

Asian Odyssey

A National K-12 Interdisciplinary Curriculum Model

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Courtship and Calligraphy in *The Tale of Genji*

Grade Level

This lesson was created for a 9th grade class. It can be adjusted for grades 9-12.

Purpose

To discover through an examination of *The Tale of Genji* the importance of calligraphy to courtship rituals in the Japanese court culture of the late Heian period (794-1185).

Concepts

- *Mono no aware*—(pronunciation: mow-no no ah-wah-ray) sensitivity to the sadness and impermanence of life.
- Cult of beauty—the belief among the aristocrats of Heian Japan that they possessed a heightened sensitivity to the appreciation of beauty in dress, poetry, and all forms of art
- Rinpa style—a school of art during the 1700s that emphasized the use of color and asymmetry
- *Uta awase*— (pronunciation: oo-tah ah-wah-say) poetry contests in which poets wrote about one topic.

Key Ideas

- The unique “cult of beauty” that prevailed in the court of Kyoto among the aristocracy of the Heian Japan
- The value the Japanese placed on self-expression through poetry
- The importance of calligraphy in writing poetry
- Portrayal of court customs and court rituals in *The Tale of Genji*
- Tradition of depicting literature in the art of Japan

Materials

Thirty-Six Immortal Poets, mid-1700s, CMA 1960.183

Narihira Viewing the Cherry Blossoms, late 1800s, CMA 1981.2

Handout of *The Tale of Genji*

Student copies of the chapter “Evening Faces” from *The Tale of Genji* or

“Yūgao.” *Genji & Heike: Selections from The Tale of Genji and The Tale of Heike*. Trans. Helen Craig McCullough. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1994. 59-83. Print.

Procedure

1. Introduce *The Tale of Ise*.
2. View the image of *Narihira Viewing the Cherry Blossoms* and ask students:
 - a. What is Narihira doing?
 - b. What kind of a person does he seem to be based on his clothing? His demeanor?
 - c. What does he seem to have before him?
 - d. What does the role of the other people seem to be?
 - e. Why would this man be viewing cherry blossoms?

Note the writing materials before Narihira and his posture on the tatami mat; observe the demeanor and pose of the Heian aristocrat who might have served as a model for Prince Genji. Note that the boy attendant on his right and the older retainer are there to serve wine and food and to provide paper, ink, and brush to Narihira as he contemplates the cherry blossoms.

3. Introduce the *Tale of Genji* and pass out the handout. Explain that *Genji* took place at the time that was depicted in the previous screen.
4. Explain the concept of *mono no aware* and ask students how viewing the cherry blossoms reflects a sensitivity to the importance of life.
5. View the image of *Thirty-Six Immortal Poets* and ask:
 - a. What do these people seem to be doing?
 - b. Are they all men?
 - c. Do some seem perplexed or concentrating?Explain the practice of *uta awase* (poetry contest) and the legend of the Heian poets. Chosen by Fujiwara no Kinto (996-1075), these 36 poets, primarily of the Heian period, were considered the best poets of the great age of poetry in Japan. Narihira, the viewer of the cherry blossoms is depicted among them. They are participating in a poetry contest, here depicted in the Rinpa style of the Edo period (1615-1868), which emphasized the use of bold color, simple silhouettes, and asymmetrical compositions.
6. Read the opening pages of “Evening Faces” (“Yūgao”), at least to the point where Genji writes a poem on the fan he receives from the servant of the young lady and receives her reply.
7. Refer to the handout for court ritual and ask:
 - a. How does this differ from the court rituals of today?
 - b. Why do these people engage in such rituals?
 - c. What does it reveal about their values?
 - d. How does their appreciation for poetry and especially for the calligraphy used to write it reflect their taste and culture?

Enrichment

- A. Research courting rituals of European aristocracy to compare and contrast with those of Heian Japan.
- B. Draw a picture of Prince Genji glimpsing the young lady through the fence (*kaimami*).
- C. Finish the chapter of *The Tale of Genji* and find more evidence of courting ritual and the “cult of beauty.”

Ohio State Standards

- 1. Explain how various types of governments use/justify their power.
- 2. Analyze how issues may be viewed differently by different cultural groups.
- 3. Identify the perspectives of diverse cultures when analyzing issues.
- 4. Explain how the character and meaning of a place reflect a society’s economics, politics, social values, and culture.

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HANDOUT

The Tale of Genji

“Evening Faces (Yūgao),” a chapter from *The Tale of Genji* by Murasaki Shikibu

Prince Genji, son of the reigning Heian emperor of Japan by a favorite concubine and a favorite young man of the court, happens to meet a young woman while visiting his sick former nurse. Infatuated with her handwriting on a fan delivered by a servant, he pursues her, eventually spiriting “Evening Faces” away to a private estate where she mysteriously dies.

Background

The Tale of Genji was written about 1000-1025 by a woman of the court known as Lady Murasaki Shikibu. Considered the world’s first great novel, it is appreciated both as fiction and as a history of Japan’s Heian culture (794-1185). At that time there were few woman writers, but they began the practice of writing in the vernacular Japanese rather than the more scholarly Chinese reserved for men. The story was probably “published” by being circulated among the members of the court.

Aspects of the Heian court culture relevant to *The Tale of Genji*

Genji, the main character, lived about 900 and was known as the “Shining Prince.” He was a favored young man in the aristocratic community because of his grace and beauty. As a member of the princely class he was expected to be well educated, have refined tastes in clothing and art, and to be especially skilled in the arts of poetry and calligraphy (*shodo*). His marriage had been arranged when he was in his teens, yet it was expected that he pursue other women. This expectation was partly due to his powerful position at court, but also to the fact that arranged marriages were often formal, with little love or intimacy, as was the case with Genji. Women were also polygamous, and this was accepted for both sexes as long as everyone was discreet. However, the rules were not always clearly defined.

Genji was, therefore, expected to have amorous adventures in and out of the court society, but it was frowned upon as matters of convention and taste to have a love affair with anyone lower in position or rank. In “Evening Faces (Yūgao),” for example, Genji will meet and become involved with a young woman while he is still involved in an affair with a widowed woman named Lady Rokujo.

The five steps of the conventional courtly love plot:

1. The man catches a glimpse of, or hears, the woman (*kaimami*).
2. The two exchange poems or letters; dialogue ensues; the man is rebuffed, but persists.
3. The two meet and become lovers, with secret visits, dreams of their beloveds, and the sense that it is sometimes hard to tell what is real and what has only been a dream.
4. One party begins to lose interest or disappears.
5. The other party is left desolate or inconsolable.

Yūgao

It happened around the time when he was making secret visits to a lady in the vicinity of Rokujō Avenue. Feeling in need of a brief rest as he was on his way to her house from the palace, he stopped on Gojō Avenue to pay a sick call at the home of his former nurse, Daini, who had become a nun in search of relief from a grave illness. The carriage gate was bolted, and he sent someone to call Koremitsu.¹

Gazing idly at the squalid avenue while he waited, he noticed that the house next door had a new wickerwork fence made of cypress wood. The half-shutters above it had all been raised for a distance of four or five bays, and from behind pale, cool-looking rattan blinds a large number of attractive feminine foreheads were visible as their owners peeped at his carriage. The women were apparently moving about, and it seemed to him that they must be very tall as he tried to visualize their lower bodies. Intrigued, he wondered who they were. He had chosen a plain carriage and had prohibited the warning shouts that usually cleared his way; and now he ventured to expose his face for a better look, certain that he would not be recognized. The whole of the modest establishment was in view just inside the gate, which was only a shutter-like contrivance, raised on a pole; and its ramshackle appearance evoked poignant thoughts of the old poem, “What place might I single out.”² Stately mansions are no less ephemeral.

As though proud that they were the only flowers in bloom, some blossoms had created exuberant splashes of white on a luxuriant green vine, which was rambling over a species of board fence.

“I would like to ask a question of the person in the distance,” Genji murmured.³

One of his escorts knelt.⁴ “Those vines, ‘blooming with snow-white flowers,’ are called evening faces [*yūgao*]. The name makes one think of people worth noticing—but that’s a wretched fence they’re blooming on.”

The tangled vines had crawled along the crumbling, weakened eaves of all the dwellings in what was indeed a shabby neighborhood of mostly small, humble houses.

“Poor blossoms! Theirs is an unhappy karma,” Genji said. “Pick one for me.” The man went inside the raised gate and picked a flower. Modest though the household was, a pretty little girl, dressed in a long pair of thin yellow silk trousers, came to a tasteful sliding door and beckoned to him. She held out a heavily scented white fan.

“Put it on this for the gentleman,” she said. “Those flowers don’t have nice stems.”

¹ We learn later that Koremitsu is the nun’s son, and that Genji is his foster-brother (*menotogo*) and patron.

² Anonymous (*Kokinshū* 987): *yo no naka wa/ izure ka sashite/ wa ga naramu/ yukitomaru o zo/ yado to sadamuru* (“In this world of men, what place might I single out to be my abode? I will choose to lay my head wherever my journey ends”).

³ Anonymous (*Kokinshū* 1007): *uchiwatasu/ochikatabito ni/ mono mōsu ware/ sono soko ni/ shiroku sakeru wa/ nani no hana zo mo* (“I would ask a question of the person to be seen standing off in the distance: What flowers are those? I mean the ones over there, blooming with snow-white flowers”).

⁴ Here and elsewhere in this book, “escort” translates *zuijin*, an armed guard assigned by the court to accompany an important member of the nobility when he traveled in the city or elsewhere.

“Just then, someone opened the gate and Koremitsu emerged. The man handed him the fan to give to Genji.

“Please forgive me; the key got lost. Nobody in this neighborhood would recognize you, but I’m sorry you had to wait in such a grubby street,” Koremitsu apologized.

They took the carriage inside, and Genji got out. Koremitsu’s older brother, the holy teacher;⁵ the nun’s son-in-law, the governor of Mikawa Province; and Koremitsu’s sister had all assembled, and all expressed the gratitude for the visit, which they considered the greatest of honors. The nun herself arose from her bed. “I don’t mind giving up my old way of life: if I hesitated and agonized over renouncing the world, it was only because I feared I could no longer appear in your presence like this and enjoy the honor of your gaze. But I saved my life by taking the tonsure, and now I can await Amida’s glory with a pure heart, thanks to this gracious visit.” She shed weak tears.

“I’ve kept worrying because you haven’t got any better in all this time, and I feel very upset and depressed because you’ve become a nun. But you must live to see me rise at court. Then there won’t be anything to keep you from being reborn in the highest of the nine grades. They say the mere hint of a lingering worldly concern counts against a person.” Genji’s voice was choked with tears.

Even when a child falls below the average, a biased observer like a nurse will be foolish enough to regard him as perfect. The connection with someone as remarkable as Genji had naturally been a source of enormous pride for the nun, and she continued to weep without apparent reason, as though perhaps regretting her loss of the importance and dignity she considered herself to have acquired during her years of close personal attendance on him. Her children exchanged pained glances and nudges. Such a display of unprovoked tears in front of His Lordship could only make it seem that she was clinging to the world she had forsaken.

Genji for his part felt deep emotion. “After death claimed my natural protectors while I was a small child, there seemed to be a great many people ready to care for me, but you were the only one I felt really close to. Now that I’m grown up, there are constraints that make it impossible to see you morning and evening, or even to call and ask about your health whenever I please, but I always begin to feel unhappy when we’re separated for a long time ‘How I wish that in this world there were no final partings!’”⁶ He wiped away tears as he spoke, his voice quiet and confidential, and the motion of his sleeve filled the room with fragrance. Forgetting their disapproval, the nun’s children wept in sympathy. “When you think about it, Mother has been blessed with an extraordinary karma,” they said to themselves.

Genji issued instructions for more performances of rituals. When he was ready to leave, he told Koremitsu to bring over a torch so that he could look at the neighbor’s fan. It carried an intriguing scent of perfume from the robes of someone who seemed to have made regular use of it, and on it there was a poem, written in elegant cursive script:

⁵ *Ajari*: a Buddhist title conferred on Tendai and Shingon monks by the court.

⁶ Ariwara no Narihira (*Kokinshū* 901): yo no naka ni/ saranu wakare no/ naku mo ga na/ chiyo mo to nageku/ hito no ko no tame/ (“For sorrowing sons who would have their parents live a thousand long years—how I wish that in this world there were no final partings”).

Kokoroate ni
Sore ka to zo miru
shiratsuyu no
Hikari soetaru
yūgao no hana

Just at a hazard,
might it perchance be his—
the face in the twilight,
a *yūgao* enhanced
by the radiance of the dew?

Dashed off with a deliberate lack of individuality, the calligraphy suggested cultivation and taste. Genji was conscious of an unexpected stir of interest. “Do you happen to have found out who lives in the house to the west?” he asked Koremitsu.

Koremitsu wished Genji would curb his troublesome instincts, but he could not very well say so. “For the five or six days I’ve been here, I’ve been too busy with Mother, worrying and taking care of her, to find out anything about the neighbors,” he answered in a snappish voice.

“I know you think I shouldn’t have asked,” Genji said, “but there’s something about this fan that seems to need looking into. Call someone who’s likely to know; ask him.”

Koremitsu went inside, summoned the caretaker, and questioned him. “The house belongs to an honorary vice-governor,” he reported. “The caretaker said, ‘The husband is away in the provinces. The wife is young and fond of elegant pursuits, and she has a sister, a lady-in-waiting, who pays her frequent visits.’ Considering that he’s only a flunky, I don’t imagine he knows anything more.”

The poem would have come from the lady-in-waiting, Genji thought, noting its rather confident, familiar tone. He wondered if she might prove a severe disappointment. It was probably because of his usual susceptibility that he felt unable to ignore the overture, coming as it did from someone who had penetrated his incognito and reacted in what was, after all, a not displeasing manner. In a carefully disguised hand, he wrote a poem on a folded sheet of paper.

Yorite koso
sore ka to mo mime
tasogare ni
honobono mitsuru
hana no yūgao

Were it to be seen
closer at hand, you might know
the evening face
of which you caught a glimpse
as twilight shadows gathered.

He dispatched it by the same escort.

Although the lady had never met Genji, she had yielded to the temptation to let him know that she had glimpsed his unmistakable profile. Awkwardly enough, considerable time had elapsed without any acknowledgment on his part, but now the household was elated at having elicited a response, and the escort perceived that its members appeared to be debating a reply. That was too much, he thought. He went back to his master.

Genji set out very quietly by the dim light of his way-clearers’ torches. The half-shutters had been lowered next door, and lonely rays of lamplight straggled through the cracks, fainter than a firefly’s glow.

At his destination, everything bespoke a degree of comfort and elegance not to be found in the common run of dwellings—the groves of great trees, the shrubs and grasses in the gardens. The mistress

was an exceptionally dignified, correct woman, and Genji probably had little leisure to remember the fence where the evening faces bloomed. He overslept the next morning. The sun was rising when he took his leave, and to those who beheld him in the early morning light, it seemed only natural that people should always be singing his praises.

On that day, also, he passed in front of the shutters. He had undoubtedly done so on earlier occasions, but the trifling incident of the fan had left an impression, and thereafter he looked at the house whenever he went by, wondering about its occupants.

Koremitsu put in an appearance several days later. "I've been taking care of my mother, who still seems frail," he said. Drawing nearer, he added, "After receiving your instructions, I had someone question a person who knew about the house next door, but he didn't tell us much. According to him, a certain lady has apparently been living there in strict secrecy ever since the fifth month or thereabouts, but nobody has been told who she is, not even the members of the household. I've looked through cracks in the boundary fence a few times, and it's true you can make out the figures of young women behind the blinds. They wear what look like abbreviated trains draped around their hips—a gesture in the direction of formality, I'd say as though they were waiting on somebody. Yesterday, when the rays of the setting sun were streaming into the house, I saw a beautiful woman sitting down to write a letter. She looked unhappy, and her attendants were trying to hide tears. I saw it all quite clearly."

Genji smiled. It would be interesting to learn more.

"A good reputation is important for someone in his position," Koremitsu thought. "But actually, when you think about it—his youth, the deference and praise he receives—he'd seem tasteless and dreary if he weren't a bit of a gallant. After all, the right woman will captivate any man, even one of those lesser mortals to whom society denies the privilege of infidelity." To Genji he said, "I manufactured a little pretext for sending a letter to the house, thinking that it might be a way to get a look at her, and a prompt reply came back, written in a practiced hand. She seems to have some fairly presentable young attendants."

"Approach her again," said Genji. "I won't be satisfied until I find out who she is." The house fell into the category dismissed by Uma-no-kami as the lowest of the low, but the lady seemed out of the ordinary. What if he were to discover an undreamt-of gem in those surroundings?

Autumn arrived. Through nobody's fault but his own, there were certain things that caused Genji overwhelming grief, and his wife existed in a state of constant bitterness because he visited her father's mansion so seldom.

The Rokujō lady was also much to be pitied, for there had been a perceptible diminution in his ardor since he had overcome her stubborn resistance. Others wondered why his present feelings lacked the passion that had driven him before she was his. Morbidly sensitive by nature, she had feared all along that the disparity between their ages would cause gossip if word of the affair leaked out; and now, more than ever, despairing thoughts crowded into her mind when she awoke during the painful nights alone.

One foggy morning, Genji left the Rokujō Mansion in response to repeated urging, sleepy-faced and sighing. Chūjō-no-menoto raised the shutters in one of the bays and moved the curtain-stand aside, as though inviting her mistress to watch his departure, and the lady raised her head to look out. It was as people said: he was incomparable, lingering in seeming reluctance to pass the riot of bloom in the garden.

When he approached the corridor, Lady Chūjō went to accompany him, a graceful, elegant figure in a gossamer train that stood out with pleasing clarity against robes dyed in the seasonal aster combination. He looked back and drew her down to sit by the corner balustrade. Her correct posture and flowing hair seemed to him strikingly beautiful⁷ [His poem:]

saku hana ni	I would not have it said
utsuru chō na wa	that my heart has turned toward
tsutsumedomo	a flower in bloom—
orade sugiuki	yet how hard it is to pass
kesa no asagao	without plucking a “morning face”! ⁸

“What shall I do?” he asked, taking her hand. No stranger to elegant badinage, she responded at once with a poem in which she pretended to mistake “a flower in bloom” for a reference to her mistress:

asagiri no	The one who starts for home
harema mo matanu	without even awaiting
keshiki nite	a break in the fog
hana ni kokoro o	would seem to care but little
tomenu to zo miru	about a flower in bloom.

Genji’s modish page boy had been dispatched to the garden. A pretty child whose appearance might have been designed for the occasion, he now brought back a morning-face blossom, his bloused trousers wet with dew. It would’ve been pleasant to paint the scene.

Everyone felt drawn to Genji, even strangers who barely caught a glimpse of him. (After all, even a coarse mountain peasant seeks out a flowering tree when he needs a rest.)⁹ Of those who beheld his radiant countenance, not one well-born father but longed to send him his precious daughter, not one humble man with a presentable sister but hoped to have her serve him, in whatever menial capacity. And it was indeed unlikely that he should have been an object of indifference to any discerning person who had been exposed to his charm at first hand, even through the receipt of a poem on a suitable occasion. It is easy to imagine that Chūjō and the other ladies-in-waiting were more than a little disturbed by his failure to treat the Rokujō Mansion as home.

But to go back to the house of the evening faces. Koremitsu had been punctilious in his surveillance through the fence. “I simply can’t learn who she is,” he reported. “She seems bent on concealment. But I think her young ladies-in-waiting are rather bored. Sometimes they cross to the long south building, the one with the half-shutters, and peep through its blinds when they hear a carriage: and it’s my impression that the one who seems to be their mistress will occasionally slip out to join them.

⁷ Genji has been walking along the veranda outside the Rokujō lady’s bedchamber. He is now approaching a corridor leading to another building, and ultimately to the street. Lady Chūjō (Chūjō-no-menoto), shown by her sobriquet to be an upper-rank lady-in-waiting, is seeing him off. The aster combination, which is worn at the beginning of autumn, is variously said to have been light purple with a green lining, purple with a brown lining, or brown with a yellowish-green lining. “Correct posture” probably means with head modestly bowed.

⁸ The “morning face” (*asagao*) has been tentatively identified as the bellflower (now called *kikyō*), one of the traditional “seven plants of autumn.”

⁹ The two *Kokinshū* prefaces (kana and Chinese) describe Ōtomo no Kuronushi’s poems as “crude...like a mountain peasant resting under a flowering tree with a load of firewood on his back.”

From what little I can see of her, she is delightful. One day a carriage came along with attendants clearing the way. Some of the household were watching, and a child maidservant called out, all excited, 'Lady Ukon! Come and see right away! Lord Tō-no-chūjō is going by!' An older lady-in-waiting appeared and signed to her to be silent. 'The idea! Hold your tongue!' she said. 'How do you know it's His Lordship? Let me see.' She started across the long building. There's a sort of plank bridge they use when they go back and forth; and in her haste, she caught the skirt of her robe on something, stumbled, and almost fell off. 'I declare, this bridge is an absolute menace!' she said in a huff. She seemed to lose interest in the carriage.

"His Lordship was wearing an informal cloak, and he had his escorts with him. I saw So-and-so and Thus-and-so,' the child said. She knew whose carriage it was—you could tell from the way she reeled off the names of the escorts and pages."

"I do wish I could've seen that," Genji said. It occurred to him that the nun's neighbor might be the very woman Tō-no-chūjō had told them about—the one his friend still remembered with affection. If only he could find out!

Koremitsu took note of his expression. "I've made it my business to court one of the girls; now I know every corner of their house. When I visit, I let them pull the wool over my eyes—I mean, I pretend not to notice that a certain young woman is careful to address the others as though they were all ladies-in-waiting together. They think they're being very clever about hiding the truth. There are children around, and whenever one of them uses an honorific by mistake, the grown-ups go to ridiculous lengths to distract my attention, trying to preserve the fiction that the ladies-in-waiting are the only people in the house." He laughed.

"You'll have to help me see them the next time I visit your mother," Genji said. Judging from the nature of the lady's dwelling, temporary shelter though it might be, he could only conclude that she must belong to the lowest class—the one that had been dismissed on the rainy night as beneath notice. But what if one were to be surprised by something of interest in such a quarter?

Reluctant to disappoint his master in the slightest way, and himself a seasoned philanderer, Koremitsu tried one scheme after another, and finally, though a high-handed tactic, he succeeded in introducing Genji into the mistress's bedchamber. I shall omit the tedious tale of his campaign.

Genji had not pressed the question of the lady's identity, nor had he told her his name. He set out for her house in excessively coarse attire, traveling on foot, rather than by carriage as usual. Concluding that he must really be smitten, Korechika gave him his own horse and trotted alongside. "I'll be in trouble if my lady-in-waiting sees her lover walking like a scruffy commoner," he grumbled. But Genji was determined not to be found out. His only other attendants were the escort who had picked the evening face and a page whom nobody could recognize.¹⁰ Lest someone put two and two together, he even refrained from stopping to rest at his nurse's house.

The lady found Genji's reticence odd and disturbing. In an effort to learn where he lived, she sent people to escort his messengers home, and dispatched others to see where he went when he left at dawn, but all of them were deliberately lead astray. At the same time, Genji had fallen deeply in love; the

¹⁰ Murasaki Shikibu does not explain why the household would have failed to recognize the escort.

thought of not meeting her was unbearable. He castigated himself for his behavior, which he recognized as wrong and foolish, but his visits were frequent indeed. Although love has been known to cloud the judgment of the most serious, he had always avoided blameworthy conduct with admirable discretion. Now he suffered from a strange malaise, fretting in the morning because a whole day must elapse before his next visit. He would try his utmost to take a dispassionate view of the matter, to convince himself that he was irrational, that there was no reason to be carried away. In spite of her astonishingly gentle, candid nature—her lack of prudence and gravity, her childlike behavior—he was not the first man she had known. Nor was it likely that she could claim a distinguished lineage. He kept asking himself why he should feel so drawn to her.

The lady could not help finding it eerie and unsettling—quite like the behavior of a supernatural being in an old tale—that he should make a point of disguising himself in a shabby hunting robe, shield his face so that she never caught a glimpse of it, and postpone his visits until late at night, when everyone was asleep. On the other hand, she could tell merely from touching him that he was someone of high birth. Who could he be? Her suspicions fastened on Koremitsu. “I’m sure the roué next door arranged the whole thing,” she thought. But Koremitsu maintained a façade of bland innocence. Assiduous as usual in his visits, he flirted and joked as though unaware of what was going on. It was quite beyond comprehension, and she worried in an oddly unconventional way.¹¹

Genji’s own mind was troubled. If he were to grow careless, lulled by her apparent openness, and if she were to disappear quietly, he would have no more notion than Tō-no-chūjō of where to search. With her present domicile apparently a mere temporary hiding place, who knew when she might move on to some mysterious destination? If this were a casual liaison, he could shrug off his failure to find her, but he was far from willing to let it go at that. In desperation, he thought of smuggling her into his Nijō Mansion, that he might spare himself the intolerable anguish of spending a night elsewhere for reasons of secrecy. It would be awkward if people found out—but if they did, it would probably be because karma had ordained it. What kind of bond could have aroused a passion such as he had felt for no other woman?

“How would you like to go to a place where you could feel perfectly at ease—where the two of us would have plenty of time to talk?” he asked her.

“Everything just seems so odd! No matter what you say, I’m scared because you don’t act like other people.” The childish speech brought an indulgent smile to his lips. “You’re right, one of us is probably a fox. Let me bewitch you,” he said in a tender voice. She then became extremely submissive, willing to accept whatever he might do.

He was touched by her docility, her readiness to assent even to so shockingly unorthodox a proposal. Tō-no-chūjō’s description of his lost lady came to mind at once, and he wondered again if he had stumbled on the wild pink, but he refrained from pressing her, telling himself that she must have reasons for concealing her identity. She was not one to run away suddenly into hiding just to make a dramatic gesture; she would act only if a man’s visits dropped off. It even occurred to him to picture how pathetic she would be if his heart happened to stray a bit, although of course he had no intention of looking elsewhere.

¹¹ The usual source of a woman’s concern was a man’s loss of interest.

It was the fifteenth of the eighth month, a brilliant moonlit night. Moonbeams streamed in through countless cracks in the board roof, affording an intriguing view of the kind of dwelling Genji seldom saw. It seemed to be getting on toward dawn; he could hear the rough voices of the working people awakening next door.

“It’s turned mighty cold!”

“Business is rotten this year.”

“No use looking to peddle in the provinces, either. I don’t know what I’m going to do.”

“Hey, on the north! Can you hear me?”

As they hurriedly emerged from their sleeping quarters to begin their pathetic occupations, their gabble was a source of embarrassment for the lady who lived so close. A snobbish, affected woman would probably have fainted if she had found herself in such an environment. But this lady was a calm person, not so deeply affected by painful, worrisome, or embarrassing things as to lose her refined, equable demeanor; and she seemed to regard the neighbors’ ill-mannered hubbub merely as something incomprehensible—an attitude that served better than red-faced apologies to excuse her from personal responsibility in Genji’s eyes.

More appalling than thunderclaps, the crashing thumps of a mechanical pestle began to reverberate next to their pillow, worked against a mortar by someone’s foot. Unlike the earlier voices, the sounds seemed intolerably noisy. With no inkling of their cause, Genji could only marvel at their strangeness and their incredible volume. It did seem to be an annoyingly inconvenient neighborhood.

They could hear the constant indistinct blows of fulling hammers on mulberry-cloth robes drifting in from near places and far, and also the cries of wild geese flying overhead—poignant reminders of autumn’s sadness.¹² Genji opened the sliding door of the room, which was at the front of the house, and the two looked out together. There was an elegant clump of black bamboo in the tiny garden, and the dew on the plants in this humble place sparkled quite as brightly as at his own mansion. Insect voices shrilled in unison. Even the crickets in the walls seemed within touching distance to someone whose ears were used to hearing them from afar, but Genji found their proximity an amusing novelty—a reaction we must doubtless attribute to the passion that made him overlook every shortcoming.

The lady was a sweet, touching figure in her subdued attire—a lavender robe, no longer new, over a lined white underrobe. No particular aspect of her appearance could have been called superior, but she was delicate and frail, and something in the manner of her speech evoked affectionate compassion. Watching her, Genji thought that a little less passivity would not come amiss, but he also felt a strong desire to be with her under more relaxed circumstances.

“Let’s spend the rest of the night in peace somewhere nearby. It’s really too much to stay on here like this,” he said.

“Why should we go someplace else? This is a very sudden idea,” she objected in a placid voice.

¹² It was the literary convention that cloth was fulling on autumn evenings by grieving women whose husbands were far away.

He then swore that their union would endure beyond this life, and she readily agreed to do as he wished. What an unusual woman she was, and how little she seemed to know of men! No longer concerned about what others might think, he summoned Ukon, told her to call his escort, and order his carriage brought to the veranda. There were things the people in the house would have liked to know, but they trusted him, understanding from his behavior how much he loved their lady.

It was almost dawn. No cocks were crowing, but they could hear an aged voice praying as its owner prostrated himself, getting up and down with great apparent difficulty. Touched, Genji thought of the brevity of all human life, of its likeness to ephemeral morning dew, and he wondered what an old man might still find to ask for. The petitioner seemed to be purifying himself for a pilgrimage to the sacred peaks. He was intoning, “Hail to Maitreya, the Buddha of the future!”

“Listen to him,” Genji said in a compassionate voice. “His thoughts aren’t bent on this life alone.” [He recited a poem:]

ubasoku ga	Revere as a guide
okonau michi o	the faith inspiring the prayers
shirube nite	of that pious man:
kon yo mo fukaki	be true to vows that will bind us
chigiri tagau na	in the coming world as in this.

Mindful of the inauspicious occurrences associated with the Hall of Long Life, he had avoided mention of shared wings, pledging instead to be true until Maitreya’s coming—a notably exaggerated commitment.¹³

[Her response:]

Saki no yo no	I cannot foresee
chigiri shiraruru	a future full of promise—
mi no usa ni	not when my sorrows
yukusue kanete	show me what has been fated
tanomigatasa yo	from an earlier life.

It was a sad little answer.

The moon lingered above the horizon, and the lady, as though seduced by its example, hesitated about embarking on so unexpected an excursion. Genji set himself to overcoming her misgivings. Meanwhile, the moon ducked behind a cloud, and a beautiful dawn began to break. Unwilling to risk the embarrassment of being seen in broad daylight, he whisked her into the carriage and made his usual swift departure. Ukon rode with them.

¹³ According to “The Song of Everlasting Sorrow,” it was in the Hall of Long Life that Emperor Xuanzong and Yang Gueifei pledged to be “as two birds sharing a wing, as two trees with joined branches.” Maitreya is a bodhsattva who has promised to leave the Tusita Heaven 5,670,000,000 years after Sakyamuni’s death, come to earth, attain Buddhahood under a dragon-flower tree, and preach the Law at three assemblies as Sakyamuni’s successor.

They arrived at a certain mansion in the vicinity. Genji sent for the caretaker.¹⁴ It was very dark under the trees as they waited outside the gate, a dilapidated structure overgrown with tiny ferns; and Genji's sleeves were drenched, merely from raising the carriage blind in the heavy, damp mist. "I've never done anything like this before," he said. "I didn't expect to feel so nervous." [He recited:]

Inishie mo	Even in the past,
kaku ya wa hito no	was ever my heart as perplexed
madoiken	as is mine today,
wa ga mada shiranu	following at dawn a path
shinonome no michi	I have never known before?

Her answering poem was shy:

Yama no ha no	In the bright rays, I fear,
kokoro mo shirade	may vanish in mid-heaven—
yuku tsuki wa	the moon journeying on,
uwa no sora nite	powerless to probe the heart
kage ya taenan	of the rim of the hills.

"I feel so uneasy." She seemed to find the place frightening and eerie—probably, Genji thought with amusement, because she had grown accustomed to living in that crowded neighborhood. He had his men take the carriage inside the grounds, and there they waited, with the shafts resting on a balustrade, while the caretaker prepared a sitting room in the west wing. Ukon's spirits rose as she silently recalled certain incidents in the past. Genji's identity had become clear to her from the zeal with which the caretaker had gone about his work.

They left the carriage just as the surroundings were becoming faintly visible. Makeshift though the arrangements were, the caretaker had managed to furnish a room in attractive style. The man was shocked by Genji's lack of attendants. He had served him for some time as a junior steward, and was also one of the staff at the minister of the left's mansion; and he now came up and offered through Ukon to send for some suitable people. But Genji bound him to secrecy. "I have purposely sought out a secluded, deserted house. Don't mention this to anybody," he said.

The caretaker hastened to produce some rice and other food, but there were too few people to serve it in proper style. In this travel lodging, alien to all of Genji's previous experience, there was nothing to do but pledge that their union would rival the one in the poem about the Long Breath River.¹⁵

When the sun was high, Genji got up and raised the shutters with his own hands. Gazing out across the ravaged, deserted garden, he could see groves of immense antiquity, looming like baleful presences. There was nothing of particular interest in the trees and bushes close at hand, which looked as though they were growing in a wild autumn field, and the lake was smothered by aquatic plants. It was an

¹⁴ Old commentaries identify the mansion as the Kawara-no-in, a residence of legendary grandeur built by a son of Emperor Saga, Minamoto no Tōru (822-95). Presented to Retired Emperor Uda in 895, it later fell into ruin. Murasaki Shikibu's contemporaries would have known it was nearby, and probably would have thought of it.

¹⁵ Uma no Kunihito (*Man'yōshū* 4482): niotori no / okinagagawa wa / taenu tomo / kimi ni kataramu / koto tsukimi ya mo ("Even if the Okinagagawa [River of Long Breath], named for the deep-diving grebes, were to cease to flow, never would there be an end to the words I would speak to you").

estate that had come to be more than a little intimidating. People were apparently occupying some rooms in one of the lesser buildings, but they were a considerable distance away.

“This has turned into an eerie place,” Genji said, “but I’m sure its demon will excuse me.” He continued to hide his face, but now he reconsidered, noting that the lady showed signs of resenting his caution. To be sure, he thought, secrecy was inappropriate in the present state of their relationship. He recited a poem:

yūtsuyu ni	Lay it to a tie
himo toku hana wa	formed when someone chanced to see
tamaboko no	a mere passerby—
tayori ni mieshi	the flowering of the bud,
e ni koso arikere	its bonds loosed by evening dew.

“How do you like ‘the radiance of the dew’?”¹⁶

With a sidelong glance, she murmured a faint response, which he chose to consider amusingly ingenious:

hikari ari to	It was a mistake,
mishi yūgao no	caused by dusk’s uncertain light,
uwatsuyu wa	that led me to see
tasogaredoki no	radiance in dewdrops
sorame narikeri	on <i>yūgao</i> flowers.

Genji’s beauty was indeed incomparable as he sat at his ease, and the contrast with the surroundings made him look still handsomer, almost inauspiciously so. “I wouldn’t let you see my face because I resented the way you kept me at a distance,” he said. “Now, though, you have to tell me who you are. For all I know, you could be a fox.” But the lady clung to her privacy, very much the bashful child. “I am but the daughter of a fisherman...,” she said.¹⁷

“Oh, very well. I suppose it’s my own fault.” His reproaches gave way to intimate conversation, which was succeeded in turn by more reproaches and more conversation, and at length the day drew to a close.

Fruit and other dainties arrived from Koremitsu, who had managed to track Genji down. Koremitsu himself felt obliged to keep his distance, lest Ukon confront him with awkward accusations. Amused that Genji’s infatuation had impelled him to become a vagabond, he could not but surmise that the lady must merit the devotion she inspired—nor could he suppress some feeling of disgust with the

¹⁶ His question is a reference to her fist poem, “Just a hazard.” There is a pun on the bud bursting its coat and the untying of a mask, which Genji is here found to be wearing.

¹⁷ Anonymous (*Shinkoshinshū* 1703): shiranami no / yosuru nagisa ni / yo o tsukusu / ama no ko nareba / yado mo sadamezu (“I have no abode, for I am but the daughter of a fisherman, spending my life on the shore where white waves roll in”). In the speech that follows, Genji introduces marine imagery from another poem by using the expression *warekara*, which can mean “from me” (i.e., “my fault”) and is also the name of a small crustacean. Fujiwara no Naoiko (*Kokinshū* 807): ama no karu / mo ni sumu mushi no / warekara to / ne o koso nakame / yo o ba uramiji (“Without blaming him, I mourn the faults that bring thoughts of the ‘from me’ shrimp dwelling on strands of seaweed harvested by fisherfolk”).

magnanimity that had prompted him to stand aside, instead of attempting what would probably have been a successful courtship of his own.

Genji was gazing at the evening sky, a scene quieter than anything in his experience. Upon observing that the lady seemed intimidated by the darkness inside the room, he raised the blinds next to the veranda and stretched out by her side. They looked at each other, their faces bright in the rays of the setting sun. She had considered the whole affair unbelievably strange, but no she forgot her qualms and relaxed in a delightfully appealing manner. She had clung to him all day long with a timidity that he found touchingly childish.

He closed the shutters early and called for the lamp to be lit. “You seem perfectly comfortable now. I don’t understand why you persist in keeping secrets,” he complained.

It occurred to him that his father was probably trying to find out what had become of him. Where would the emperor’s people be searching? But his chief concern was for someone he pitied. “I don’t know what’s got into me,” he thought. “The lady at Rokujō must be terribly upset.” It would be awkward if she resented his behavior—but what else could he expect? Moved by the artlessness of his present companion, he could not help comparing the two. If only he could rid the other of her excessive sensitivity, of the touchiness that made a visitor so uncomfortable!

About halfway through the first part of the night, as he lay asleep, he dreamed that a beautiful woman seated herself near his pillow. “I consider you the most splendid of men,” she said, “but you can’t be bothered to visit me. Instead, you bring this common creature here to bask in your attentions. It’s too mortifying!” She seized his companion to pull her up. Starting awake as though from a nightmare, he saw that the lamp had gone out. The atmosphere of the room seemed ominous; he drew his sword and put it next to the pillow.¹⁸ Then he awakened Ukon, and she came to his side with a frightened look.

“Rouse one of the men on duty in the gallery. Tell him to bring a light torch,” he said.

“How am I supposed to get there? It’s dark.”

He laughed. “You sound like a child.” He clapped his hands, and a ghostly echo answered. The summons had not been loud enough to arouse anyone. To the lady, trembling with fear, their situation seemed desperate. She broke out in perspiration and fell into a faint.

“She gets these absurd fears,” Ukon said. “Think how she must feel now!”

“She’s so very frail,” Genji thought. “Even during the daytime she just kept looking off into space.”¹⁹ Poor child!” He drew Ukon closer. “I’ll wake somebody up. It makes a disagreeable echo when I clap. You stay with her awhile.” He pushed open the double-leafed door on the west. The light in the gallery had also gone out.

¹⁸ To ward off malignant spirits.

¹⁹ The editors of one modern Genji edition take this to be a sign of weak nerves. An early commentator saw it as a portent of death. See Abe et al., *Genji monogatari*, I: 239, n. 16.

A faint breeze had sprung up, and his few attendants had fallen asleep. There were only three of them—a young personal servant, the son of the mansion’s caretaker; a single page; and the escort who had plucked the *yūgao* blossom. The servant arose in answer to his call.

“Light a torch and bring it here,” Genji said. “Tell the escort to twang his bowstring and keep shouting.²⁰ Do you think it’s a good idea to drop off to sleep in an isolated place like this? I thought Koremitsu was here. What’s become of him?”

“Master Koremitsu was here, but he went home. He said, ‘He hasn’t given me any instructions. Tell him I’ll come just before dawn to await his pleasure.’”

The servant, a member of the palace guards, could be heard twanging his bow with expert skill and shouting warnings against carelessness with fire as he went off toward the caretaker’s room.²¹ The sound reminded Genji of the imperial palace. The roll call would be over now; the guardsmen were probably twanging their bows and proclaiming their names. It was still not very late.

He went back inside and groped his way to the lady. As before, she lay prostrate, with Ukon face down beside her. “What’s the matter?” he said to Ukon. “You act scared to death. You’re probably afraid of a fox or something in this deserted place, but there’s nothing to worry about as long as I’m here.” He pulled her to her feet.

“I’m terrified! I was lying down on my stomach because I felt sick. My lady must be petrified,” Ukon said.

“So it would seem.” To the lady, he said, “Why are you so afraid?” When he touched her, there was no sign of life. He shook her. She was limp and seemed unconscious. She was such a child, he thought in despair. Had a malignant influence stolen her spirit?

The servant arrived with a torch. Since Ukon seemed incapable of motion, Genji pulled over the curtain-stand to shield the lady. “Bring the light up,” he said.

Disconcerted by the command, which would never have been issued in the normal course of events, the servant hesitated to venture beyond the threshold of the eave-chamber.

“Come along with it! This is no place for ceremony,” Genji said.

When the light illuminated the lady, he saw beside the pillow a figure whose face was that of the woman in his dream—a vision no sooner glimpsed than gone. He remembered an old tale in which just such a thing had happened. It was strange and uncanny, but his first thought was for the lady. His mind in turmoil, he lay close and tried to rouse her, indifferent to his own danger. “Wake up!” he urged. But her body was icy, for she had long since ceased to breathe. Words were of no avail, nor was there any reliable person to help him. A monk might have filled the need, had one been present.

²⁰ Murasaki Shikibu’s mention of the sudden breeze may be intended to suggest the advent of a malignant spirit. The purpose of the bow-twanging and shouting was to warn off spirits by threatening them with military action, and with the names of Genji and his armed guard.

²¹ He’s going to get fire for the torch.

Although he had made a show of courage earlier, the sight of his dead mistress was too much for his young heart. He clasped in tight in his arms. “Come back, my darling! Don’t make me suffer this agony!” But the body was cold, starting to look unpleasant.

Ukon wept in a paroxysm of grief, her previous terror forgotten.

Genji took hold of himself, encouraged by the memory of what had happened in the past, when a demon menaced a minister of state in the Shishinden.²² “No matter how things look, she’s not going to die. It sounds frightful to hear someone wailing like that in the middle of the night. Don’t make so much noise,” he told her. But the suddenness of it all had been stunning.

He called the caretaker’s son. “It’s very strange...someone here is suffering from a spirit possession. Send word at once for Master Koremitsu to come as fast as he can. If his brother, the holy teacher, is there, ask him quietly to come too. Be discreet when you deliver the message; don’t let the nun hear you. She tends to be trying about things like this.” His demeanor was calm, but there was a painful tightness in his chest. It was agonizing to think that he was responsible for the lady’s death—and as though that were not enough, the eeriness of the surroundings was beyond description.

Was it because the night was more than half spent that the wind had risen to a veritable gale? The southing in the pines made it seem as though they were deep in the forest, and a strange bird uttered hollow cries. He wondered if it might be an owl.²³ Reflecting on the mansion’s isolation and its unearthly atmosphere—exacerbated now by the complete absence of human voices—he regretted in vain the inexplicable impulse that had made him seek lodging in so dismal a place. Ukon clung to him in a daze, trembling like a dying woman. Was she to go too? Half-unconsciously, he held her fast. With no second rational person to consult, he felt at his wits’ end. The lamplight was a mere dim flicker, and the darkness seemed impenetrable in some parts of the rooms, such as the area above the folding screens at the entrance to the inner chamber. He thought he heard footsteps approaching from the rear, the plank floor creaking as they advanced. If only Koremitsu would hurry! But Koremitsu was not one to spend every night in the same house, and the messenger searched place after place. The hours until dawn seemed as long as a thousand nights.

As a distant cock finally began to crow, Genji pondered his situation. What karmic bond had enmeshed him in an affair that might have cost him his life? True, he had started it himself, but what a sensation it would cause! It must be his punishment for harboring a reprehensible passion. “Once a thing has happened, it’s bound to get out, not matter how hard you try to keep it a secret. His Majesty will know, people at court will talk, the street ruffraff will get hold of it. I’ll be a laughing stock,” he thought.

Master Koremitsu arrived. Genji was annoyed. Here was the faithful attendant who stood ever ready to do his bidding—midnight or dawn, it made no difference—and he had absented himself on this of all nights. Moreover, he had even reported late when summoned. He called him in, but what he wanted to say was too distressing; the words refused to come.

²² According to an old story, Fujiwara no Tadahira (880-949) was accosted by a demon when passing through the deserted Shishinden on his way to execute an imperial decree. He chased it off by invoking the authority of the throne and drawing his sword. See McCullough, *Ōkagami*, p 106.

²³ Considered a bird of ill omen. The chicks were said to eat their parents.

When Ukon realized who had arrived, the whole history of the affair returned to her mind, and she burst into tears. Genji was also overcome. He had continued to embrace Ukon in his role of stalwart protector, but now, with Koremitsu's arrival, he breathed a sigh of relief, his grief welled up. For a time, he gave way to irrepressible tears.

When he had pulled himself together, he said, "Something weird has happened here: to call it astounding would be an understatement. I remember hearing that sutras need to be recited after a sudden event like this, and I sent for the hold teacher so I could commission readings and prayers, but he hasn't come. Do you know why?"

"He went up to Mount Hiei yesterday," Koremitsu said. "This is amazing! Could she have been ill before she came?"

"I'm sure she wasn't," Genji said in tears. The pathetic expression on his handsome face wrung Koremitsu's heart, and he too began to sob.

Koremitsu had come, to be sure, but it is the man of mature years, experienced in the vicissitudes of life, who serves as a source of strength in a crisis. The two of them were only boys, with no idea what to do.

"We can't let the caretaker know," Koremitsu said. "He himself could be trusted because of his ties to you, but he'll have relatives around, people who'll let it out without meaning to. The first thing is for you to get away from this mansion."

"But no place is more deserted than this," Genji said.

"That's true." Koremitsu thought about it. "We can't go to Her Ladyship's house. Her attendants would start wailing and carrying on, and there'd be all kinds of questions among the commoners in the crowded neighborhood. The truth would be bound to get out. A mountain temple—that's it! People are always being buried in such places; we wouldn't attract any attention." He thought some more. "an old acquaintance of mine, a former lady-in-waiting, has gone to live in the eastern hills as a nun. She's my father's nurse, exceedingly ancient now. The district seems fairly populous, but her cell is quiet and secluded." He had the carriage brought to that they might merge unnoticed into the homeward stream of early-morning traffic.

Since Genji appeared to be incapable of carrying the lady, Koremitsu wrapped her in a quilt and put her in the carriage. The tiny body seemed pathetic rather than repellent. He had been unable to bring himself to truss her up like a parcel, and her flowing hair was enough to blind any eye with helpless tears. Overcome by grief, Genji wanted to stay with her to the end, but Koremitsu demurred. "Take the horse and go home to Nijō before the streets get crowded," he said. He put Ukon into the carriage with her mistress, gave his horse to Genji, and tied up his trousers for walking. Then he set out on the strange, unforeseen journey to the nunnery, his pride sacrificed to the compassion he felt as he looked at Genji's stricken face.

Genji reached home in a daze.

"Where have you been? You don't seem well," the ladies-in-waiting said.

Inside the curtain-dais, he abandoned himself to thought, his hands pressed to his breast. The situation was unbearable. “Why didn’t I go with her?” he asked himself. “How would she feel if she came back to life? Wouldn’t she think it was horrible of me to run off and leave her?” Insinuating itself into a mind already distraught with grief, the suggestion evoked a sensation akin to nausea. His head ached, his body felt feverish, he was ill and confused. With symptoms like these, he thought, he was probably going to die too. Even after the sun rose high, he stayed in bed, too sick and depressed to respond when his puzzled attendants urged him to eat. Meanwhile, messengers arrived from the imperial palace bearing word that the emperor was troubled because his people had been unable to find Genji on the preceding day. It was the sons of the minister of the left who came.

Genji announced that he could receive only Tō-no-chūjō. “Come in, but don’t sit down,” he told his friend from behind the blinds. “My nurse fell gravely ill around the fifth month. She managed to rally—possibly because she cut her hair, received the commandments, and so forth—but there was a flare-up a while ago, and now she’s very weak. She asked me to come to see her one last time, so I did. I thought it would seem heartless not to pay a deathbed visit to someone I’d been so close to ever since I was little. There was a sick servant in the house, and he died suddenly before he could move anywhere else. Not wanting to inconvenience me, they left him there until nightfall, but I found out about it later; and now I can’t go to the palace because of the problems it would cause, what with all the rituals coming up.²⁴ Furthermore, I think I’ve caught a cold; my head has been aching since before dawn, and I feel terrible. So please excuse the way I’ve received you.”

“I’ll report this to His Majesty. His men looked for you everywhere last night before the concert. He seemed displeased.” Tō-no-chūjō started away. Then he turned back. “How did you really get defiled? I can’t believe all that.”

Genji’s heart skipped a beat. “Please just tell His Majesty that I’ve suffered an unexpected defilement; don’t go into the details. I much regret my inability to wait on him.” He spoke with an air of indifference, but his thoughts were on the tragic event no words could undo, and he felt too ill to meet anyone face to face. Nevertheless, he summoned Kurōdo-no-ben and entrusted him with the same message for the emperor, speaking very seriously.²⁵ He also sent a letter to the minister’s house, telling of his defilement and his inability to call there.

Koremitsu appeared at dusk. The usual visitors, told of Genji’s defilement, had all departed without seating themselves, and the mansion was almost deserted. Genji called him in.

“Tell me what happened. Do you make sure there was no hope?” He wept with his sleeve pressed to his face.

Koremitsu also shed tears. “I’m afraid she’s gone. I didn’t think the vigil should be prolonged, and tomorrow is an auspicious day, so I’ve made arrangements for the funeral with a saintly old monk I know,” he said.

“What about the attendant who was with her?”

²⁴ Defilement from contact with a corpse lasted 30 days and could be transmitted if a guest came inside and sat down. It was particularly important for a defiled person to absent himself from Shinto rituals.

²⁵ Genji apparently has doubts about Tō-no-chūjō’s reliability. Kurōdo-no-ben is Tō-no-chūjō’s brother.

“I doubt that she’ll survive, either. Her mind is confused. She says she won’t let her mistress go without her, and this morning she seemed ready to leap into a chasm. She wants to tell the people back at Gojō, but I’ve managed to put her off. ‘Take a little time to pull yourself together,’ I told her. ‘Think things over first.’”

Genji’s heart was full. “I feel terribly ill. I wonder if I’m going to die too,” he said.

“Why brood about it? After all, it’s karma that determines everything. This needs to be kept quiet; I’ll handle all the details myself,” Koremitsu said.

“You’re right. I do try to see it that way. But I can’t bear to think of the inevitable criticism—the accusations that I’ve sacrificed a human life for my own wanton pleasure. Don’t let Shōshō-no-myōbu find out,” he cautioned.²⁶ “And especially not your mother. She’s always getting after me about these affairs; I simply couldn’t face her.”

“I won’t. I’ve even lied to the monks,” Koremitsu said. Genji was reassured.

The ladies-in-waiting overheard snatches of the conversation. “It’s very odd; what can be happening?” they wondered. “He won’t even go to the palace because he says he’s been defiled, and now there’s all this whispering and sighing.”

Genji’s thoughts turned to the funeral rites. “Be sure to manage things nicely,” he said.

“Oh, that’s nothing. There won’t be much of anything to do.” Koremitsu stood up to go.

Genji was overwhelmed by a sudden new access of grief. “You won’t approve, but I’m going to the temple on horseback. I’ll always be miserable if I don’t see her one last time,” he said.

Koremitsu swallowed his misgivings. “If you’ve decided, so be it. Please go right away; you need to get back early in the night.”

Genji prepared for the journey by changing into a hunting robe, one of an assortment with which he had provided himself for his recent incognito excursions. Mindful of the previous night’s horrors, he pondered the wisdom on going through with the bizarre expedition to which his bleak, tormented heart was driving him, but it was impossible to assuage his misery in any other way. “If I don’t see her now,” he thought, “when in another world shall I find her looking as she did in this?” He mastered his fears and started out, accompanied by his usual attendants, Koremitsu and the escort. The ride seemed interminable.

The moon of the seventeenth night had risen, and Toribeno loomed in the distance when the party reached the riverbed, their way-clearer’s torch a mere dim glow.²⁷ It was an eerie scene, but Genji let it pass unobserved, lost in agitated thought.

They arrived at their destination. In that area of unearthly loneliness, the nun’s dwelling was a moving sight, a rude board-roofed cell with an adjoining chapel. Light from a sacred lamp shone faintly

²⁶ Probably Koremitsu’s sister.

²⁷ The dry bed of the Kamo River was used as a thoroughfare.

through the chapel blinds. Inside the cell, the only sound was a woman's sobbing; outside the blinds, two or three monks talked and recited the sacred name in low tones. Vespers had ended at the temples, and all was still. Off toward Kiyomizu, the glitter of many lights pointed to the presence of throngs of people.²⁸ The nun's son, a monk of great virtue, was intoning a sutra in a holy voice. Genji felt he must weep until his store of tears was exhausted.

Upon entering the room, Genji saw that the lamp had been turned toward the wall. Ukon was lying down, separated from her mistress by a folding screen. He could imagine her misery. To his mind, there was nothing frightening about the lady's appearance: she was as charming as ever, quite unchanged. He took her hand. "Let me at least hear your voice one last time. What kind of karmic bond could it have been? During that brief interlude, I loved you with all my heart, and yet you went away and left me to suffer this anguish, this devastating grief." He broke down in convulsive sobs. The monks knew nothing about the two, but they also shed tears, astonished by the extravagance of his grief.

"Ukon, come home with me to Nijō," Genji said.

"In all the years since I was a child, I served her without once leaving her side. How could I suddenly abandon her and go off somewhere else? Besides, I have to tell the others what's happened. Her death is sorrow enough; I really don't think I can bear it if they blame me." She began to cry. "All I want is to follow her, to be part of the smoke for her pyre," she said.

Genji tried to comfort her. "It's natural for you to feel that way, but such is life in this world. There's no parting that isn't sad. And no matter how a person may die, die he will, for every life must end. Resign yourself to it and leave everything to me." He continued, "Even though I talk this way, I feel that I can't live much longer." It was not a reassuring remark.

"Dawn seems to be approaching. I think you should start back right away," said Koremitsu.

Genji left the cell with deep emotion and many backward glances. The wayside foliage was heavy with dew, the morning fog so impenetrable that he seemed to himself a forlorn wanderer, setting off on a journey into nowhere. As he rode, he thought of how the lady had looked lying there, the same as ever to all appearances, clad by force of circumstance in his own red singlet, which was one of the robes they had used as cover. What might have been the origin of such a karmic bond? Noticing that he seemed unsteady in the saddle, Koremitsu helped him along, but near the bank of the Kamo River, in great distress, he slid to the ground from the horse's back. "I wonder if it's my destiny to die by the roadside. I just don't see how I can get all the way home," he said.

Koremitsu was nonplused. "If I'd had any sense, I'd never have taken him on an excursion like this, whether he wanted to go or not," he thought. In dismay, he cleansed his hands in the river and prayed to Kiyomizu Kannon, for he could think of nothing else to do. Genji forced himself to take heart. He offered silent prayers to the buddhas, and finally, thanks to Koremitsu's help, he managed to reach the Nijō Mansion.

²⁸ The crowds had perhaps assembled in anticipation of the following day. The 18th of each month was considered an especially good time for the worship of Kannon, the principal divinity at the Kiyomizudera.

The ladies-in-waiting sighed to one another over the strange errand that had kept their master out so late. “It really won’t do! He’s been so unusually restless lately—all those clandestine outings—and now this! Why in the world would he ramble off that way when he looked deathly ill yesterday?”

Genji took to his bed, genuinely and miserably ill, and within two or three days, he was alarmingly enfeebled. The emperor was devastated. A hubbub of continuous prayer arose at temples and shrines in every quarter: rituals addressed to the gods, yin-yang purifications, Buddhist esoteric rites—I could not possibly list them all. The general public held to the vociferous opinion that his incomparable beauty was an ominous sign that he was not long for this world.

Desperate though he felt his illness to be, Genji summoned Ukon to the Nijō Mansion, assigned her a room near his own quarters, and enrolled her among his ladies-in-waiting. Koremitsu was frantic with worry, but he forced himself to seem calm and did what he could to help Ukon perform her duties, aware that there was nobody else for her to turn to. Whenever Genji felt a little better, he summoned her, sent her on errands, and so forth; and she was soon at ease with the other attendants. Although she was no beauty in her deep black mourning, she was a prepossessing enough young person.

“It looks as though I must die too—as though my fate has been determined by the bond forged during that strange, fleeting interlude. I can imagine how forlorn you must feel after losing the mistress you depended on for so long, and I had meant to try to comfort you by looking after you if I lived. Unfortunately, I’ll probably follow her soon.” He spoke in a confidential voice, shedding weak tears.

For the moment, Ukon put aside thoughts of the one whom grief could not bring back. What a terrible waste it would be if such a life as this were extinguished!

The people in the mansion were beside themselves with worry, and messengers from the emperor came thicker than raindrops. Genji made a valiant effort to rally his spirits, awed by reports of his father’s dismay.

The minister of the left bustled about on his son-in-law’s behalf, paid daily calls, and made sure that the Nijō household arranged for various kinds of prayers and rites. Whether or not it was due to his efforts, Genji started on the road to recovery, with no apparent lingering effects, after more than twenty days of critical illness. The return of his health coincided with the end of the ritual seclusion imposed by his defilement, and he felt obliged to put in an appearance at the Kiritsubo pavilion on the same night, mindful of the need to show proper appreciation for the emperor’s solicitude. The minister called for him there and took him in his carriage to his own house, where he went to officious lengths to ensure his observation of the ritual seclusion and other precautions required after an illness. For a time, Genji’s sense of disorientation was so strong that he felt as though he had been born into another world.

It was around the twentieth of the ninth month when he recovered. His extreme emaciation served only to refine his beauty. He often sat gazing into space and sobbing, and there were those among his mystified attendants who concluded that he must be possessed by an evil spirit.

One quiet evening, he summoned Ukon for a talk. “It still seems strange,” he said. “Why wouldn’t she let me know who she was? She always kept that barrier between us, as though she didn’t realize I’d have loved her even if she really had been a fisherman’s daughter. It was hard to bear.”

“It wasn’t at all that she was determined to hide who she was. There just was no opportunity to mention so insignificant a name. From the outset, she considered it strange and incomprehensible that you should be in love with her—like a dream. She felt hurt by your reticence about your own identity. ‘I’ve guessed who he is, but he won’t tell me because he doesn’t take me seriously,’ she said.”

“Both of us were stubborn fools. I didn’t want to be evasive, but I’m not used to doing things people disapprove of. I have to be very circumspect in my position—first of all, so His Majesty won’t have occasion to reprimand me, but also because even a little joke addressed to a woman will cause gossip. It’s an annoying situation. When I think of how strangely your mistress fascinated me after the trifling incident that night—of how I insisted on being with her—I can’t help believing that her karma ordained that she should meet such an end. I pity her with all my heart, and yet I feel ill-used, too. Why did I have to love her so much if our union wasn’t going to last?”

“Tell me more about her. You shouldn’t hold anything back now. When I commission sacred paintings to be offered during the seventh-day services, whom shall I tell myself they’re for?”

“I don’t want to keep anything from you; it was only that, after her death, I didn’t think I ought to blurt out something she had treated as a secret. Both of her parents died prematurely. Her father was a middle captain of third rank. He loved her dearly, but he seemed to worry that his career was stagnating, and in the end he couldn’t even maintain his hold on life. Later, through some little happenstance, she began to receive visits from Lord Tō-no-chūjō, who was still a lesser captain then. He kept up the relationship for three years and seemed to be very much in love, but some horrible threats came from the minister of the right’s house last fall. Being an excessively timid person, my lady was terrified, and she stole away to the house of an old nurse, in the western sector of the city. It was a squalid place. She was unhappy there, and wanted to move to the hills, but that direction was unfavorable this year, so she took up residence in the shabby dwelling you know about, merely to avoid the taboo.²⁹ It was a sorrow to her that you found her there. She was far more diffident than most people; it embarrassed her to reveal her worries, and she always put on a placid front when you were together.”

It was just as he had thought, Genji said to himself. His love and pity increased as the fragments of the lady’s story came together in his mind. “I once heard Tō-no-chūjō lament the loss of a child. Did she have one?” he said.

“Yes, it was born year before last, in the spring—a sweet little girl,” she said.

“Where is she? Give her to me without letting people know. It would be wonderful to have her as a keepsake of the lady whose loss is so hard to bear.” He went on in a confidential voice, “I ought to tell Tō-no-chūjō about her, but he would be sure to overwhelm me with reproaches that wouldn’t change a thing. In any case, I don’t see what objection there could be to my rearing her. Make some excuse to the nurse, or whoever else is with her, and bring her here.”

“I’d be very happy if you took her. It’s sad to think of her growing up in the western sector, which is where she is now. There was nobody reliable to entrust her to at Gojō.”

²⁹ In yin-yang cosmology, certain directions were unfavorable for an individual at certain times. If it was essential to reach a place, a person could spend one or more nights in a house from which he or she could travel in another direction.

The quiet evening scene was like a painting—poignant charm of sky, the withering plants in the front garden, the feeble insect voices, the reddening maple trees. Looking out at it all, Ukon marveled that she had stumbled into such a splendid situation, and it was with a flush of embarrassment that she recalled the house at Gojō.

The throaty coo of a pigeon in the bamboo reminded Genji of how the same call had frightened the lady while they were at the ruined mansion, and a vision of her pathetic face rose before him. “How old was she?” he asked. “It must have been because she was doomed to an early death that she seemed so strangely, so extraordinarily fragile.”

“She would have been nineteen. After the death of my mother, who was one of her nurses, her father took pity on me and raised me with her. How can I keep on living when I remember that act of mercy? And yet I feel like the poet who regretted an intimacy he had once savored—during all those years, I relied on someone who was a rather helpless person.”³⁰

“It’s precisely lack of strength that makes a woman appealing. Clever, unsubmissive women don’t attract men. I myself am not a brisk, forceful type, and I like someone who is gentle, susceptible perhaps to masculine deception when off guard, but nevertheless basically prudent and discreet, and submissive to her husband’s wishes. If a man finds such a woman, corrects her flaws to suit his taste, and makes her his wife, she’ll become very dear to him,” Genji said.

“When I think of how my lady was exactly what you wanted, it seems such a pity!” Ukon began to weep.

The sky had clouded over, and a cold wind was blowing. Genji stared gloomily into space. Half under his breath, he recited a poem:

mishi hito no	The evening sky itself
keburī o kumo to	becomes something to cherish
nagamureba	when I gaze at it,
yūbe no sora mo	seeing in one of the clouds
mutsumashiki ka na	the smoke from her funeral pyre.

Ukon was unable to respond. “If only she could be here with him!” The thought made her heart ache. As for Genji, even the memory of the noisy cloth fullers evoked nostalgic feelings, and he murmured, “The nights are long,” as he composed himself for sleep.³¹

To mark the forty-ninth day after the death, Genji made discreet arrangements for sutra recitations at the Lotus Concentration Chapel on Mount Hiei, including unstinting, meticulous provision for costumes and other appropriate offerings. Even the sutra scrolls and the decorations for the images received careful attention. Koremitsu’s brother, the holy teacher, conducted the rites with impeccable dignity. To review the petition he composed, Genji called in his Chinese teacher, a professor of literature with whom he was on close terms. With a pitiful mien, he wrote that someone dear to him, not named,

³⁰ The poem has not survived.

³¹ The quotation is part of a line from “On Hearing Cloth-fulling Mallets in the Night,” a poem by Bo Juyi about wives fulling cloth while grieving for husbands absent on military duty.

had breathed her last, and that he now commended her to Amida Buddha. “That will do as it is; nothing needs to be added,” the professor said. He saw that Genji seemed sunk in misery, his eyes overflowing with irrepressible tears. “Who might the lady have been?” he wondered. “She must have had a splendid karma to have remained completely unknown to outsiders, and yet to have excited such remarkable grief.”

Genji picked up a pair of trousers from one of the costumes he had quietly tailored. [His poem:]

nakunaku mo	In what other world
kyō wa wa ga yuu	shall we meet with hearts at ease—
shitahimo o	in what world untie
izure no yo ni ka	the strings I fasten today,
tokete mirubeki	weeping, ever weeping?

He recited heartfelt Buddha-invocations with his mind on the lady. She had been wandering up to this point; now she must be setting out on a designated path.

For no good reason, his heart beat faster whenever he encountered Tō-no-chūjō. He would have liked to let him know that the wild pink was being cared for, but he held his peace, unable to face the thought of his friend’s reproaches.

Back at the Gojō house, everyone was greatly upset by the lady’s disappearance, but there was nothing to go on, no way to find her. It was so odd, her attendants lamented, so strange that not even Ukon should have come back! Admittedly, there was no proof, but they whispered that appearances had pointed Genji as their mistress’s lover. They brought their complaints to Koremitsu, who professed bewilderment, talked as though he knew nothing at all, and continued to visit and flirt as before. The episode seemed increasingly dreamlike. Perhaps, they speculated, the man had been the dissolute son of a provincial governor—someone who had carried her off into the countryside because he was afraid of Tō-no-chūjō. The mistress of the house was one of three children whose mother was the nurse in the western sector. Ukon’s parentage was different, and the mistress, shedding nostalgic tears, thought that she must be withholding news of the lady’s whereabouts for standoffish reasons of her own. Ukon for her part thought that she would become the center of a tremendous furor if she revealed the truth; and she also knew that Genji remained set on secrecy. She felt unable even to inquire about the little girl, and the lady’s people continued in the same state of stunned surprise and ignorance.

Genji mourned on. If only he might at least dream about her! Instead, on the night after the forty-ninth-day services, his dreams were visited by an indistinct figure, the exact image of the woman who had appeared at the bedside in the mansion. Looking back on the event, he could not help believing that some creature at the ruined mansion had lodged itself in his person, and that the lady had died because she happened to be present also. It was a chilling thought.

"Yūgao." *Genji & Heike: Selections from The Tale of Genji and The Tale of Heike*. Trans. Helen Craig McCullough. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1994. 59-83, 470, 473, 476, Print.