident. Sometimes Chūjō had thought it was merely dread of the old Emperor's rebukes—coupled with a sense of

obligation towards Aoi's father whose kindness had always been so marked and also towards the Princess her mother, who had cherished him with an unflinching patience and fondness—that had made it difficult for him to break off a relationship which was in fact becoming very irksome. Often indeed Genji's apparent indifference to Aoi had been very painful to him. Now it was evident to him that she had never ceased to hold an important place in his affections, and this made him deplore more bitterly than ever the tragedy of her early death. Whatever he did and wherever he went he felt that a light was gone out of his life and he was very despondent.

Among the withered undergrowth in the garden Genji found to his delight a few gentians still blossoming and after *Chūjō* was gone he plucked some and bade the wet-nurse *Saisō* give them to the child's grandmother, together with the verse: 'This gentian flower that lingered amid the withered grasses of the hedge I send you in remembrance of the autumn that is passed.' 'To you' he added 'it will seem a poor thing in contrast to the flowers that are gone.' The Princess looked at her grandson's innocent smiling face and thought that in beauty he was not far behind the child she had lost. Already her tears were pouring faster than a stormy wind shakes down the dry leaves from a tree, and when she read Genji's message they flowed faster still. This was her answer: 'New tears, but tears of joy it brings,—this blossom from a meadow that is now laid waste.'

Still in need of some small employment to distract his thoughts, though it was already getting dark he began a letter to Princess Asagao who, he felt sure, must long ago have been told of his bereavement. Although it was a long time since he had heard from her he made no reference to their former friendship; his letter was indeed so formal that he allowed the messenger to read it before he started. It was written on Chinese paper tinted sky-blue. With it was the poem 'When I look back upon an autumn fraught with diverse sorrows I find no dusk dimmed with such tears as I to-night have shed.' He took great pains with his handwriting and her ladies thought it a shame that so elegant a note should remain unanswered. In the end she reached the same conclusion. 'Though my heart goes out towards you in your affliction,' she answered, 'I see no cause to abandon my distrust.' And to this she added the poem 'Since I heard that the mists of autumn had vanished and left desolate winter in your house, I have thought often of you as I watched the streaming sky.' This was all, and it was written hastily, but to Genji, who for so long had received no news from her, it gave as much pleasure as the longest and most ingenious epistle.

It is in general the unexplored that attracts us, and Genji tended to fall most deeply in love with those who gave him least encouragement. The ideal condition for the continuance of his affection was that the beloved, much occupied elsewhere, should grant him no more than an occasional favour. There was one who admirably fulfilled these conditions, but unfortunately her high

rank and conspicuous position in society brought with them too many material difficulties. But little Murasaki was different. There was no need to bring her up on this principle. He had not during the long days of his mourning ever forgotten her and he knew that she must be feeling very dull without him. But he regarded her merely as an orphan child whose care he had undertaken and it was a comfort to him to think that here at least was someone he could leave for a little while without anxiously wondering all the time whether he would get into trouble.

It was now quite dark, and gathering the people of the house round the great lamp he got them to tell him stories. There was among them a gentlewoman named Chūnagon with whom he had for years been secretly in love. He still felt drawn towards her, but at such a time there could of course be no thought of any closer tie. Seeing now that he was looking despondent she came over to him and when they had talked for a while of various matters at large, Genji said to her: 'During these last weeks, when all has been quiet in the house, I have grown so used to the company of you gentlewomen that if a time comes when we can no longer meet so frequently, I shall miss you very much. That was why I was feeling particularly depressed; though indeed whichever way I turn my thoughts I find small matter for consolation!' Here he paused and some of the ladies shed a few tears. At last one of them said: 'I know, my Lord, how dark a cloud has fallen upon your life and would not venture to compare

our sorrow with yours. But I would have you remember what it must mean to us that henceforward you will never....' 'Do not say never' answered Genji kindly. 'I do not forget my friends so easily as that. If there are any among you who, mindful of the past, wish still to serve in this house, they may count upon it that so long as I live I shall never desert them.' And as he sat gazing into the lamplight, with tears a-glitter in his eyes, they felt they were fortunate indeed in having such a protector.

There was among these gentlewomen a little orphan girl who had been Aoi's favourite among all her maids. Well knowing how desolate the child must now be feeling he said to her kindly: 'Whose business is it now but mine to look after little Miss Até?' The girl burst into tears. In her short tunic, darker than the dresses the others were wearing, with black neckerchief and dark blue breeches she was a charming figure. 'I hope' continued Genji 'that there are some who despite the dull times they are likely to have in this house will choose, in memory of the past, to devote themselves to the care of the little prince whom I am leaving behind. If all who knew his mother are now to be dispersed his plight will be more wretched than before.' Again he promised never to forget them, but they knew well enough that his visits would be few and far between, and felt very despondent.

That night he distributed among these waiting-ladies and among all the servants at the Great Hall according to their rank and condition various keepsakes and trifles that had belonged to their young mistress, giving to

each whatever he thought most likely to keep her memory alive, without regard to his own preferences and dislikes in the household.

He had determined that he could not much longer continue this mode of life and must soon return to his own palace. While his servants were dragging out his coach and his gentlemen assembling in front of his rooms, as though on purpose to delay him a violent rainstorm began, with a wind that tore the last leaves from the trees and swept them over the earth with wild rapidity. The gentlemen who had assembled in front of the house were soon drenched to the skin. He had meant to go to the Palace, then to the Nijō-in and return to sleep at the Great Hall. But on such a night this was impossible, and he ordered his gentlemen to proceed straight to the Nijō-in where he would join them subsequently. As they trooped off each of them felt (though none of them was likely to be seeing the Great Hall for by any means the last time) that to-day a chapter in his life was closed. Both the Minister and his wife, when they heard that Genji was not returning that night, also felt that they had reached a new and bitter stage in the progress of their affliction. To Aoi's mother he sent this letter: 'The ex-Emperor has expressed a strong desire to see me and I feel bound to go to the Palace. Though I shall not be absent for many days, yet it is now so long a time since I left this house that I feel dazed at the prospect of facing the great world once more. I could not go without informing you of my departure, but am in no condition to pay you

a visit.' The Princess was still lying with closed eyes, her thoughts buried in the profoundest gloom. She did not send a reply. Presently Aoi's father came to Genji's apartments. He found it very hard to bear up, and during the interview clung fast to his son-in-law's sleeve with an air of dependence which was pathetic to witness. After much hesitation he began at last to say: 'We old men are prone to tears even when small matters are amiss; you must not wonder then that under the weight of so terrible a sorrow I sometimes find myself breaking into fits of weeping which I am at a loss to control. At such moments of weakness and disarray I had rather be where none can see me, and that is why I have not as yet ventured even to pay my respects to his Majesty your good father. If opportunity offers, I beg you to explain this to him. To be left thus desolate in the last years of life is a sore trial, a very sore trial indeed....' The effort which it cost him to say these words was distressing for Genji to watch and he hastened to assure the old Minister that he would make matters right at the Court. 'Though I do not doubt,' he added, 'that my father has already guessed the reason of your absence.' As it was still raining heavily the Minister urged him to start before it grew quite dark. But Genji would not leave the house till he had taken a last look at the inner rooms. His father-in-law followed him. In the space beyond Aoi's curtained seat, packed away behind a screen, some thirty gentlewomen all clad in dark grey weeds were huddled together, forlorn and tearful. 'These hapless ladies,' said the Minister, turning to Genji, 'though they

take some comfort in the thought that you are leaving behind you one whose presence will sometimes draw you to this house, well know that it will never again be your rightful home, and this distresses them no less than the loss of their dear mistress. For years they had hoped against hope that you and she would at last be reconciled. Consider then how bitter for them must be the day of this, your final departure.' 'Let them take heart' said Genji; 'for whereas while my lady was alive I would often of set purpose absent myself from her in the vain hope that upon my return I should find her less harshly disposed towards me, now that she is dead I have no longer any cause to shun this house, as soon you shall discover.'

When he had watched Genji drive away, Aoi's father went to her bedroom. All her things were just as she had left them. On a stand in front of the bed writing materials lay scattered about. There were some papers covered with Genji's handwriting, and these the old man clasped with an eagerness that made some of the gentlewomen who had followed him smile even in the midst of their grief. The works that Genji had written out were all masterpieces of the past, some Chinese, some Japanese; some written in cursive, some in full script; they constituted indeed an astonishing display of versatile penmanship. The Minister gazed with an almost religious awe at these specimens of Genji's skill, and the thought that he must henceforth regard the young man whom he adored as no longer a member of his household and family must at that moment have been very painful to him.

Among these manuscripts was a copy of Po Chü-ís “Everlasting Wrong” and beside the words ‘The old pillow, the old coverlet with whom shall he now share?’ Genji had written the poem: ‘Mournful her ghost that journeying now to unfamiliar realms must flee the couch where we were wont to rest.’ While beside the words ‘The white petals of the frost’ he had written: ‘The dust shall cover this bed; for no longer can I bear to brush from it the nightly dew of my tears.’

Aoi’s ladies were gathered together in groups of two or three in each of which some gentlewoman was pouring out her private griefs and vexations. ‘No doubt, as his Excellency the Minister told us, Prince Genji will come to us sometimes, if only to see the child. But for my part I doubt whether he will find much comfort in such visits....’ So one of them was saying to her friends. And soon there were many affecting scenes of farewell between them, for it had been decided that for the present they were all of them to go back to their homes.

Meanwhile Genji was with his father in the Palace. ‘You are very thin in the face,’ said the ex-Emperor as soon as he saw him. ‘I am afraid you have overtaxed your strength by too much prayer and fasting,’ and in a state of the deepest concern he at once began pressing all kinds of viands and cordials upon him, showing with regard to his health and indeed his affairs in general a solicitude by which Genji could not help feeling touched. Late that night he at last arrived at the Nijō-in. Here he found everything garnished and swept; his men-

servants and maids were waiting for him at the door. All the gentlewomen of the household at once presented themselves in his apartments. They seemed to have vied with one another which should look the gayest and smartest, and their finery contrasted pleasantly with the sombre and dispiriting attire of the unfortunate ladies whom he had left behind him at the Great Hall. Having changed out of his court dress, he went at once to the western wing. Not only was Murasaki's winter costume most daintily designed, but her pretty waiting-maids and little companions were so handsomely equipped as to reflect the greatest credit on Shōnagon's management; and he saw with satisfaction that such matters might with perfect safety be left in her hands. Murasaki herself was indeed exquisitely dressed. 'How tall you have grown since last I saw you!' he said and pulled up her little curtain-of-honour. He had been away so long that she felt shy with him and turned her head aside. But he would not for the world have had her look otherwise than she looked at that moment, for as she sat in profile with the lamplight falling upon her face he realized with delight that she was becoming the very image of her whom from the beginning he had loved best. Coming closer to her side he whispered to her: 'Some time or other I want to tell you about all that has been happening to me since I went away. But it has all been very terrible and I am too tired to speak of it now, so I am going away to rest for a little while in my own room. From to-morrow onwards you

will have me to yourself all day long; in fact, I expect you will soon grow quite tired of me.'

'So far, so good' thought Shōnagon when she heard this speech. But she was still very far from easy in her mind. She knew that there were several ladies of very great influence with whom Genji was on terms of friendship and she feared that when it came to choosing a second wife, he would be far more likely to take one of these than to remember her own little mistress; and she was not at all satisfied.

When Genji had retired to the eastern wing, he sent for a certain Lady Chūjō to rub his limbs and then went to bed. Next morning he wrote to the nurses of Aoi's child and received from them in reply a touching account of its beauty and progress; but the letter served only to awaken in him useless memories and regrets. Towards the end of the day he felt very restless and the time hung heavily on his hands, but he was in no mood to resume his secret roving and such an idea did not even occur to him. In Murasaki none of his hopes had been disappointed; she had indeed grown up into as handsome a girl as you could wish to see, nor was she any longer at an age when it was impossible for him to become her lover. He constantly hinted at this, but she did not seem to understand what he meant.

He still had plenty of time on his hands, and the whole of it was now spent in her society. All day long they played together at draughts or word-picking, and even in the course of these trivial pursuits she showed a

quickness of mind and beauty of disposition which continually delighted him; but she had been brought up in such rigid seclusion from the world that it never once occurred to her to exploit her charms in any more adult way.

Soon the situation became unendurable, and though he knew that she would be very much upset he determined somehow or another to get his own way. There came a morning when the gentleman was already up and about, but the young lady was still lying a-bed. Her attendants had no means of knowing that anything out of the ordinary had happened, for it had always been Genji's habit to go in and out of her room just as he chose. They naturally assumed that she was not feeling well and were glancing at her with sympathy when Genji arrived carrying a writing-box which he slipped behind the bed curtains. He at once retired, and the ladies also left the room. Seeing that she was alone Murasaki slowly raised her head. There by her pillow was the writing-box and tied to it with ribbon, a slender note. Listlessly she detached the note and unfolding it read the hastily scribbled poem: 'Too long have we deferred this new emprise, who night by night till now have lain but with a shift between.'

That this was what Genji had so long been wanting came to her as a complete surprise and she could not think why he should regard the unpleasant thing that had happened last night as in some way the beginning of a new and more intimate friendship between them. Later in the morning he came again. 'Is something the matter with you?' he asked. 'I shall be very dull to-day

if you cannot play draughts with me.' But when he came close to her she only buried herself more deeply than ever under the bedclothes. He waited till the room was empty and then bending over her he said 'Why are you treating me in this surly way? I little expected to find you in so bad a humour this morning. The others will think it very strange if you lie here all day,' and he pulled aside the scarlet coverlet beneath which she had dived. To his astonishment he found that she was bathed in sweat; even the hair that hung across her cheeks was dripping wet. 'No! This is too much,' he said; 'what a state you have worked yourself up into!' But try as he would to coax her back to reason he could not get a word out of her, for she was really feeling very vexed with him indeed. 'Very well then,' he said at last, 'if that is how you feel I will never come to see you again,' and he pretended to be very much mortified and humiliated. Turning away, he opened the writing-box to see whether she had written any answer to his poem, but of course found none. He understood perfectly that her distress was due merely to extreme youth and inexperience, and was not at all put out. All day long he sat near her trying to win back her confidence, and though he had small success he found even her rebuffs in a curious way very endearing.

At nightfall, it being the Day of the Wild Boar, the festival cakes were served. Owing to Genji's bereavement no great display was made, but a few were brought round to Murasaki's quarters in an elegant picnic-basket. Seeing that the different kinds were all mixed up together Genji came out into the

front part of the house and calling for Koremitsu said to him: 'I want you to take these cakes away and bring me some more to-morrow evening; only not nearly so many as this, and all of one kind. This is not the right evening for them.' He smiled as he said these words and Koremitsu was quick-witted enough at once to guess what had happened. He did not however think that it would be discreet to congratulate his master in so many words, and merely said: 'It is true enough that if you want to make a good beginning you must eat your cakes on the proper day. The day of the Rat is certainly very much to the purpose. Pray how many am I to bring?' When Genji answered 'Divide by three and you will get the answer,' Koremitsu was no longer in any doubt, and hastily retired, leaving Genji amused at the practised air with which he invariably handled matters of this kind. He said nothing to anyone, but returning to his private house made the cakes there with his own hands.

Genji was beginning to despair of ever restoring her confidence and good humour. But even now, when she seemed as shy of him as on the night when he first stole her from her home, her beauty fascinated him and he knew that his love for her in past days had been but a particle compared with what he had felt since yesterday.

How strange a thing is the heart of man! For now it would have seemed to him a calamity if even for a single night he had been taken from Murasaki's side; and only a little while ago....

Koremitsu brought the cakes which Genji had ordered very late on the following night. He was careful not to entrust them to Shōnagon, for he thought that such a commission might embarrass a grown woman. Instead, he sent for her daughter Miss Ben and putting all the cakes into one large perfume-box he bade her take them secretly to her mistress. 'Be sure to put them close by her pillow, for they are lucky cakes and must not be left about the house. Promise me not to do anything silly with them.' Miss Ben thought all this very odd, but tossing her head she answered 'When, pray, did you ever know me to be silly,' and she walked off with the box. Being quite a young girl and completely innocent as regards matters of this kind she marched straight up to her mistress's bed and, remembering Koremitsu's instructions, pushed the box through the curtains and lodged it safely by the pillow. It seemed to her that there was someone else there as well as Murasaki. 'No doubt,' thought she 'Prince Genji has come as usual to hear her repeat her lessons.'

As yet no one in the household save Koremitsu had any knowledge of the betrothal. But when next day the box was found by the bed and brought into the servant's quarters some of those who were in closest touch with their master's affairs at once guessed the secret. Where did these little dishes come from, each set on its own little carved stand? and who had been at such pains to make these dainty and ingenious cakes? Shōnagon, though she was shocked at this casual way of slipping into matrimony, was overjoyed to learn that Genji's

strange patronage of her young mistress had at last culminated in a definite act of betrothal, and her eyes brimmed with tears of thankfulness and delight. All the same, she thought he might at least have taken the trouble to inform her old nurse, and there was a good deal of grumbling in the household generally at an outside retainer such as Koremitsu having got wind of the matter first.

During the days that followed he grudged even the short hours of attendance which he was obliged to put in at the Palace and in his father's rooms, discovering (much to his own surprise) that save in her presence he could no longer enjoy a moment's peace. The friends whom he had been wont to visit showed themselves both surprised and offended by this unexplained neglect, but though he had no wish to stand ill with them he now found that even a remote prospect of having to absent himself from his palace for a single night was enough to throw him quite out of gear; and all the time he was away his spirits were at the very lowest ebb and he looked for all the world as though he were sickening from some strange illness. To all invitations or greetings he invariably replied that he was at present in no fit mood for company (which was naturally taken as an allusion to his recent loss) or that he must now be gone, for someone with whom he had business was already awaiting him.

The Minister of the Right was aware that his youngest daughter was still pining for Prince Genji and he said one day to Princess Kōkiden: 'While his wife was alive

we were bound of course to discourage her friendship with him in every way we could. But the position is now quite changed and I feel that as things are there would be much to be said for such a match.' But Kōkiden had always hated Genji and having herself arranged that her sister should enter the Palace, she saw no reason why this plan should suddenly be abandoned. Indeed from this moment onwards she became obstinately determined that the girl should be given to the Emperor and to no one else. Genji indeed still retained a certain partiality towards her; but though it grieved him to hear that he had made her unhappy he had not at present any spare affection to offer her. Life, he had come to the conclusion, was not long enough for diversions and experiments; henceforward he would concentrate. He had moreover received a terrible warning of the dangers which might accrue from such jealousies and resentments as his former way of life had involved. He thought with great tenderness and concern of Lady Rokujō's distress; but it was clear to him that he must beware of ever again allowing her to regard him as her true haven of refuge. If however she would renew their friendship in quite new terms, permitting him to enjoy her company and conversation at such times as he could conveniently arrange to do so, he saw no reason why they should not sometimes meet.

Society at large knew that someone was living with him, but her identity was quite unknown. This was of no consequence; but Genji felt that sooner or later he

ought to let her father Prince Hyōbukyō know what had become of her and decided that before he did so it would be best to celebrate her Initiation. This was done privately, but he was at pains that every detail of the ceremony should be performed with due splendour and solemnity, and though the outside world was not invited it was as magnificent an affair as it well could be. But ever since their betrothal Murasaki had shown a certain shyness and diffidence in his presence. She could not help feeling sorry that after all the years during which they had got on so well together and been such close friends he should suddenly take this strange idea into his head, and whenever her eyes met his she hastily averted them. He tried to make a joke of the matter, but to her it was very serious indeed and weighed heavily upon her mind. Her changed attitude towards him was indeed somewhat comic; but it was also very distressing, and one day he said: 'Sometimes it seems as though you had forgotten all the long years of our friendship and I had suddenly become as new to you as at the start'; and while thus he scolded her the year drew to a close. On New Year's Day he paid the usual visits of ceremony to his father, to the Emperor and to the Heir Apparent. Next he visited the Great Hall. The old Minister made no reference to the new year, but at once began to speak of the past. In the midst of his loneliness and sorrow he was so deeply moved even by this hasty and long deferred visit that though he strove hard to keep his composure it was more than he could compass to do. Looking fondly at his son-in-law he

thought that the passage of each fresh year did but add new beauty to this fair face. They went together into the inner rooms, where his entry surprised and delighted beyond measure the disconsolate ladies who had remained behind. Next they visited the little prince who was growing into a fine child; his merry face was indeed a pleasure to see. His resemblance to the Heir Apparent was certainly very striking and Genji wondered whether it had been noticed.

Aoi's things were still as she had left them. His New Year clothes had as in former years been hung out for him on the clothes-frame. Aoi's clothes-frame which stood empty beside it wore a strangely desolate air. A letter from the Princess her mother was now brought to him: 'To-day,' she said, 'our bereavement was more than ever present to my mind, and though touched at the news of your visit, I fear that to see you would but awaken unhappy recollections.' 'You will remember,' she continued, 'that it was my custom to present you with a suit of clothes on each New Year's Day. But in these last months my sight has been so dimmed with tears that I fear you will think I have matched the colours very ill. Nevertheless I beg that though it be for to-day only you will suffer yourself to be disfigured by this unfashionable garb ...' and a servant held out before him a second suit, which was evidently the one he was expected to wear to-day. The under-stuff was of a most unusual pattern and mixture of colours and did not at all please him; but he could not allow her to feel that she had laboured in vain, and at once put the suit on. It was indeed fortunate that he had come to the

Great Hall that day, for he could see that she had counted on it. In his reply he said: 'Though I came with the hope that you would be the first friend I should greet at this new springtide, yet now that I am here too many bitter memories assail me and I think it wiser that we should not meet.' To this he added an acrostic poem in which he said that with the mourning dress which he had just discarded so many years of friendship were cast aside that were he to come to her he could but weep. To this she sent in answer an acrostic poem in which she said that in this new season when all things else on earth put on altered hue, one thing alone remained as in the months gone by—her longing for the child who like the passing year had vanished from their sight.

But though hers may have been the greater grief we must not think that there was not at that moment very deep emotion on both sides.