



*THE TALE
OF GENJI*

TRANSLATED WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY *Edward G. Seidensticker*

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BY *Murasaki Shikibu*

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6 | *Heartvine*



With the new reign Genji's career languished, and since he must be the more discreet about his romantic adventures as he rose in rank, he had less to amuse him. Everywhere there were complaints about his aloofness.

As if to punish him, there was one lady who continued to cause him pain with her own aloofness. Fujitsubo saw more of the old emperor, now abdicated, than ever. She was always at his side, almost as if she were a common housewife. Annoyed at this state of affairs, Kokiden did not follow the old emperor when he left the main palace. Fujitsubo was happy and secure. The concerts in the old emperor's palace attracted the attention of the whole court, and altogether life was happier for the two of them than while he had reigned. Only one thing was lacking: he greatly missed the crown prince, Fujitsubo's son, and worried that he had no strong backers. Genji,

he said, must be the boy's adviser and guardian. Genji was both pleased and embarrassed.

And there was the matter of the lady at Rokujō. With the change of reigns, her daughter, who was also the daughter of the late crown prince, had been appointed high priestess of the Ise Shrine. No longer trusting Genji's affections, the Rokujō lady had been thinking that, making the girl's youth her excuse, she too would go to Ise.

The old emperor heard of her plans. "The crown prince was so very fond of her," he said to Genji, in open displeasure. "It is sad that you should have made light of her, as if she were any ordinary woman. I think of the high priestess as one of my own children, and you should be good to her mother, for my sake and for the sake of the dead prince. It does you no good to abandon yourself to these affairs quite as the impulse takes you."

It was perfectly true, thought Genji. He waited in silence.

"You should treat any woman with tact and courtesy, and be sure that you cause her no embarrassment. You should never have a woman angry with you."

What would his father think if he were to learn of Genji's worst indiscretion? The thought made Genji shudder. He bowed and withdrew.

The matter his father had thus reproved him for did no good for either of them, the woman or Genji himself. It was a scandal, and very sad for her. She continued to be very much on his mind, and yet he had no thought of making her his wife. She had grown cool toward him, worried about the difference in their ages. He made it seem that it was because of her wishes that he stayed away. Now that the old emperor knew of the affair the whole court knew of it. In spite of everything, the lady went on grieving that he had not loved her better.

There was another lady, his cousin Princess Asagao. Determined that she would not share the plight of the Rokujō

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lady, she refused even the briefest answer to his notes. Still, and he thought her most civil for it, she was careful to avoid giving open offense.

At Sanjō, his wife and her family were even unhappier about his infidelities, but, perhaps because he did not lie to them, they for the most part kept their displeasure to themselves. His wife was with child and in considerable distress mentally and physically. For Genji it was a strange and moving time. Everyone was delighted and at the same time filled with apprehension, and all manner of retreats and abstinences were prescribed for the lady. Genji had little time to himself. While he had no particular wish to avoid the Rokujō lady and the others, he rarely visited them.

At about this time the high priestess of Kamo resigned. She was replaced by the old emperor's third daughter, whose mother was Kokiden. The new priestess was a favorite of both her brother, the new emperor, and her mother, and it seemed a great pity that she should be shut off from court life; but no other princess was qualified for the position. The installation ceremonies, in the austere Shinto tradition, were of great dignity and solemnity. Many novel details were added to the Kamo festival in the Fourth Month, so that it was certain to be the finest of the season. Though the number of high courtiers attending the princess at the lustration* was limited by precedent, great care was taken to choose handsome men of good repute. Similar care was given to their uniforms and to the uniform trappings of their horses. Genji was among the attendants, by special command of the new emperor. Courtiers and ladies had readied their carriages far in advance, and Ichijō was a frightening crush, without space for another vehicle. The stands along the way had been appointed most elaborately. The sleeves that showed beneath the curtains fulfilled in their brightness and variety all the festive promise.

* At the Kamo River, some days in advance of the festival.

Genji's wife seldom went forth on sightseeing expeditions and her pregnancy was another reason for staying at home.

But her young women protested. "Really, my lady, it won't be much fun sneaking off by ourselves. Why, even complete strangers—why, all the country folk have come in to see our lord! They've brought their wives and families from the farthest provinces. It will be too much if you make us stay away."

Her mother, Princess Omiya, agreed. "You seem to be feeling well enough, my dear, and they will be very disappointed if you don't take them."

And so carriages were hastily and unostentatiously decked out, and the sun was already high when they set forth. The waysides were by now too crowded to admit the elegant Sanjō procession. Coming upon several fine carriages not attended by grooms and footmen, the Sanjō men commenced clearing a space. Two palm-frond carriages remained, not new ones, obviously belonging to someone who did not wish to attract attention. The curtains and the sleeves and aprons to be glimpsed beneath them, some in the gay colors little girls wear, were in very good taste.

The men in attendance sought to defend their places against the Sanjō invaders. "We aren't the sort of people you push around."

There had been too much drink in both parties, and the drunken ones were not responsive to the efforts of their more mature and collected seniors to restrain them.

The palm-frond carriages were from the Rokujō house of the high priestess of Ise. The Rokujō lady had come quietly to see the procession, hoping that it might make her briefly forget her unhappiness. The men from Sanjō had recognized her, but preferred to make it seem otherwise.

"They can't tell us who to push and not to push," said the more intemperate ones to their fellows. "They have General Genji to make them feel important."

Among the newcomers were some of Genji's men. They



recognized and felt a little sorry for the Rokujō lady, but, not wishing to become involved, they looked the other way. Presently all the Sanjō carriages were in place. The Rokujō lady, behind the lesser ones, could see almost nothing. Quite aside from her natural distress at the insult, she was filled with the bitterest chagrin that, having refrained from display, she had been recognized. The stools for her carriage shafts had been broken and the shafts propped on the hubs of perfectly strange carriages, a most undignified sight. It was no good asking

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herself why she had come. She thought of going home without seeing the procession, but there was no room for her to pass; and then came word that the procession was approaching, and she must, after all, see the man who had caused her such unhappiness. How weak is the heart of a woman! Perhaps because this was not "the bamboo by the river Hinokuma,"* he passed without stopping his horse or looking her way; and the unhappiness was greater than if she had stayed at home.

Genji seemed indifferent to all the grandly decorated carriages and all the gay sleeves, such a flood of them that it was as if ladies were stacked in layers behind the carriage curtains. Now and again, however, he would have a smile and a glance for a carriage he recognized. His face was solemn and respectful as he passed his wife's carriage. His men bowed deeply, and the Rokujō lady was in misery. She had been utterly defeated.

She whispered to herself:

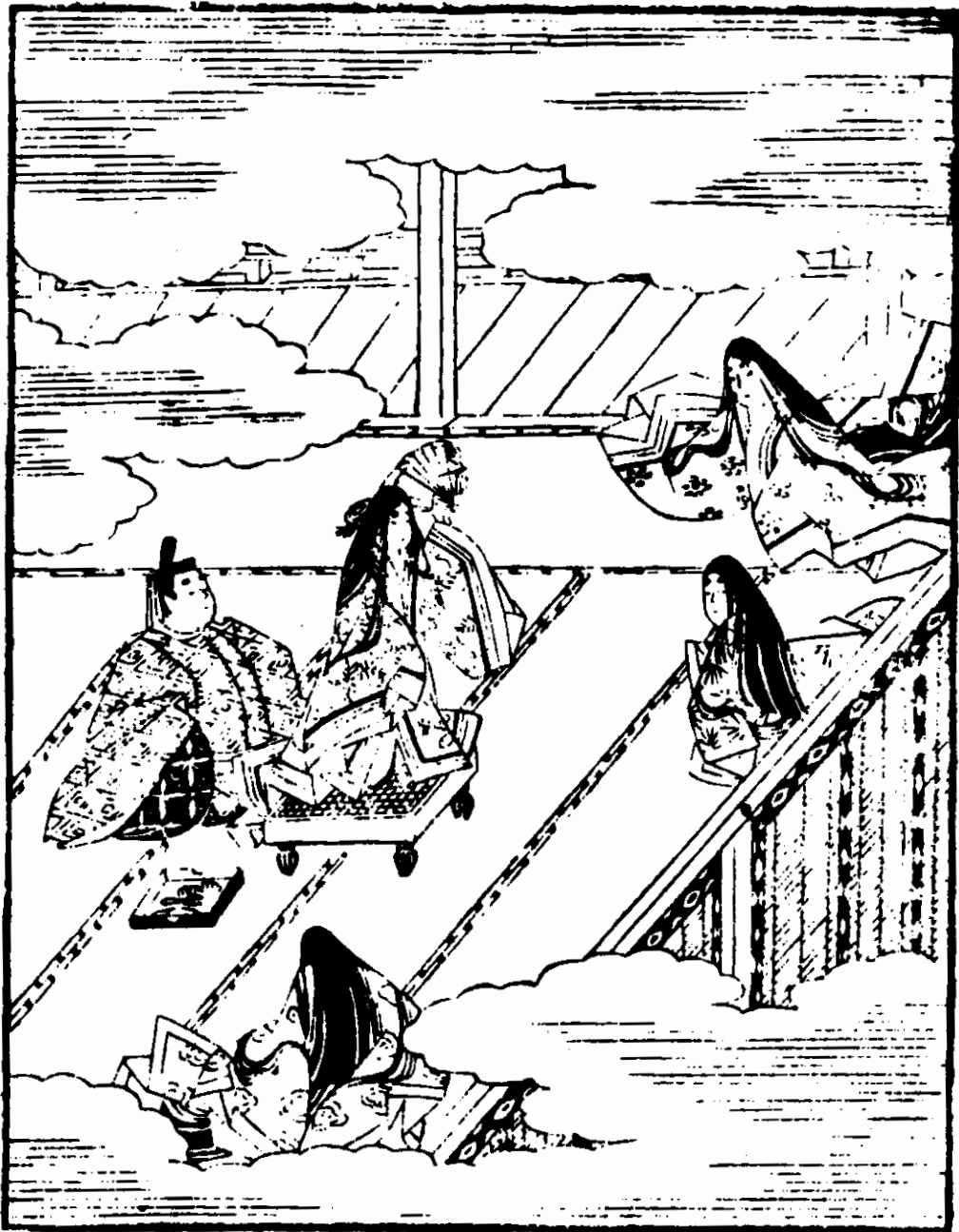
"A distant glimpse of the River of Lustration.
His coldness is the measure of my sorrow."

She was ashamed of her tears. Yet she thought how sorry she would have been if she had not seen that handsome figure set off to such advantage by the crowds.

The high courtiers were, after their several ranks, impeccably dressed and caparisoned and many of them were very handsome; but Genji's radiance dimmed the strongest lights. Among his special attendants was a guards officer of the Sixth Rank, though attendants of such standing were usually reserved for the most splendid royal processions. His retinue made such a fine procession itself that every tree and

* Anonymous, *Kokinshū* 1080:

In the bamboo by the river Hinokuma,
Stop that your horse may drink, and I may see you.



blade of grass along the way seemed to bend forward in admiration.

It is not on the whole considered good form for veiled ladies of no mean rank and even nuns who have withdrawn from the world to be jostling and shoving one another in the struggle to see, but today no one thought it out of place. Hollow-mouthed women of the lower classes, their hair tucked under their robes, their hands brought respectfully to their foreheads, were hopping about in hopes of catching a

glimpse. Plebeian faces were wreathed in smiles which their owners might not have enjoyed seeing in mirrors, and daughters of petty provincial officers of whose existence Genji would scarcely have been aware had set forth in carriages decked out with the most exhaustive care and taken up posts which seemed to offer a chance of being seen. There were almost as many things by the wayside as in the procession to attract one's attention.

And there were many ladies whom he had seen in secret and who now sighed more than ever that their station was so out of keeping with his. Prince Shikibu viewed the procession from a stand. Genji had matured and did indeed quite dazzle the eye, and the prince thought with foreboding that some god might have noticed, and was making plans to spirit the young man away. His daughter, Princess Asagao, having over the years found Genji a faithful correspondent, knew how remarkably steady his feelings were. She was aware that attentions moved ladies even when the donor was a most ordinary man; yet she had no wish for further intimacy. As for her women, their sighs of admiration were almost deafening.

No carriages set out from the Sanjō mansion on the day of the festival proper.

Genji presently heard the story of the competing carriages. He was sorry for the Rokujō lady and angry at his wife. It was a sad fact that, so deliberate and fastidious, she lacked ordinary compassion. There was indeed a tart, forbidding quality about her. She refused to see, though it was probably an unconscious refusal, that ladies who were to each other as she was to the Rokujō lady should behave with charity and forbearance. It was under her influence that the men in her service flung themselves so violently about. Genji sometimes felt uncomfortable before the proud dignity of the Rokujō lady, and he could imagine her rage and humiliation now.

He called upon her. The high priestess, her daughter, was

still with her, however, and, making reverence for the sacred *sakaki* tree* her excuse, she declined to receive him.

She was right, of course. Yet he muttered to himself: "Why must it be so? Why cannot the two of them be a little less prickly?"

It was from his Nijō mansion, away from all this trouble, that he set forth to view the festival proper. Going over to Murasaki's rooms in the west wing, he gave Koremitsu instructions for the carriages.

"And are all our little ladies going too?" he asked. He smiled with pleasure at Murasaki, lovely in her festive dress. "We will watch it together." He stroked her hair, which seemed more lustrous than ever. "It hasn't been trimmed in a very long time. I wonder if today would be a good day for it." He summoned a soothsayer and while the man was investigating told the "little ladies" to go on ahead. They too were a delight, bright and fresh, their hair all sprucely trimmed and flowing over embroidered trousers.

He would trim Murasaki's hair himself, he said. "But see how thick it is. The scissors get all tangled up in it. Think how it will be when you grow up. Even ladies with very long hair usually cut it here at the forehead, and you've not a single lock of short hair. A person might even call it untidy."

The joy was more than a body deserved, said Shōnagon, her nurse.

"May it grow to a thousand fathoms," said Genji.

"Mine it shall be, rich as the grasses beneath
The fathomless sea, the thousand-fathomed sea."

Murasaki took out brush and paper and set down her answer:

* A glossy-leaved tree related to the camellia. Its branches are used in Shinto ritual.

"It may indeed be a thousand fathoms deep.
How can I know, when it restlessly comes and
goes?"

She wrote well, but a pleasant girlishness remained.

Again the streets were lined in solid ranks. Genji's party pulled up near the cavalry grounds, unable to find a place.

"Very difficult," said Genji. "Too many of the great ones hereabouts."

A fan was thrust from beneath the blinds of an elegant ladies' carriage that was filled to overflowing.

"Suppose you pull in here," said a lady. "I would be happy to relinquish my place."

What sort of adventuress might she be? The place was indeed a good one. He had his carriage pulled in.

"How did you find it? I am consumed with envy."

She wrote her reply at the bent edge of a pretty little fan:

"Ah, the fickleness! It summoned me
To a meeting, the heartvine now worn by another.*

"The gods themselves seemed to summon me, though of course I am not admitted to the sacred precincts."

He recognized the hand: that of old Naishi,† still youthfully resisting the years.

Frowning, he sent back:

"Yes, fickleness, this vine of the day of meeting,
Available to all the eighty clans."

* The *aoi*, a vine the heart-shaped leaves of which are a common decorative motif, was a symbol of the Kamo festival. Because of its sound, *aoi* being also "day of meeting," it was much used in poetry to signify a rendezvous. This exchange of poems gives the chapter its title, and from the chapter title, in turn, comes the name Aoi, by which Genji's wife has traditionally been known.

† See Chapter 4.

It was her turn to reply, this time in much chagrin:

“Vine of meeting indeed! A useless weed,
A mouthing, its name, of empty promises.”

Many ladies along the way bemoaned the fact that, apparently in feminine company, he did not even raise the blinds of his carriage. Such a stately figure on the day of the lustration—and just see him today, quite at his ease, for everyone to see. The lady with him must surely be a beauty.

A tasteless exchange, thought Genji. A more proper lady would have kept the strictest silence, out of deference to the lady with him.

For the Rokujō lady the pain was unrelieved. She knew that she could expect no lessening of his coldness, and yet to steel herself and go off to Ise with her daughter—she would be lonely, she knew, and people would laugh at her. They would laugh just as heartily if she stayed in the city. Her thoughts were as the fisherman’s bob at Ise.* Her very soul seemed to jump wildly about, and at last she fell physically ill.

Genji discounted the possibility of her going to Ise. “It is natural that you should have little use for a reprobate like myself and think of discarding me. But to stay with me would be to show admirable depths of feeling.”

These remarks did not seem very helpful. Her anger and sorrow increased. A hope of relief from this agony of indecision had sent her to the river of lustration, and there she had been subjected to violence.

At Sanjō, Genji’s wife seemed to be in the grip of a malign spirit. It was no time for nocturnal wanderings. Genji paid

* Anonymous, *Kokinshū* 509:

Has my heart become the fisherman’s bob at Ise?
It jumps and bobs and knows not calm or resolve.

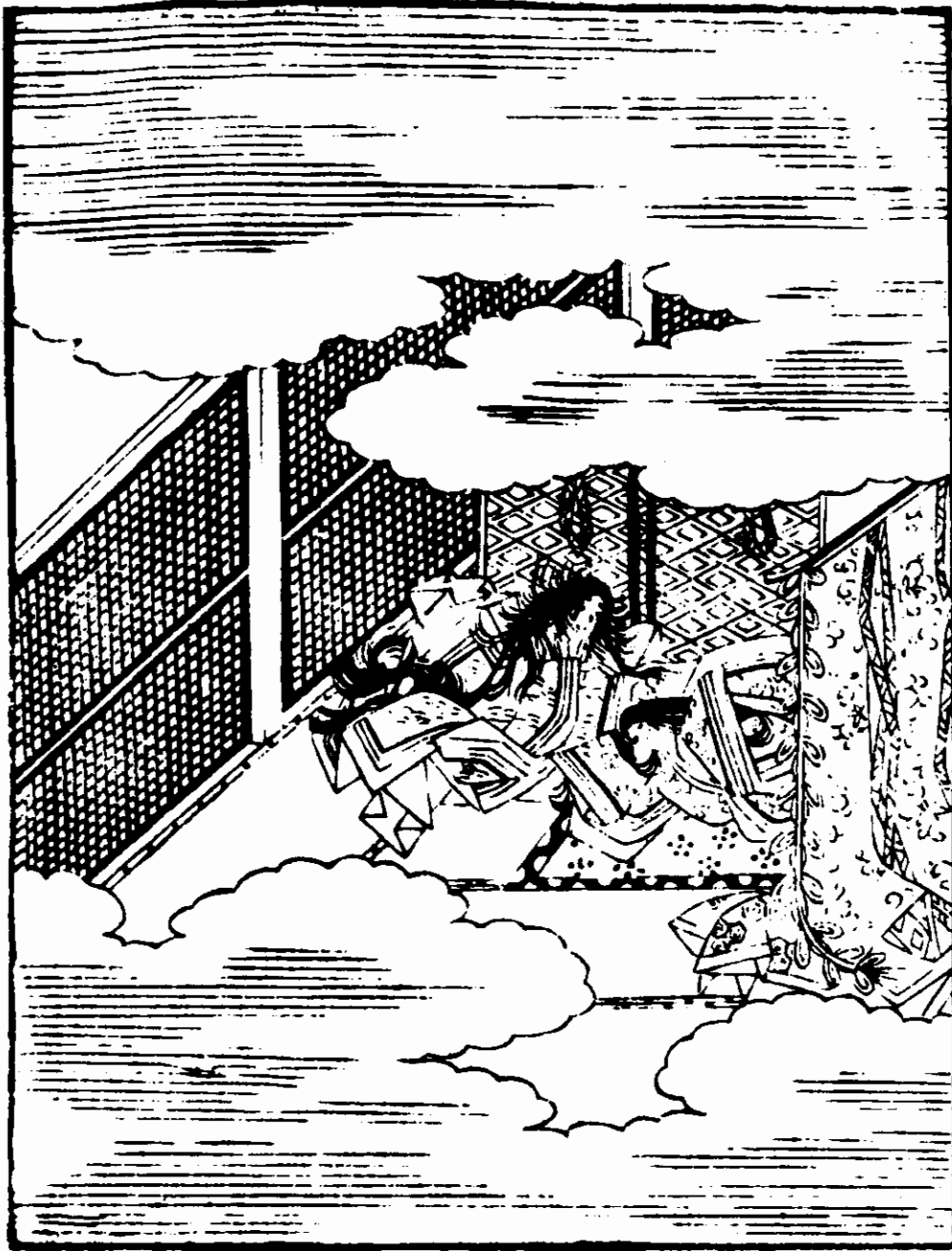
only an occasional visit to his own Nijō mansion. His marriage had not been happy, but his wife was important to him and now she was carrying his child. He had prayers read in his Sanjō rooms. Several malign spirits were transferred to the medium and identified themselves, but there was one which quite refused to move. Though it did not cause great pain, it refused to leave her for so much as an instant. There was something very sinister about a spirit that eluded the powers of the most skilled exorcists. The Sanjō people went over the list of Genji's ladies one by one. Among them all, it came to be whispered, only the Rokujō lady and the lady at Nijō seemed to have been singled out for special attentions, and no doubt they were jealous. The exorcists were asked about the possibility, but they gave no very informative answers. Of the spirits that did announce themselves, none seemed to feel any deep enmity toward the lady. Their behavior seemed random and purposeless. There was the spirit of her dead nurse, for instance, and there were spirits that had been with the family for generations and had taken advantage of her weakness.

The confusion and worry continued. The lady would sometimes weep in loud wailing sobs, and sometimes be tormented by nausea and shortness of breath.

The old emperor sent repeated inquiries and ordered religious services. That the lady should be worthy of these august attentions made the possibility of her death seem even more lamentable. Reports that they quite monopolized the attention of court reached the Rokujō mansion, to further embitter its lady. No one can have guessed that the trivial incident of the carriages had so angered a lady whose sense of rivalry had not until then been strong.

Not at all herself, she left her house to her daughter and moved to one where Buddhist rites would not be out of place.*

* They were out of place in the house of a Shinto priestess.



Sorry to hear of the move, Genji bestirred himself to call on her. The neighborhood was a strange one and he was in careful disguise. He explained his negligence in terms likely to make it seem involuntary and to bring her forgiveness, and he told her of Aoi's* illness and the worry it was causing him.

"I have not been so very worried myself, but her parents are beside themselves. It has seemed best to stay with her. It

* Genji's wife's. See note *, page 155.

would relieve me enormously if I thought you might take a generous view of it all.” He knew why she was unwell, and pitied her.

They passed a tense night. As she saw him off in the dawn she found that her plans for quitting the city were not as firm as on the day before. Her rival was of the highest rank and there was this important new consideration; no doubt his affections would finally settle on her. She herself would be left in solitude, wondering when he might call. The visit had only made her unhappier. In upon her gloom, in the evening, came a letter.

“Though she had seemed to be improving, she has taken a sudden and drastic turn for the worse. I cannot leave her.”

The usual excuses, she thought. Yet she answered:

“I go down the way of love and dampen my
sleeves,
And go yet further, into the muddy fields.

A pity the well is so shallow.”*

The hand was the very best he knew. It was a difficult world, which refused to give satisfaction. Among his ladies there was none who could be dismissed as completely beneath consideration and none to whom he could give his whole love.

Despite the lateness of the hour, he got off an answer: “You only wet your sleeves—what can this mean? That your feelings are not of the deepest, I should think.

“You only dip into the shallow waters,
And I quite disappear into the slough?

* Anonymous, *Kokin Rokujō, Zoku Kokka Taikan* 31863:

A pity the mountain well should be so shallow.
I seek to take water and only wet my sleeve.

“Do you think I would answer by letter and not in person if she were merely indisposed?”

The malign spirit was more insistent, and Aoi was in great distress. Unpleasant rumors reached the Rokujō lady, to the effect that it might be her spirit or that of her father, the late minister. Though she had felt sorry enough for herself, she had not wished ill to anyone; and might it be that the soul of one so lost in sad thoughts went wandering off by itself? She had, over the years, known the full range of sorrows, but never before had she felt so utterly miserable. There had been no release from the anger since the other lady had so insulted her, indeed behaved as if she did not exist. More than once she had the same dream: in the beautifully appointed apartments of a lady who seemed to be a rival she would push and shake the lady, and flail at her blindly and savagely. It was too terrible. Sometimes in a daze she would ask herself if her soul had indeed gone wandering off. The world was not given to speaking well of people whose transgressions had been far slighter. She would be notorious. It was common enough for the spirits of the angry dead to linger on in this world. She had thought them hateful, and it was her own lot to set a hateful example while she still lived. She must think no more about the man who had been so cruel to her. But so to think was, after all, to think.*

The high priestess, her daughter, was to have been presented at court the year before, but complications had required postponement. It was finally decided that in the Ninth Month she would go from court to her temporary shrine. The Rokujō house was thus busy preparing for two lustrations, but its lady, lost in thought, seemed strangely indifferent. A most serious state of affairs—the priestess’s attendants ordered

* A poetic allusion, apparently, but none has been satisfactorily identified.

prayers. There were no really alarming symptoms. She was vaguely unwell, no more. The days passed. Genji sent repeated inquiries, but there was no relief from his worries about another invalid, a more important one.

It was still too early for Aoi to be delivered of her child. Her women were less than fully alert; and then suddenly, she was seized with labor pains. More priests were put to more strenuous prayers. The malign spirit refused to move. The most eminent of exorcists found this stubbornness extraordinary, and could not think what to do. Then, after renewed efforts at exorcism, more intense than before, it commenced sobbing as if in pain.

“Stop for a moment, please. I want to speak to General Genji.”

It was as they had thought. The women showed Genji to a place at Aoi's curtains. Thinking—for she did seem on the point of death—that Aoi had last words for Genji, her parents withdrew. The effect was grandly solemn as priests read from the Lotus Sutra in hushed voices. Genji drew the curtains back and looked down at his wife. She was heavy with child, and very beautiful. Even a man who was nothing to her would have been saddened to look at her. Long, heavy hair, bound at one side, was set off by white robes, and he thought her lovelier than when she was most carefully dressed and groomed.

He took her hand. “How awful. How awful for all of us.” He could say no more.

Usually so haughty and forbidding, she now gazed up at him with languid eyes that were presently filled with tears. How could he fail to be moved? This violent weeping, he thought, would be for her parents, soon to be left behind, and perhaps, at this last leave-taking, for him too.

“You mustn't fret so. It can't be as bad as you think. And even if the worst comes, we will meet again. And your mother and father: the bond between parents and children lasts

through many lives. You must tell yourself that you will see them again."

"No, no. I was hurting so, I asked them to stop for a while. I had not dreamed that I would come to you like this. It is true: a troubled soul will sometimes go wandering off." The voice was gentle and affectionate.

"Bind the hem of my robe, to keep it within,
The grieving soul that has wandered through the
skies."*

It was not Aoi's voice, nor was the manner hers. Extraordinary—and then he knew that it was the voice of the Rokujō lady. He was aghast. He had dismissed the talk as vulgar and ignorant fabrication, and here before his eyes he had proof that such things did actually happen. He was horrified and repelled.

"You may say so. But I don't know who you are. Identify yourself."

It was indeed she. "Aghast"—is there no stronger word? He waved the women back.

Thinking that these calmer tones meant a respite from pain, her mother came with medicine; and even as she drank it down she gave birth to a baby boy. Everyone was delighted, save the spirits that had been transferred to mediums. Chagrined at their failure, they were raising a great stir, and all in all it was a noisy and untidy scene. There was still the afterbirth to worry about. Then, perhaps because of all the prayers, it too was delivered. The grand abbot of Hiei and all the other eminent clerics departed, looking rather pleased with themselves as they mopped their foreheads. Sure that the worst was past after all the anxious days, the women allowed themselves a rest.

* Tying the skirt of a robe was a device for keeping an errant spirit at home.

The prayers went on as noisily as ever, but the house was now caught up in the happy business of ministering to a pretty baby. It hummed with excitement on each of the festive nights.* Fine and unusual gifts came from the old emperor and from all the princes and high courtiers. Ceremonies honoring a boy baby are always interesting.

The Rokujō lady received the news with mixed feelings. She had heard that her rival was critically ill, and now the crisis had passed. She was not herself. The strangest thing was that her robes were permeated with the scent of the poppy seeds burned at exorcisms. She changed clothes repeatedly and even washed her hair, but the odor persisted. She was overcome with self-loathing. And what would others be thinking? It was a matter she could discuss with no one. She could only suffer in distraught silence.

Somewhat calmer, Genji was still horrified at the unsolicited remarks he had had from the possessive spirit. He really must get off a note to the Rokujō lady. Or should he have a talk with her? He would find it hard to be civil, and he did not wish to hurt her. In the end he made do with a note.

Aoi's illness had been critical, and the strictest vigil must be continued. Genji had been persuaded to stop his nocturnal wanderings. He still had not really talked to his wife, for she was still far from normal. The child was so beautiful as to arouse forebodings, and preparations were already under way for a most careful and elaborate education. The minister was pleased with everything save the fact that his daughter had still not recovered. But he told himself that he need not worry. A slow convalescence was to be expected after so serious an illness.

Especially around the eyes, the baby bore a strong resemblance to the crown prince, whom Genji suddenly felt an

* There were celebrations on the third, fifth, seventh, and ninth nights.

intense longing to see. He could not sit still. He had to be off to court.

"I have been neglecting my duties," he said to the women, "and am feeling rather guilty. I think today I will venture out. It would be good if I might see her before I go. I am not a stranger, you know."

"Quite true, sir. You of all people should be allowed near. She is badly emaciated, I fear, but that is scarcely a reason for her to hide herself from you."

And so a place was set out for him at her bedside. She answered from time to time, but in a very weak voice. Even so little, from a lady who had been given up for dead, was like a dream. He told her of those terrible days. Then he remembered how, as if pulling back from a brink, she had begun talking to him so volubly and so eagerly. A shudder of revulsion passed over him.

"There are many things I would like to say to you, but you still seem very tired."

He even prepared medicine for her. The women were filled with admiration. When had he learned to be so useful?

She was sadly worn and lay as if on the border of death, pathetic and still lovely. There was not a tangle in her lustrous hair. The thick tresses that poured over her pillows seemed to him quite beyond compare. He gazed down at her, thinking it odd that he should have felt so dissatisfied with her over the years.

"I must see my father, but I am sure I will not be needed long. How nice if we could always be like this. But your mother is with you so much, I have not wanted to seem insistent. You must get back your strength and move back to your own rooms. Your mother pampers you too much. That may be one reason why you are so slow getting well."

As he withdrew in grand court dress she lay looking after him as she had not been in the habit of doing.

There was to be a conference on promotions and ap-

pointments. The minister too set off for court, in procession with all his sons, each of them with a case to plead and determined not to leave his side.

The Sanjō mansion was almost deserted. Aoi was again seized with a strangling shortness of breath; and very soon after a messenger had been sent to court she was dead. Genji and the others left court, scarcely aware of where their feet were taking them. Appointments and promotions no longer concerned them. Since the crisis had come at about midnight there was no possibility of summoning the grand abbot and his suffragans. Everyone had thought that the worst was over, and now of course everyone was stunned, dazed, wandering aimlessly from room to room, hardly knowing a door from a wall. Messengers crowded in with condolences, but the house was in such confusion that there was no one to receive them. The intensity of the grief was almost frightening. Since malign spirits had more than once attacked the lady, her father ordered the body left as it was for two or three days in hopes that she might revive. The signs of death were more and more pronounced, however, and, in great anguish, the family at length accepted the truth. Genji, who had private distress to add to the general grief, thought he knew as well as anyone ever would what unhappiness love can bring. Condolences even from the people most important to him brought no comfort. The old emperor, himself much grieved, sent a personal message; and so for the minister there was new honor, happiness to temper the sorrow. Yet there was no relief from tears.

Every reasonable suggestion was accepted toward reviving the lady, but, the ravages of death being ever more apparent, there was finally no recourse but to see her to Toribe Moor. There were many heartrending scenes along the way. The crowds of mourners and priests invoking the holy name quite overflowed the wide moor. Messages continued to pour in, from the old emperor, of course, and from the

empress and crown prince and all the great houses as well.

The minister was desolate. "Now in my last years to be left behind by a daughter who should have had so many years before her." No one could see him without sharing his sorrow.

Grandly the services went on through the night, and as dawn came over the sky the mourners turned back to the city, taking with them only a handful of ashes. Funerals are common enough, but Genji, who had not been present at many, was shaken as never before. Since it was late in the Eighth Month a quarter moon still hung in a sky that would have brought melancholy thoughts in any case; and the figure of his father-in-law, as if groping in pitch darkness, seemed proper to the occasion and at the same time indescribably sad.

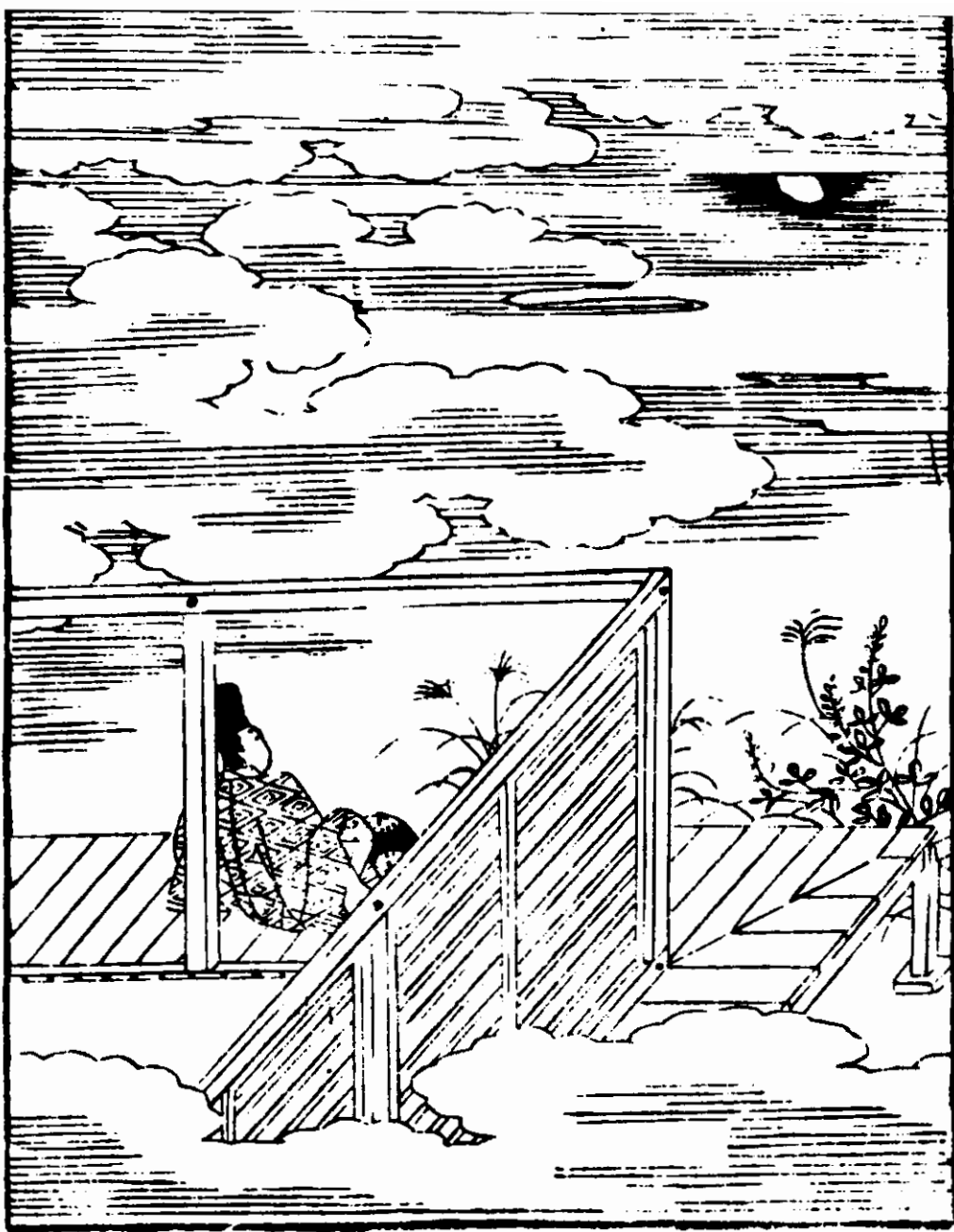
A poem came to his lips as he gazed up into the morning sky:

"Might these clouds be the smoke that mounts
from her pyre?
They fill my heart with feelings too deep for
words."

Back at Sanjō, he was unable to sleep. He thought over their years together. Why had he so carelessly told himself that she would one day understand? Why had he allowed himself silly flirtations, the smallest of them sure to anger her? He had let her carry her hostility to the grave. The regrets were strong, but useless.

It was as if in a trance that he put on the dull gray mourning robes. Had she outlived him, it occurred to him, hers would have been darker gray.*

* A widow wore darker mourning than a widower.



“Weeds obey rules. Mine are the shallower hue.
But tears plunge my sleeves into the deepest
wells.”

He closed his eyes in prayer, a handsomer man in sorrow than in happiness. He intoned softly: “Hail, Samantabhadra, in whose serene thoughts all is contained.”* The invocation

* The source of the invocation is unknown.

seemed more powerful than from the mouth of the most reverend priest.

There were tears in his eyes as he took the little boy up in his arms. "What would we have to remember her by?"* he whispered to himself. The sorrow would be worse if he did not have this child.

Princess Omiya took to her bed in such a sad state that services were now commenced for her. The preparations for memorial rites were the sadder for the fact that there had been so little warning. Parents grieve at the loss of the most ill-favored child, and the intensity of the grief in this case was not to be wondered at. The family had no other daughters. It was as if—it was worse than if the jewels upon the silken sleeve had been shattered to bits.†

Genji did not venture forth even to Nijō. He passed his days in tears and in earnest prayer. He did, it is true, send off a few notes. The high priestess of Ise had moved to a temporary shrine in the guards' quarters of the palace. Making the girl's ritual purity her excuse, the Rokujō lady refused to answer. The world had not been kind to him, and now, gloomier than ever, he thought that if he had not had this new bond with the world he would have liked to follow what had for so long been his deepest inclinations and leave it entirely behind. But then he would think of the girl Murasaki at Nijō. He slept alone. Women were on duty nearby, but still he was lonely. Unable to sleep, he would say to himself: "In autumn, of all the seasons."‡ Summoning priests of good voice, he

* The nurse of Kanetada's mother, *Gosenshū* 1188:

What would we have to remember our lady by
Were it not for this keepsake, this child she left behind?

† Apparently a quotation, but the source has not been identified.

‡ Mibu Tadamine, *Kokinshū* 839:

Why did he die in autumn, of all the seasons?
In autumn one grieves for those who yet remain.

would have them chant the holy name; and the dawn sky would be almost more than he could bear.

In one of those late-autumn dawns when the very sound of the wind seems to sink to one's bones, he arose from a lonely, sleepless bed to see the garden enshrouded in mist. A letter was brought in, on dark blue-gray paper attached to a half-opened bud of chrysanthemum. In the best of taste, he thought. The hand was that of the Rokujō lady.

"Do you know why I have been so negligent?"

"I too am in tears, at the thought of her sad, short
life.

Moist the sleeves of you whom she left behind.

"These autumn skies make it impossible for me to be silent."

The hand was more beautiful than ever. He wanted to fling the note away from him, but could not. It seemed to him altogether too disingenuous. Yet he could not bring himself to sever relations. Poor woman, she seemed marked for notoriety. No doubt Aoi had been fated to die. But anger rose again. Why had he seen and heard it all so clearly, why had it been paraded before him? Try though he might, he could not put his feelings toward the woman in order. He debated at great length, remembering too that perhaps he should hold his tongue out of respect for the high priestess.

But he finally decided that the last thing he wanted was to seem cold and insensitive. His answer was on soft, quiet purple. "You for your part will understand, I am sure, the reasons for this inexcusably long silence. You have been much on my mind, but I have thought it best to keep my distance.

"We go, we stay, alike of this world of dew.

We should not let it have such a hold upon us.

"You too should try to shake loose. I shall be brief, for perhaps you will not welcome a letter from a house of mourning."

Now back at Rokujō, she waited until she was alone to read the letter. Her conscience told her his meaning all too clearly. So he knew. It was too awful. Surely no one had been more cruelly treated by fate than herself. What would the old emperor be thinking? He and her late husband, the crown prince, were brothers by the same mother, and they had been very close. The prince had asked his protection for their daughter, and he had replied that he would look upon himself as taking the place of her father. He had repeatedly invited the lady and her daughter to go on living in the palace, but she held to a demanding view of the proprieties. And so she had found herself in this childish entanglement, and had succeeded in making a very bad name for herself. She was still not feeling well.

In fact, the name she had made for herself was rather different. She had long been famous for her subtlety and refinement, and when her daughter moved to another temporary shrine, this one to the west of the city, all the details were tasteful and in the latest fashion. Genji was not surprised to hear that the more cultivated of the courtiers were making it their main business to part the dew-drenched grasses before the shrine. She was a lady of almost too good taste. If, wanting no more of love, she were to go with her daughter to Ise, he would, after all, miss her.

The memorial services were over, but Genji remained in seclusion for seven weeks. Pitying him in the unaccustomed tedium, Tō no Chūjō would come and divert him with the latest talk, serious and trivial; and it seems likely that old Naishi was cause for a good laugh now and then.

"You mustn't make fun of dear old Granny," said Genji; but he found stories of the old lady unfailingly amusing.

They would go over the list of their little adventures, on

the night of a misty autumn moon, just past full, and others; and their talk would come around to the evanescence of things and they would shed a few tears.

On an evening of chilly autumn rains, Tō no Chūjō again came calling. He had changed to lighter mourning and presented a fine, manly figure indeed, enough to put most men to shame. Genji was at the railing of the west veranda, looking out over the frostbitten garden. The wind was high and it was as if his tears sought to compete with the driven rain.

"Is she the rain, is she the clouds? Alas, I cannot say."*

He sat chin in hand. Were he himself the dead lady, thought Tō no Chūjō, his soul would certainly remain bound to this world. He came up to his friend. Genji, who had not expected callers, quietly smoothed his robes, a finely glossed red singlet under a robe of a deeper gray than Tō no Chūjō's. It was the modest, conservative sort of dress that never seems merely dull.

Tō no Chūjō too looked up at the sky.

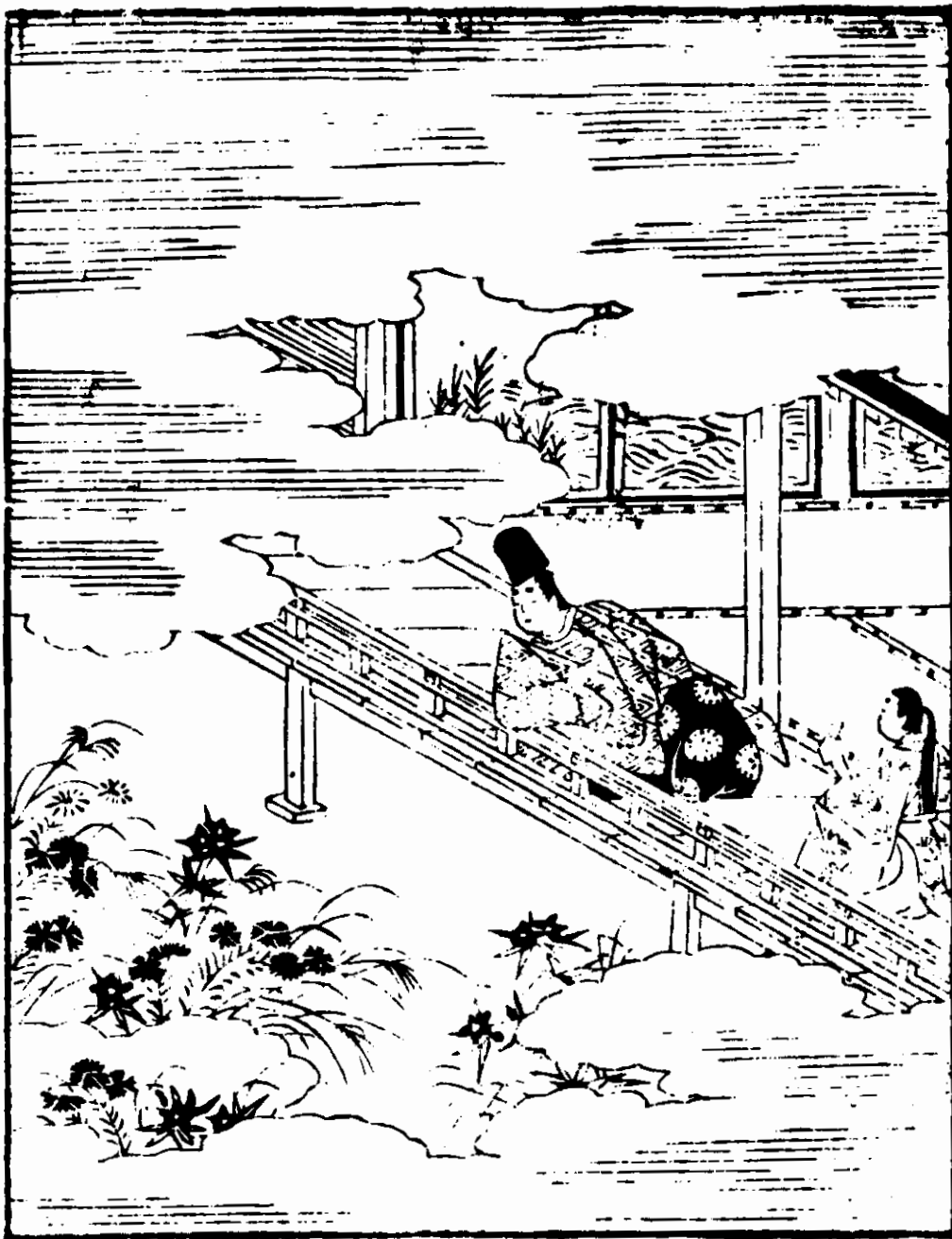
"Is she the rain? Where in these stormy skies,
To which of these brooding clouds may I look to
find her?

Neither can I say," he added, as if to himself.

"It is a time of storms when even the clouds
To which my lady has risen are blotted away."

Genji's grief was clearly unfeigned. Very odd, thought Tō no Chūjō. Genji had so often been reproved by his father for not being a better husband, and the attentions of his father-in-law had made him very uncomfortable. There were circumstances, having largely to do with his nearness to Princess

* More than one Chinese source has been averred.



Omiya, which kept him from leaving Aoi completely; and so he had continued to wait upon her, making little attempt to hide his dissatisfaction. Tō no Chūjō had more than once been moved to pity him in this unhappy predicament. And now it seemed that she had after all had a place in his affections, that he had loved and honored her. Tō no Chūjō's own sorrow was more intense for the knowledge. It was as if a light had gone out.

Gentians and wild carnations peeped from the frosty tan-



7 | *The Sacred Tree*

The Rokujō lady was more and more despondent as the time neared for her daughter's departure. Since the death of Aoi, who had caused her such pain, Genji's visits, never frequent, had stopped altogether. They had aroused great excitement among her women, who hoped that now he would marry her. Genji must have very specific reasons for having turned against her—there was no explaining his extreme coldness otherwise. She would think no more about him. She would go with her daughter. There were no precedents for a mother's accompanying a high priestess to Ise, but she had as her excuse that her daughter would be helpless without her. The real reason, of course, was that she wanted to flee these painful associations.

In spite of everything, Genji was sorry when he heard of her decision. He now wrote often and almost pleadingly, but she

thought a meeting out of the question at this late date. She would risk disappointing him rather than have it all begin again.

She occasionally went from the priestess's temporary shrine to her Rokujō house, but so briefly and in such secrecy that Genji did not hear of the visits. The temporary shrine did not, he thought, invite casual visits. Although she was much on his mind, he let the days and months go by. His father, the old emperor, had begun to suffer from recurrent aches and cramps, and Genji had little time for himself. Yet he did not want the lady to go off to Ise thinking him completely heartless, nor did he wish to have a name at court for insensitivity. He gathered his resolve and set off for the shrine.

It was on about the seventh of the Ninth Month. The lady was under great tension, for their departure was imminent, possibly only a day or two away. He had several times asked for a word with her. He need not go inside, he said, but could wait on the veranda. She was in a torment of uncertainty but at length reached a secret decision: she did not want to seem like a complete recluse and so she would receive him through curtains.

It was over a reed plain of melancholy beauty that he made his way to the shrine. The flowers were gone and insects hummed sadly in the wintry tangles. A wind whistling through the pines brought snatches of music to most wonderful effect, though so distant that he could not tell what was being played. Not wishing to attract attention, he had some ten outrunners, men who had long been in his service, and his guards were in subdued livery. He had dressed with great care. His more perceptive men saw how beautifully the melancholy scene set him off, and he was having regrets that he had not made the journey often. A low wattle fence, scarcely more than a suggestion of an enclosure, surrounded a complex of board-roofed buildings, as rough and insubstantial as temporary shelters.

The shrine gates, of unfinished logs, had a grand and awe-

some dignity for all their simplicity, and the somewhat forbidding austerity of the place was accentuated by clusters of priests talking among themselves and coughing and clearing their throats as if in warning. It was a scene quite unlike any Genji had seen before. The fire lodge* glowed faintly. It was all in all a lonely, quiet place, and here a way from the world a lady already deep in sorrow had passed these weeks and months. Concealing himself outside the north wing, he sent in word of his arrival. The music abruptly stopped and the silence was broken only by a rustling of silken robes.

Though several messages were passed back and forth, the lady herself did not come out.

"You surely know that these expeditions are frowned upon. I find it very curious that I should be required to wait outside the sacred paling. I want to tell you everything, all my sorrows and worries."

He was right, said the women. It was more than a person could bear, seeing him out there without even a place to sit down. What was she to do? thought the lady. There were all these people about, and her daughter would expect more mature and sober conduct. No, to receive him at this late date would be altogether too undignified. Yet she could not bring herself to send him briskly on his way. She sighed and hesitated and hesitated again, and it was with great excitement that he finally heard her come forward.

"May I at least come up to the veranda?" he asked, starting up the stairs.

The evening moon burst forth and the figure she saw in its light was handsome beyond describing.

Not wishing to apologize for all the weeks of neglect, he pushed a branch of the sacred tree† in under the blinds.

"I come through the sacred gate," he said, "because I obey

* There are several theories about the use of this building. The most likely are that it was for preparing offerings and that it was for lighting torches and flares.

† *Sakaki*, related to the camellia. See note *, page 154.



the urgings of a heart as constant as this evergreen. You do not respond as I had hoped you would.”

She replied:

“You err with your sacred tree and sacred gate.
No beckoning cedars stand before my house.”*

* Anonymous, *Kokinshū* 982:

Should you seek my house at the foot of Mount Miwa,
You need only look for the cedars by the gate.

And he:

“Thinking to find you here with the holy maidens,
I followed the scent of the leaf of the sacred
tree.”

Though the scene did not encourage familiarity, he made bold to lean inside the blinds.

He had complacently wasted the days when he could have visited her and perhaps made her happy. He had begun to have misgivings about her, his ardor had cooled, and they had become the near strangers they were now. But she was here before him, and memories flooded back. He thought of what had been and what was to be, and he was weeping like a child.

She did not wish him to see her following his example. He felt even sadder for her as she fought to control herself, and it would seem that even now he urged her to change her plans. Gazing up into a sky even more beautiful now that the moon was setting, he poured forth all his pleas and complaints, and no doubt they were enough to erase the accumulated bitterness. She had resigned herself to what must be, and it was as she had feared. Now that she was with him again she found her resolve wavering.

Groups of young courtiers came up. It was a garden which aroused romantic urges and which a young man was reluctant to leave.

Their feelings for each other, Genji's and the lady's, had run the whole range of sorrows and irritations, and no words could suffice for all they wanted to say to each other. The dawn sky was as if made for the occasion. Not wanting to go quite yet, Genji took her hand, very gently.

“A dawn farewell is always drenched in dew,
But sad is the autumn sky as never before.”

A cold wind was blowing, and a pine cricket* seemed to recognize the occasion. It was a serenade to which a happy lover would not have been deaf. Perhaps because their feelings were in such tumult, they found that the poems they might have exchanged were eluding them.

At length the lady replied:

“An autumn farewell needs nothing to make it sadder.
Enough of your songs, O crickets on the moors!”

It would do no good to pour forth all the regrets again. He made his departure, not wanting to be seen in the broadening daylight. His sleeves were made wet along the way with dew and with tears.

The lady, not as strong as she would have wished, was sunk in a sad reverie. The shadowy figure in the moonlight and the perfume he left behind had the younger women in a state only just short of swooning.

“What kind of journey could be important enough, I ask you,” said one of them, choking with tears, “to make her leave such a man?”

His letter the next day was so warm and tender that again she was tempted to reconsider. But it was too late: a return to the old indecision would accomplish nothing. Genji could be very persuasive even when he did not care a great deal for a woman, and this was no ordinary parting. He sent the finest travel robes and supplies, for the lady and for her women as well. They were no longer enough to move her. It was as if the thought had only now come to her of the ugly name she seemed fated to leave behind.

The high priestess was delighted that plans were now clear. The novel fact that she was taking her mother with her

* *Matsumushi*. It seems to have been what is today called “bell cricket,” *suzumushi*. See note †, page 13.

gave rise to talk, some sympathetic and some hostile. Happy are they whose place in the world puts them beneath such notice! The great ones of the world live sadly constricted lives.

On the sixteenth there was a lustration at the Katsura River, splendid as never before. Perhaps because the old emperor was so fond of the high priestess, the present emperor appointed a retinue of unusually grand rank and good repute to escort her to Ise. Genji sent a long letter (but not long enough) as the procession left the temporary shrine. For the princess there was a note tied with a ritual cord.* "To her whom it would be blasphemy to address in person," he wrote on the envelope.

"I would have thought not even the heavenly thunderer strong enough.†

"If my lady the priestess, surveying her manifold
realms,
Has feelings for those below, let her feel for me.

"I tell myself that it must be, but remain unconvinced."

There was an answer despite the confusion, in the hand of the priestess's lady of honor:

"If a lord of the land is watching from above,
This pretense of sorrow will not have escaped his
notice."

Genji would have liked to be present at the final audience with the emperor, but did not relish the role of rejected suitor.

* *Yū*, a cord of paper mulberry used by Shinto priests and priestesses to tie up their sleeves.

† Anonymous, *Kokinshū* 701:

Is even the rage of the heavenly thunderer,
Stamping and storming, enough to keep us apart?

He spent the day in gloomy seclusion. He had to smile, however, at the priestess's rather knowing poem. She was clever for her age, and she interested him. Difficult and unconventional relationships always interested him. He could have done a great deal for her in earlier years and he was sorry now that he had not. But perhaps they would meet again—one never knew in this world.*

A great many carriages had gathered, for an entourage presided over by ladies of such taste was sure to be worth seeing. It entered the palace in midafternoon. As the priestess's mother got into her state palanquin, she thought of her late father, who had had ambitious plans for her and prepared her with the greatest care for the position that was to be hers; and things could not have gone more disastrously wrong. Now, after all these years, she came to the palace again. She had entered the late crown prince's household at sixteen and at twenty he had left her behind; and now, at thirty, she saw the palace once more.

“The things of the past are always of the past.
I would not think of them. Yet sad is my heart.”

The priestess was a charming, delicate girl of fourteen, dressed by her mother with very great care. She was so compelling a little figure, indeed, that one wondered if she could be long for this world. The emperor was near tears as he put the farewell comb in her hair.

The carriages of their ladies were lined up before the eight ministries to await their withdrawal from the royal presence. The sleeves that flowed from beneath the blinds were of many and marvelous hues, and no doubt there were courtiers who were making their own silent, regretful farewells.

* It was common for a high priestess to be replaced at the beginning of a new reign.

The procession left the palace in the evening. It was before Genji's mansion as it turned south from Nijō to Dōin. Unable to let it pass without a word, Genji sent out a poem attached to a sacred branch:

“You throw me off; but will they not wet your
sleeves,
The eighty waves of the river Suzuka?”*

It was dark and there was great confusion, and her answer, brief and to the point, came the next morning from beyond Osaka Gate.

“And who will watch us all the way to Ise,
To see if those eighty waves have done their
work?”

Her hand had lost none of its elegance, though it was a rather cold and austere elegance.

The morning was an unusually sad one of heavy mists. Absently he whispered to himself:

“I see her on her way. Do not, O mists,
This autumn close off the Gate of the Hill of
Meeting.”†

He spent the day alone, sunk in a sad reverie of his own making, not even visiting Murasaki. And how much sadder must have been the thoughts of the lady on the road!

From the Tenth Month alarm for the old emperor spread through the whole court. The new emperor called to inquire after him. Weak though he was, the old emperor asked over

* In Ise. *Suzu* means “bell” and the swinging of a bell suggests rejection or shaking off.

† Osaka means “hill of meeting.”



and over again that his son be good to the crown prince. And he spoke too of Genji:

“Look to him for advice in large things and in small, just as you have until now. He is young but quite capable of ordering the most complicated public affairs. There is no office of which he need feel unworthy and no task in all the land that is beyond his powers. I reduced him to common rank so that you might make full use of his services. Do not, I beg of you, ignore my last wishes.”

He made many other moving requests, but it is not a