

9
(ABRIDGED)

AOI
HEART-TO-HEART

The plant *aoi* (more precisely, *futaba aoi*), sacred to the Kamo Shrine, grows on the forest floor and consists of a pair of broad, heart-shaped leaves that spring from a single stem. At the Kamo Festival people decorated their headdresses and carriages with it. In its Heian spelling (*afuhi*), the word can also be read to mean "day of (lovers') meeting." This word-play and the plant's configuration suggest the translation "heart-to-heart."

As the chapter title, *Aoi* refers particularly to an exchange of poems at the Festival between Genji and the amorous Dame of Staff. Since Genji's wife bears the main responsibility for a famous incident at the Festival, she is traditionally known as *Aoi*.

There is a gap of two years or so between chapters 8 and 9. In the interval Genji's father has abdicated; Suzaku, his son by the Kokiden Consort, has become Emperor; and Fujitsubo's son by Genji has become Heir Apparent.

The change of reign made all things a burden for Genji, and perhaps his rise in rank¹ explains why he now renounced his lighter affairs, so that for many he multiplied the sorrows of

1. Suzaku, the son of the Kokiden Consort, has succeeded Genji's father as Emperor. This has brought the faction represented by the Kokiden Consort and her father, the Minister of the Right, to power. Moreover, Genji's father seems as a last gesture to have appointed Genji Commander of the Right, so that he must now travel with an escort of eight guards.

neglect even while he himself, as though in retribution, continually lamented his own love's cruelty.² Fujitsubo was so constantly at the Retired Emperor's side³ that she might as well have been a commoner, and this seemed to displease the Empress Mother,⁴ who kept to the palace and left her in peace. Now and again His Eminence might hold a beautiful concert or something of the sort, one that set the whole court talking, so that he shone more brightly than ever; but he sadly missed the Heir Apparent, whose lack of effective support worried him, and his request that Genji look after him moved the new Commander to mingled joy and dismay.

Oh, yes, Akikonomu, the late Heir Apparent's daughter by the Rokujō Haven, had been named High Priestess of Ise, and her mother, who doubted Genji's devotion, had quickly invoked concern over her daughter's youth as a reason for considering going down to Ise herself.

Genji's father remarked to him on learning of her plan, "The Heir Apparent thought very highly of her and showed her every attention, and I find it intolerable that you should treat her as casually as you might any other woman. I consider the High Priestess my own daughter, and I should therefore appreciate it if you were to avoid offending her mother, both for her father's sake and for mine. Such wanton self-indulgence risks widespread censure." The displeasure on his countenance obliged Genji to agree, and he kept a humble silence.

"Never cause a woman to suffer humiliation," His Eminence continued. "Treat each with tact and avoid provoking her anger."

Genji withdrew contritely from his presence, terrified to imagine his rebuke were he to learn the full impudence of his own inadmissible passion.

That even His Eminence should know of his misconduct and express himself on the subject showed how painfully the lady's

2. Fujitsubo's. *Kokinshū* 1041: "As though in retribution for my not loving the one who loves me, the one I do love does not love me."

3. Genji's father.

4. The former Kokiden Consort, whose son is now Emperor.

name as well as his own had been compromised in the affair, and he guiltily redoubled his attentions toward her, but he still showed no sign of acknowledging their tie openly. She herself remained constantly constrained by shame over the discrepancy between their ages, and he countered with matching formality. The affair had reached His Eminence's ears by now and was well known to one and all, but she still suffered acutely from his relative indifference toward her.

News of all this confirmed Princess Asagao in her resolve that nothing of the kind should happen to her, and she rarely gave him the simplest reply. Still, he often thought how unusual it was of her, and how like her, too, not to dismiss him outright.

At the Minister of the Left's there was no praise for Genji's obviously roving fancy, but Aoi did not hold it deeply against him, perhaps because the way he almost flaunted it was beneath comment. For a very touching reason she was sadly unwell.⁵ Genji felt wonder and sympathy for her. Everyone was pleased, but her parents had penances done for fear of rejoicing too soon.⁶ These things kept him fully occupied, and while he never forgot the Rokujō Haven, he must have failed more often than not to visit her.

The High Priestess of the Kamo Shrine resigned at this time, and her successor was the Retired Emperor's third daughter by the Empress Mother. This Princess's parents were sorry to see her life take this odd turn, since she was a great favorite of theirs, but no other would do. The attendant rites, although not unusual, were done with great pomp and animation. When the time for the Festival came,⁷ the customary events received many embellishments, and there were all sorts of sights to see. The Princess's personal distinction seemed to explain it all.

On the day of the Purification⁸ the senior nobles took part in

5. With morning sickness.

6. Ritual abstinences, performed by others on her behalf, to ensure safe child-birth.

7. The Kamo Festival, on the middle Bird (*tori*) day in the fourth month, one of the major annual events in the City.

8. Strictly speaking, the second Purification, held on the day of the Horse (*uma*) or Sheep (*hitsuji*) preceding the day of the Festival proper.

the requisite numbers,⁹ but only the best-looking and most highly regarded among them. They were all perfect in the color of their train-robos, in the pattern of their outer trousers,¹⁰ and even in their choice of saddle and mount. Genji took part as well, by His Eminence's special decree. The sightseeing carriages had been made ready well in advance. Ichijō Avenue was packed and terribly noisy. The viewing stands put up here and there were elaborately adorned, each according to its owner's taste, and even the sleeves spilling from under their blinds were a wonder to behold.

Aoi rarely went out for such events, and she had not even thought of going this time, since she was indisposed, but her younger gentlewomen protested, "Oh, come, my lady, we would not enjoy stealing off there on our own! All the world longs for a glimpse of Lord Genji at the Festival today, and they say even the poorest woodcutters will be there to see him. Some people are even bringing their families from far-off provinces! My lady, you simply cannot miss it!"

"You really are feeling better lately," Aoi's mother remarked to her daughter when she heard, "and your women seem so disappointed." The household therefore suddenly learned that she would see the Festival after all.

The sun was already high when she set out with as little fuss as possible. Her imposing train of carriages halted, since by now every place was taken and it had nowhere to go. Her grooms fixed on a spot occupied by many fine ladies' carriages but free of any press of attendants, and they began having them cleared away. Among them were two basketwork carriages, a little worn but with elegant blinds through which spilled a hint of sleeves, trains, and jackets in the loveliest colors worn by those seated deep within. The occupant clearly wished to go unrecognized.

9. According to the *Engi shiki*, the first Purification required a single Consultant as imperial envoy, while the second required one Grand Counselor, one Counselor, and two Consultants.

10. They had on full civil dress, with a formal cloak of a color to match their rank, contrasting train-robos, and two pairs of open-legged trousers (the inner pair of plain red silk, the outer of brocade).

"These carriages are *not* ones you can push aside this way!" her grooms insisted loudly, and they would not let them be touched, but by now the young men on both sides were drunk and rowdy and out of control. The more sober personal escort from the Minister of the Left's warned them in vain.

The Rokujō Haven, the mother of the High Priestess of Ise (for it was she), had come secretly for relief from her troubles. Her people said nothing about who she was, but the other side of course knew her. "Take no such nonsense from the likes of them! They must be counting on Lord Genji's protection!" shouted the men from the Minister of the Left's. Some of them, Genji's own men, were disturbed to see what was happening, but they feigned indifference because it would have been too difficult to intervene.

By the time all the carriages were in place, the Rokujō Haven's had been pushed behind the least of the gentlewomen's, and she had no view at all. She was not only outraged but extremely put out that she had been recognized after all. With her shaft benches broken and her carriage shafts now resting willy-nilly on the wheel hubs of other carriages, she looked so ridiculous that she rued her folly and wondered helplessly why she had ever come. She would gladly have left without seeing the procession, but there was no room for her to get out, and her resolve must have faltered after all when she heard cries of "Here they come!" and understood that her own cruel lover would be passing by. And pass on by he did, to her bitter chagrin, without so much as a glance her way.¹¹

Beneath the blinds of carriages far more elaborately done up than usual, many eager ladies had indeed put forth a bright display that Genji affected to ignore, but on some he bestowed a sidelong glance and a smile. The carriages from the Minister of the Left's stood out, and he rode gravely past them. The profound deference and respect shown by his own retinue

11. More literally, "And perhaps because this was not even Sasanokuma, he passed by with no sign of recognition . . ." *Kokinshū* 1080, attributed to the goddess at Ise: "At Sasanokuma, by the Hinokuma River, stop, let your horse drink, that I may look upon you!"

brought home to the Rokujō Haven the sting of her ignominious defeat.

*"One fugitive glimpse as of a face reflected in a hallowed stream
tells me with new cruelty that I matter not at all!"*

She did not like being seen to weep, but she knew how much she would have regretted missing the dazzling beauty and presence that on this great occasion shone more brilliantly than ever.

The gentlemen of Genji's escort were perfect in dress and deportment, each as his station warranted, and the senior nobles among them especially so, but the brightness of that single light seemed to eclipse them all. It was unusual for a Commander to be specially guarded by a privy gentleman from the Palace Guards, but this procession was so exceptional that that office was filled for once by someone from the Right Palace Guards. The rest of Genji's retinue was equally brilliant in looks and finery, until it seemed as though the very trees and grasses must bow down before a beauty so universally admired. The way quite respectable women in deep hats¹² or nuns to whom the world was dross came lurching and stumbling along to see him would ordinarily have merited cries of horrified disapproval, except that today no one could blame them. Women with puckered mouths and gowns over their hair¹³ gaped up at him, palms joined or pressed to their foreheads in idiot adoration, while peasant simpletons grinned beatifically, innocent of any thought of how they looked themselves. Even miserable Governors' daughters, girls beneath his notice, were there in cleverly tricked-out carriages, preening and congratulating themselves. Yes, there were many amusing sights to see. Of course, there were also many whom Genji had secretly favored and who now could only sigh that they meant so little to him.

12. *Tsubo sōzoku*, the attire for a respectable woman outdoors. She draped a shift over her head and hair, then put on a deep, broad-brimmed hat. She also hitched up her skirts a little for walking.

13. Women too modest in standing to wear *tsubo sōzoku* would still tuck their hair under their outer robe when outdoors.

Princess Asagao's father, the Lord of the Bureau of Ceremonial, was watching from a stand. The older he grows, the more devastatingly handsome he becomes, he said to himself with a feeling of vague dread; surely he must catch the eye even of the gods! To his daughter, who well knew from the letters she had had from him all these years how little his sentiments resembled those of other men, Genji would no doubt have been pleasing enough even if quite ordinary in looks, and she wondered as she felt his attraction how he could possibly be so dazzlingly beautiful as well. Still, she desired no greater intimacy with him. Her young gentlewomen praised him until she wished they would stop.

There were no sightseers from the Minister of the Left's residence on the day of the Festival proper.¹⁴ With shock and dismay Genji received from his men a full account of the quarrel the previous day over the placement of the carriages. Alas, he thought, despite her dignity Aoi lacks kindness and tact. She cannot really have meant this to happen, but I suppose she sees so little reason why the two of them should think warmly of each other that those men of hers then took it on themselves to act as they did. The Rokujō Haven is so fastidious and reserved by nature—it must have been a terrible experience for her.

He anxiously went straight to call on her, but her daughter, the Ise Priestess, was still at home, and she invoked respect for the sacred *sakaki* tree to turn him away.¹⁵ He quite understood, yet he could not help whispering to himself, "But why? I do wish they would both be less prickly with one another!"

On the day, he sought refuge at Nijō, from where he went to watch the Festival. He crossed to the west wing¹⁶ and had

14. On this day the High Priestess actually went to the Kamo Shrine.

15. Once appointed, the High Priestess moved to special quarters in the palace and there underwent purification until the seventh month of the following year, when at last she went on to Ise. In this case, however, her move seems to have been delayed. Meanwhile, her house has been purified, and branches of the sacred *sakaki* tree, hung with cloth or paper streamers, have been set up at the four corners and at the gate to mark the place as ritually pure.

16. Where Murasaki lives.

Koremitsu order the carriage. "Are you gentlewomen going, too?"¹⁷ he asked and watched, all smiles, while the young lady got herself ready very prettily indeed. "Come along, then," he said, "let us see it together."

Her hair was lovelier than ever. "You seem not to have had it trimmed for ages," he observed while he stroked it. "I imagine today is a good day for that."¹⁸ He called for a Doctor of the Almanac and had him questioned about the proper hour. "Out you come now, gentlewomen!" he said and surveyed the delightful picture the children presented. The line of their bewitching hair, boldly cut straight across, stood out sharply against their damask-patterned outer trousers.

"I shall trim your hair myself. But oh, dear, how thick it is! I wonder how long it will grow!" He hardly knew what to do next. "People with very long hair still seem to have it shorter at the sides, but you have no stray locks at all! I am afraid you are not going to look very nice!"¹⁹ When he was done, he made the "thousand fathom" wish, while Shōnagon looked on with pleasure and deep gratitude.

He said,

*"Rich seaweed tresses of the unplumbed ocean depths, a thousand fathoms long,
you are mine and mine alone to watch daily as you grow."²⁰*

*"How am I to know whether a thousand fathoms measure your love, too,
when the ever shifting tides so restlessly ebb and flow?"*

17. Genji playfully addresses Murasaki's playmates as adults.

18. An auspicious day according to the almanac.

19. Ladies with long hair, Genji says, still have shorter sidelocks (*hitai gami*, the hair that falls from the temples over the cheeks); but Murasaki's *hitai gami* seems as long as the rest of her hair. His lament that she "will not look very nice" is not serious.

20. It was apparently customary to wish that a girl's hair should grow "a thousand fathoms" long. Genji's poem compares the little girl's hair to seaweed in praise, and it plays on *miru* (a kind of seaweed) and *miru* ("see"—i.e., "possess" [a wife]).

she wrote on a bit of paper, looking so grown-up yet at the same time so fresh and young that she was a joy to behold.

Today again there was no room for one carriage more. Genji's found nowhere to go, and it waited by the riding ground pavilion.²¹ "It is awfully crowded here, with all these senior nobles' carriages," he remarked, and he was wondering whether to pass on when from a very fine one overflowing with a bright profusion of sleeves there emerged a fan that beckoned to one of his men.

"Would you not like to put your carriage here?" the occupant inquired. "I cede you my place."

Genji wondered what sort of coquette she could be, but he had his carriage brought up to the spot, since it was indeed a good one. "I envy you having managed to find it," he replied.

At this she broke a bit off a prettily decorated fan²² and wrote upon it,

*"Ah, it is too hard! Today when our heart-to-heart told me that the god
blessed our meeting, I perceive that another sports those leaves."*

I should not presume . . ."²³

He knew the handwriting: it was the Dame of Staff's. How she will play the gay young thing, despite her years! He was sufficiently irritated to retort,

21. The riding ground ([*sakon no*] *baba*) was near the intersection of Ichijō and Nishi no Tōin; the pavilion (*otodo*) there was where the Captains and Lieutenants sat during the *yabusame* riding events that took place on the third and fifth days of the fifth month. For the Festival the High Priestess was to come down from her temporary residence north of the city and proceed eastward along Ichijō to the Kamo Shrine.

22. Presumably a *hiōgi* made of thin slips of cypress (*hinoki*) wood. She would have written on a piece of one of these.

23. Continuing the mood of the poem, "I should not presume" relies on vocabulary special to a sacred festival.

*"Yours, so I would say, was a very naughty wish to sport heart-to-heart,
when this meeting place today gathers men from countless clans!"*

She answered, deeply wounded,

*"How I rue the day I wished to sport heart-to-heart, those perfidious leaves
that with no more than a name stir such foolish pangs of hope!"*

Many ladies were disappointed to see that he had someone with him and did not even raise his blinds. The other day he was so correct, they said to themselves, but he certainly is making a casual outing of it today. Who can she be? She must be worth looking at, if she is with him.

What a dismal skirmish that was, over heart-to-heart! Genji was annoyed. Certainly, anyone less shameless than that woman would have deferred to the lady beside him and refrained from tossing off rash repartee.

The Rokujō Haven had never through all the years known such misery and turmoil. As to her cruel lover, she had given him up, but she knew how badly she would miss him if she were actually to break with him and go down to Ise, and she also feared ridicule for doing so; yet the thought of staying after all left her afraid of encountering once more the hideous contempt that she had already suffered. "Am I the float on the fisherman's line?"²⁴ she asked herself in anguish day and night, and perhaps this was why she lived like an invalid, her mind seeming to her to have come adrift.

Genji never insisted that it would be madness for her to go; he only argued, "I quite understand that you should wish to see the last of me, worthless as I am, but even if you are fed up with me by now, it would still be much kinder of you to continue

24. *Kokinshū* 509: "Am I the float on the line of the fisherman, fishing in Ise Bay, that I should be unable to make up my mind?"

receiving me." This made the storm of that day of Purification,²⁵ which she had attended only for relief from her indecision, more hateful to her than before.

At the Minister of the Left's a spirit, it seemed, was making Aoi extremely unwell, and her family was alarmed. This was therefore no time for Genji to pursue adventures elsewhere, and it was only at odd moments that he managed even to visit Nijō. It pained him deeply that someone who so commanded his consideration should suffer this way, especially in her already delicate condition, and he had many prayers and rites done for her in his own apartment within the residence.

Many spirits and living phantoms²⁶ came forth and identified themselves in one way or another, but one refused to move into the medium and clung instead to Aoi herself; and although it did her no great violence, it never left her. Its resistance even to the most potent healers was extraordinarily stubborn.

After considering all the women with whom Genji had a liaison, people began to whisper that only the Rokujō Haven and the lady at Nijō engaged his deeper feelings, so that either might be intensely jealous; but divination performed at His Excellency's insistence still yielded nothing clear. None of the other spirits was especially hostile. One appeared to be a deceased nurse, while others were entities that had haunted her parents' families for generations, but these were not serious, and they were manifesting themselves only at random because of her weakened condition. She herself just cried and cried, and sometimes retched, suffering such unbearable agony that her parents wondered in fear and sorrow what was to become of her.

There were constant inquiries from the Retired Emperor, whose most gracious solicitude, expressed in the prayers that he was kindly having offered on her behalf, made it seem still more urgent that she be saved. The Rokujō Haven was shaken to learn that all the world feared for Aoi's life. No one at His Excellency's guessed

25. Literally, "the violent rapids of the lustration stream" (*misogigawa*, the stream that runs before the Kamo Shrine).

26. "Spirits" (*mononoke*) are the spirits of the dead or other supernatural, generally troublesome entities. "Living phantoms" (*ikisudama*) are the malevolent spirits of living persons.

that that little quarrel over placement of the carriages had inflamed in her heart a rivalry hitherto dormant for many years.

Her troubled mood convinced her that she was simply not herself, and she moved elsewhere to have healing rites done. The news made Genji wonder with uneasy sympathy what state of mind had prompted her to do this, and he resolved to go and see her. He went very discreetly, since for once she was not at her own home. He begged forgiveness at length for his recent, quite unintentional neglect, and he appealed to her with an account of Aoi's condition.

"I myself am not all that worried," he earnestly explained, "but I feel for her parents, who are desperately anxious, and so, you see, I thought I should stay with her for the time being. I would be grateful if you were to view my behavior more indulgently." He understood that she was suffering more than usual, and was pained to see it.

His departing figure, at dawn after a night of distances, was so enchanting that again she could not bear to leave him, but now that he had reason to devote himself more than ever to the one who commanded his first allegiance, he would doubtless settle his affections upon her, and this endless waiting would mean nothing but misery; his occasional visit would arouse only fresh despair. These thoughts were running through her mind when she had a letter from him—only a letter, and toward sunset: "She had seemed a little better lately, but all at once she took such a turn for the worse that I could not get away."

To her this was just another of his excuses, and she replied,

*"I knew all too well that no sleeve goes unmoistened by the mire of love,
yet in the slough of that field I labor in helpless pain."*

How true! 眞 なる 山 泉 について 涙 ぐさ 涙 ぐさ 涙 ぐさ line about the mountain spring!"²⁷

27. Rokujō's poem develops a play on *koi*ji ("mud-filled [flooded] rice field" and "path of love"), and her final remark means, "It is true that you care little for me." *Kokin rokujō* 987: "How bitterly I regret dipping water from the mountain spring, so shallow that I only wetted my sleeves."

To Genji her writing stood out easily in any company. Ah, he thought, why must it be like this? He was caught agonizingly between his reluctance to give up both her spirit and her looks and his incapacity to commit himself to her. His reply reached her well after dark: "Only your sleeves are wet? So your feelings have no depth . . .

*It is shallow, then, the field of your hard labors, not at all like mine,
for I am wholly immersed in the deep slough of love's mire.*

Have I failed to answer you in person only because you mean so little to me?"

At the Minister of the Left's the spirit was very active, and Aoi was in agony. The Rokujō Haven heard that some were calling it her own living phantom or the ghost of her late father, but on reflection she found in herself only her own misery and no desire at all to see Aoi harmed, though she conceded that a soul wandering in distress, as souls were said to do, might well act in this manner. Despite years plumbing the depths of despair, she had never before felt, as now, utterly destroyed, and after the Purification, when in that foolish incident she had been as though singled out for contempt and treated as naught, she knew that her mind, which had then drifted briefly from her, was now indeed beyond her control; and perhaps this was why she dreamed repeatedly, on dozing off, that she went to where that lady (as she supposed) lay in her finery, pushed and tugged her about, and flailed at her with a baneful violence strange to her waking self. Time after time she felt that she was not herself and that to her horror she had wandered away from her own body, until she saw that even if she were wrong, the world so unwillingly speaks well of anyone that the rumor of it would be embroidered upon everywhere with glee. She would, she knew, be talked of far and wide. No doubt it was common enough to leave a still-active malevolence behind after death, and this alone, when told of another, would arouse repulsion and fear; but that it should be her tragic destiny to have anything so horrible said of herself while she was still alive! No, she could not

remain attached to so cruel a lover. Such were her thoughts, but hers was a case of "trying too hard to forget."²⁸

Akikononmu was to have gone to the palace the year before,²⁹ but various difficulties had prevented her from doing so until this autumn. She was then to move in the ninth month directly to the Shrine on the Moor,³⁰ which meant that preparations for the second Purification had to go forward urgently at the same time; but her mother was overcome by a strange lassitude and spent her time in despondent brooding, to the intense anxiety of the High Priestess's staff, who offered prayers of every kind.³¹ Still, her condition was not actually dire, and she got through the days and months without displaying any clear symptoms. Genji called on her often, but Aoi was so ill that he remained deeply preoccupied.

It was still early, and the family were unprepared, when all at once Aoi began to show obvious signs and to suffer pain. Ever more potent prayers were commissioned in great numbers, but that single most obstinate spirit refused to move, until the mightiest healers were surprised to find their efforts frustrated. Their assault was nonetheless fierce enough that the spirit wept in misery and cried, "Oh, please be a little more gentle with me! I have something to say to Commander Genji!"

"What did I tell you?" the women whispered among themselves. "Now we shall know!"

They led Genji in to the curtain that stood near where she lay. She was so clearly dying that her parents withdrew a little,

28. From a riddling poem (*Genji monogatari kochūshakusho in'yō waka* 76) built on the multiple implications of the verb *omou*: "Trying too hard to forget, I only remember; why, when one tries to forget, does one not forget?"

29. An Ise Priestess was appointed by divination at the start of a new reign. She first purified herself on the bank of the Kamo River (first Purification), then entered the Shosai-in ("Hall of First Abstinence") within the palace compound. In the autumn of the next year she underwent the second Purification and then entered the Shrine on the Moor; she went to Ise in the ninth month of the following year, after further purification in the Katsura River.

30. Nonomiya, a temporary shrine built for the purpose on Saga Moor (Sagano), just west of the City.

31. If she became unambiguously ill, her presence would pollute the sacred space inhabited by her daughter.

understanding that she might have some last word for him. The priests chanting the Lotus Sutra lowered their voices, to awe-some effect. He lifted the curtain and looked in. Anyone, not only her husband, would have been moved to see her lying there, so beautiful and with so vast a belly, and since she was indeed his wife, he was of course overcome by pity and regret. Her long, abundant hair, bound at the end, lay beside her, contrasting vividly with her white gown. He thought her dearer and more beautiful than ever before.

He took her hand. "This is dreadful! What a thing to do to me!" When weeping silenced him, she lifted to his face her expiring gaze, so filled in the past with reproach and disapproval, and tears spilled from her eyes. How could he not have been profoundly moved?

She wept so piteously that he assumed her thoughts were on her sorrowing parents, as well as on the pain of leaving him. "You must not make too much of all this," he said soothingly. "You are going to be well after all. At any rate, whatever happens, you and I will meet again. People do. Remember what a strong bond you have with your mother and father, because it will remain unbroken in lives to come, and you will be with them again."

"No, no, you do not understand," a gentle voice answered. "I only wished you to have them release me a little because I am in such pain. I did not want to come at all, but you see, it really is true that the soul of someone in anguish may wander away.

*This spirit of mine that, sighing and suffering, wanders the heavens,
oh, stop it now, tie a knot where in front the two hems meet."*³²

The voice, the manner, were not hers but those of someone else. After a moment of shock he understood that he was in the presence of the Rokujō Haven. Alas, what he had dismissed so

32. An old poem-spell, to be repeated by one who has seen a ghost, enjoins the speaker to knot the overlapping hems at the front of his or her robe.

far as malicious rumor put about by the ignorant now proved to be patently true, and he saw with revulsion that such things really did happen. "I hear your voice, but I do not know you. Please make it clear to me who you are." To his understandable horror, the answer was not in doubt. He shuddered to imagine the gentlewomen coming to their mistress now.

When her cries died down a little, her mother brought the hot medicinal water in case she might be in reprieve; then she was lifted upright and quickly gave birth.³³ Her parents' joy knew no bounds, but the spirits expelled by the healers³⁴ now raised a wild clamor of jealous rage, and what remained to come³⁵ was still a great worry. When all finally ended well, no doubt thanks to urgent prayers renewed in numbers beyond counting, the Abbot of Mount Hiei and the other most holy monks wiped away their perspiration in triumph and hurried away.

Days of acute and widespread anxiety now gave way to a welcome lull, and at last her parents breathed easily. The Minister of the Left commissioned a new round of protective rites, but happiness reigned, and exceptional delight in the child put everyone off guard. The Retired Emperor, Their Highnesses the Princes, and the senior nobles all attended the splendid birth celebrations that enlivened the succeeding evenings.³⁶ These events were especially bright and gay because in the bargain the child was a boy.

This news shook the Rokujō Haven. Aoi was supposed to be near death, she silently exclaimed, and now she has actually given birth without a hitch! Curiously, she still felt unlike herself, and her clothing reeked of poppy seeds.³⁷ To allay her misgivings she tried washing her hair and changing, but the smell

33. Her gentlewoman lifted her to the then-normal squatting position. Hot medicinal water was provided for a birth.

34. Driven by the healers (male Buddhist clerics) into the attendant (female) mediums, through whom the healers interrogated and dismissed them.

35. The afterbirth.

36. Parties (*ubuyashinai*) were given on the third, fifth, seventh, and ninth evenings after a birth. The guests brought gifts of food and clothing for the child.

37. Poppy seeds were thrown on the sacred *goma* fire during the rite to quell a spirit.

lingered until she came to look on herself with horror and of course to mourn inwardly (for the matter was hardly one she could discuss) what others must be saying about her. As she did so, she sank into ever more disturbed states of mind.

Genji, who was now a little less anxious than before, shuddered to recall that dreadful moment when the spirit had so startlingly addressed him. He knew he had been wrong to neglect her for so long, but he had grave doubts about how he would feel in her presence, and after careful reflection (for he did not wish to be unkind) he only sent her a letter.

Aoi's parents were still apprehensive, since they feared the effects of so serious an illness, and Genji tactfully abstained from his private excursions. She was not yet well enough to receive him as she usually did. The little boy was so handsome, in fact disturbingly so, that Genji was soon captivated, while His Excellency rejoiced that things had turned out well after all, if it were not for the worry that his daughter had yet to recover; but this he attributed to the difficulty of getting over everything she had suffered, and in truth he had little reason to fear.

Seeing how closely the little boy's engaging looks resembled the Heir Apparent's, Genji gave in to fond memories and went to call at the palace. "I feel guilty not to have seen His Majesty for so long," he said reproachfully, "and now I am going at last, I hope that I may come a little nearer to talk to you. It is too unkind of you to keep yourself from me as you do."³⁸

"Indeed, my lord," a gentlewoman replied, "you and my lady need no longer present yourselves flatteringly to each other, and although my lady is very reduced, there is no reason why a curtain should stand between you."

They arranged a seat for him near where she lay, and he went in to talk to her. She was very weak even now, as her few answers showed. Still, the memory of thinking her well and truly lost seemed a dream, and as he told her of his fears for her then, he was assailed by the grim recollection of how, while she lay all but lifeless, that flood of speech had suddenly burst from her. "Ah," he said, "I have so much more to tell you, but they

38. He speaks to Aoi through a gentlewoman.

tell me you are not up to it, you see. Do take your medicine," he went on, and in other ways, too, he made himself so useful that her gentlewomen were touched and wondered when he could have learned all this. The sight of her lying there, so beautiful yet so thin and weak that she hardly seemed among the living, aroused his love and his keenest sympathy. The hair streaming across her pillow, not a strand out of place, struck him as a wonder, and as he gazed at her, he found himself unable to understand how for all these years he could have seen any flaw in her.

"I shall call upon the Retired Emperor, too, and then I shall be back very soon. I would gladly stay with you like this all the time, but your mother is always beside you, and I am afraid that I have held back so far for fear of being indiscreet. In your usual room, though, once you have gradually recovered your strength . . . One reason why you do not get better is that you treat yourself too much like a child." When he had finished, he set out in his magnificent robes, while she lay there and watched him go for longer than ever before.

The Minister of the Left, too, left for court, since the autumn appointments were to be announced,³⁹ and all his sons, who had ambitions of their own and kept him close company, set off with him.

The residence was quiet, for there was hardly anyone about, when she was suddenly racked by a violent fit of retching. Before word could reach the palace, she was gone. All present there withdrew in shock. Appointments list evening or not, this disaster had clearly put an end to the proceedings. His Excellency could not call on the Abbot of the Mountain or on any other great monk because it was already night when the cry went up. The people of the household, who had thought the danger past, went stumbling about blindly in their horror. The messengers who crowded in from far and near found no one to talk to because all was turmoil, and the parents' desperate grief was truly frightening to see. The spirit had possessed her so

39. Appointments were announced each spring and autumn, and the Minister of the Left, the court's senior nonimperial official, presided over the event.

often in the past that they watched for two or three days, leaving her pillow and so on undisturbed,⁴⁰ until signs of change convinced them at last, in their misery, to give up hope.

Genji had now suffered blow on blow, and life was intolerable to him. Condolences from those closest to him aroused only irritated impatience. The expressions of sorrow and sympathy from the Retired Emperor were still a great honor, and the Minister of the Left, who had also reason to rejoice, wept without end. At the urging of those around him he commissioned solemn rites of every kind, in case his daughter should revive, and in his anguish he persisted even when the workings of change had become all too plain, but after the vain passage of several days he resigned himself at last, and they took her to Toribeno⁴¹ amid scenes of heartrending grief.

[Aoi's funeral is performed. Her parents mourn her bitterly. Genji remains with them for a week and mourns her, too. Eventually, however, he returns to his Niijō residence and to Murasaki.]

Every room at Niijō was spic-and-span, and the whole staff, men and women alike, awaited his arrival. The senior gentlemen were all back, and seeing each of them dressed and made up to her best advantage recalled to him with a pang the sorrowing company that he had just left. He changed and went straight to the west wing. The curtains and furnishings for the new season were bright and gay,⁴² the handsome young gentlewomen and page girls, with their graceful airs and ways, made a most agreeable sight, and Shōnagon's warm welcome pleased him greatly.

His young lady was dressed extremely prettily. "See what a big girl you are, now I have been away so long!" He lifted her little standing curtain to see her, and her looks as she bashfully turned away were beyond reproach. Her profile in the lamplight, her hair—everything told him that she would exactly resemble that other lady for whom he pined, and he was overjoyed.

40. The pillow was the soul's resting place. If it was moved, the soul might fail to find the body again if life returned.

41. A burning ground just east of the City.

42. Curtains and other furnishings had been changed for winter, which began on the first of the tenth lunar month.

He sat beside her and described what had happened while he was gone.⁴³ "I so look forward to telling you all about it," he said, "but all that would be too much now. I shall go and rest a little first and then be back. I shall be seeing so much of you now that you may grow tired of me!"

Shōnagon was pleased to hear all this, but she still worried about him. That may not have been very nice of her, but he kept up with so many great ladies that she was afraid a new one might now appear and ruin everything.

Genji returned to his own apartments, where he had the gentlewoman Chūjō rub his legs before he fell asleep. The next morning he sent off a letter for his little son. The sorrowful reply filled him with melancholy.

With so little to occupy him now he remained very pensive, but he could not yet muster the ambition to set out on casual evening calls. It was a pleasure to see that his young lady had turned out to be all he could wish, and since he judged that the time had now more or less come, he began to drop suggestive hints; but she showed no sign of understanding.

He spent whole days with her, whiling away the time at Go or at character-guessing games,⁴⁴ and such were her wit and grace, so enthralling in quality her every gesture, that after those years of forbearance while her charm had offered nothing more, he could endure it no longer; and so despite his compunction it came to pass one morning, when there was nothing otherwise about their ways with each other to betray the change, that he rose early while she rose not at all.

"What can be the matter?" her women asked each other anxiously. "She must not be feeling herself."

Before leaving he put a writing box beside her, inside her curtains.⁴⁵ At last, when there was no one nearby, she lifted her

43. He addresses her very politely, despite his intimate tone.

44. The guessing game (*hen-tsugi*) involved guessing partly hidden characters or making up new ones by adding elements to given parts.

45. So that she can answer the poem he has left by her pillow. After a couple's first night together the man was supposed to leave the woman a poem, and she to respond. Being "knotted," Genji's note has visibly to do with love.

head and found a knotted letter at her pillow. Opening it uncomprehendingly, she read,

"Ah, what distances kept us so strangely apart, when night after night we two yet lay side by side in our overlapping clothes."

He seemed to have dashed it off with the greatest of ease. She had never suspected him of such intentions, and she could only wonder bitterly why in her innocence she had ever trusted anyone with such horrid ideas.

Toward midday he returned. "You seem to be ill. What is wrong, then? Today will be no fun if we cannot play Go." He peeped in: she was still lying with the bedclothes over her head. The gentlewomen drew back as he went to her. "Why will you not talk to me? You do not like me after all, do you. Your gentlewomen must be wondering about all this." He pulled the covers off her and found her drenched in perspiration. Even the hair at her forehead was soaking wet. "Oh, dear, we cannot have this! What a fuss you are making!" She was still furious with him, though, despite his attempts to console her, and she refused him a single word in reply. "Very well, then," he said reproachfully, "I will not come anymore. I feel quite unwanted." He opened the writing box and peered inside, but there was nothing in it.⁴⁶ What a little girl she still is! He contemplated her fondly. He spent the whole day trying to make her feel better, and her refusal to yield only made her more precious.

That evening they were brought baby boar cakes.⁴⁷ The event was nothing elaborate, since Genji was in mourning, and the cakes were served only there in the west wing. When he saw them in all their colors, presented in pretty cypress boxes, he

46. She had not answered his poem on that morning.

47. Glutinous rice cakes, each shaped like a baby boar (*inoko mochi*), eaten for good luck at the hour of the Boar (about 9:00 to 11:00 P.M.) on the first day of the Boar in the tenth lunar month. The rice was mixed with ingredients like sesame, chestnut, or persimmon, so that the cakes came in seven different flavors and colors.

went out to the front of the house and called Koremitsu. "Bring me cakes like these tomorrow evening, although not nearly so many. Today was not lucky."⁴⁸

Koremitsu, always so quick, noted his smiles and caught his meaning instantly. He asked no questions but only said with a perfectly straight face, "Certainly, my lord, a new couple should of course choose the right day to have them. How many baby rat cakes should I provide?"⁴⁹

"About a third as many should do." Koremitsu, who understood him perfectly, withdrew. He certainly knows his way about! Genji thought. Koremitsu said nothing to anyone, and he all but made the cakes himself, at home.

Genji, at his wits' end to placate his darling, was highly amused to feel as though he had just stolen a bride. What she used to mean to me is nothing compared to what she means to me now! he reflected. How unruly the heart is! I could not bear one night away from her!

Discreetly, very late at night, Koremitsu brought the cakes that Genji had ordered. He was acutely aware that Shōnagon, who was older, might embarrass Genji's young lady, so he called for her daughter, Ben. "Take them these, quietly." He handed her the cakes in an incense jar box.⁵⁰ "They are to celebrate a happy event, and you are to put them beside the pillow. Be careful, now, do not do anything wrong."

"But I have never done anything wrong like that," Ben said in surprise as she took them.⁵¹

"Actually, avoid that word for now. Just don't use it."⁵² Ben was too young to grasp what he meant, but she delivered

48. Newlyweds were served white rice cakes on their third night together, the one when their marriage was sealed. However, the day of the Boar (only the second night in this case) was unlucky for the start of anything as important as marriage.

49. The day of the Rat followed that of the Boar, but "baby rat cakes" (*nenoko mochi*) did not exist; the term is Koremitsu's invention.

50. Ben must be behind a curtain. The box serves to disguise its contents.

51. She mistakes Koremitsu's meaning. *Ada* ("wrong") can mean specifically something wanton.

52. *Ada* is too ill-omened to use at the time of a marriage.

the cakes, slipping them in through the standing curtain by their pillows. No doubt it was as always Genji who explained them.

The gentlewomen knew nothing of all this, but when Genji had the box removed early the next morning, those closest to their mistress understood what had happened. Where could those dishes have come from? The little carved stands were so delicate and the cakes themselves so beautifully made—it was all as pretty as could be.⁵³ Shōnagon, who had never dreamed Genji would go this far,⁵⁴ dissolved in tears of gratitude before such evidence of his unstinting devotion.

"I do wish he had quietly told *us*, though," the women whispered to each other. "What can that man of his have thought?"

Thereafter Genji missed her and worried about her whenever he called a moment at the palace or at His Eminence's, so much so that his feelings surprised even him. He was not insensitive to the bitter complaints addressed to him by the ladies he was visiting, but he was so reluctant to hurt his new wife by being away a single night that he arranged things to look as though he were ill. "I shall begin going out once I am again ready to face the world" was the only kind of answer he gave them.

Oborozukiyo still had her heart set only on Genji, and the Empress Mother did not at all like the feelings that their father, the Minister of the Right, expressed on the subject. "After all," he would say, "I see nothing wrong with her having what she wants, now that I gather that proud wife of his is no more." The Empress Mother, to whom there was nothing dishonorable about her sister's entering palace service as long as she did so with dignity, was determined to offer her to His Majesty.

Genji, who was so fond of her, found this prospect thoroughly disappointing, but he was in no mood just now to divide his affections. Why do that? He had learned, to his cost, the value of caution. Life is short enough as it is, he reflected, and besides, I have made my choice. I should never have provoked jealousy.

53. "Third-night cakes" were served on silver dishes, with silver chopsticks, silver chopstick rests in the shape of cranes, etc.

54. As to marry Murasaki relatively formally.

As to the Rokujō Haven, her plight affected him very much, but things would never go well if he acknowledged her formally, whereas she was just the woman to discuss things with now and again, if she would only let him go on seeing her as in the past. He could not bring himself to give her up even now.

It occurred to him that society still did not know who his new love was, and that that reflected poorly on her; and he decided accordingly to inform His Highness her father. He invited a chosen few to a donning of the train that he planned to bring off more amply than usual—which was all very well, except that she had now taken a keen dislike to him. She so bitterly rued giving him all those years of trust and affection that she would not even look him properly in the eye, and she displayed only aversion for his lightest remark. The change that had come over her both amused and pained him. "Those years when I was so fond of you have all gone to waste," he would complain, "and the way you keep yourself from me hurts me very much!"

On this note the New Year came.

[...]