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Bellflower
An Excerpt from the *Tale of Genji*: Commentary and Translation

Charles De Wolf

The present article represents an ongoing endeavor to combine linguistic and literary analysis of the vast work that is *The Tale of Genji*. I am tempted to say that I have chosen the "Asagao" chapter for both the interesting interpretation (and thus translation-related) issues it poses and its significance relevant to what in the story has gone before and what will come: In it we are vividly reminded of the protagonist's contradictory character, his inconsistent motives and desires, and the contrast between his deep self-awareness and his capacity for callousness and deviousness. Genji's pursuit of the former Kamo priestess, motivated by both ambition and pride, foreshadows his catastrophic decision, fourteen chapters later, to marry his half-brother's daughter, the Third Princess.

In all candor, however, I must concede that there are many other passages about which the same general statement can be said. My choice was in part motivated by the convenience of the chapter's relative brevity, though the humor of Genji's encounter with Gen no Naishi-no-suke, the portrayal of his beloved Murasaki, the poignancy of several verses, and my

fondness for the giant snowball scene in the garden were also factors.

Translations of classical works differ in regard not only to interpretation but also to style and register, with translators choosing and defending their own preferences. Edward Seidensticker's Genji is strikingly less ornate and more laconic than Arthur Waley's. Compared to Oscar Benl's *Die Geschichte vom Prinzen Genji*, with its use of semi-archaic German, Jos Vos's Dutch translation, *Het Verhaal van Genji*, is strikingly colloquial. The language of Maria Teresa Orsi's *La Storia di Genji* is literary Italian but, in contrast to the ostentatiously 18th-century French of René Sieffert's *Le Dit du Genji*, is nonetheless modern.

In my own translation, I choose the formal over the colloquial, while attempting to approximate the languid, circumlocutory, at times evasive, language of the original. Following the example of René Sieffert and Royall Tyler, I refer to characters by their titles rather than by the sobriquets to which other translators have resorted. As for vocabulary, I endeavor to avoid terms suggesting Occidental modernity, especially psychological terms, and, at the same time, all Japanese words, lest such provide an unwelcome reminder to readers that they are reading a translation.

Approaches to the translation of the nearly 800 verses in the tale vary greatly. Again like Sieffert and Tyler, I follow the form of the original, with the English syllable intended as an approximation of the Japanese mora: 5–7–5–7–7.

The 20th chapter of the *Tale of Genji* is conventionally entitled "Asagao," lit. 'morning faces', referring to a flower that the protagonist has had picked for a cousin he seeks to woo, hence the sobriquet by which she has come to be known. The precise species is a matter of debate. In Modern Japanese, asagao (< asagaho) is the Ipomoea nil or Japanese morning glory,

but in the Heian Period, the word seems to have referred to the kikyō (桔梗), the Platycodon grandiflorus, variously called in English the balloon flower, the bluebell, and the bellflower.[1)]

Already in the second chapter (帚木 Hahakigi “The Broom Tree”), Genji,[2)] aged seventeen, is rumored to have sent his cousin the same flower. Fifteen years have now passed, with much Sturm und Drang in the young man’s life and with events both predictably and conveniently centered around women, described here according to their sobriquets:

Fujitsubo (藤壺): The Lady of the Wisteria Pavilion, the daughter of a previous emperor, is the favorite consort of Genji’s father. She arrives at the Palace some years after the death of Genji’s mother, whom the lady appears strongly to resemble. In his boyhood, Genji is allowed to go behind her screens; later kept at a distance, as custom demands, he continues to yearn for her. On a long night of summer rain in the second chapter, he listens as his companions speak of the ideal woman and, momentarily lost in reverie, thinks of his own model of perfection. Most commentators agree that the lady in his mind must be Fujitsubo. In the fifth chapter (若紫 Waka-Murasaki “Young Lavender”), she becomes aware to her great consternation that she is pregnant with Genji’s child. She gives birth to a son, who, as the supposed offspring of his grandfather, will eventually succeed Genji’s half-brother to become Emperor Reizei (冷泉). Following the death of Genji’s father, Fujitsubo becomes a nun and is thus referred to in the translation as Her Cloistered Eminence. In Chapter 19 (薄雲 Usugumo “Wisps of Cloud”), she dies at the young age of thirty-seven. Her son subsequently learns of his biological father. When he offers to abdicate and yield the throne to Genji, though without saying anything more, Genji begins to suspect that Reizei knows the truth. At the end of the Asagao chapter, Fujitsubo appears to Genji in a vision to blame him for the divulgence of their dark secret.

Aoi (葵): The word aoi ‘mallows, hollyhock, wild ginger’ derives from afuhi. On the occasion of the Aoi Matsuri (Hollyhock Festival), in Chapter 9, an older woman who has been in aggressive pursuit of Genji sends him a verse that plays on the name of the heart-shaped flower, suggesting ‘meeting day’. Aoi has thus been made the title of the chapter, and as at the end of it, Genji’s wife, to whom he has been married since the age of seventeen, dies just after giving birth, the name is also made, confusingly enough, her sobriquet. The daughter of an imperial princess and the Minister of the Left, she is two years older than Genji. Genji admires her, a proud and haughty beauty, but he clearly does not love her, and his ill-concealed longing for the comfort of female companionship elsewhere makes for an ever more difficult relationship.

Asagao (朝顔): In Chapter 2, Genji is spending the night at the residence of the Governor of Kii, where he overhears the gossip of young ladies. He is at first worried that they are speaking of a potentially scandalous affair of his, possibly with Fujitsubo, and is thus relieved (and no doubt amused) when mention is made of a bellflower he has sent to his cousin, the daughter of His Highness of Ceremonial (式部卿宮 Shikibukyō-no-Miya), who dies in Chapter 19.

Asagao reappears early on in Chapter 9. Well aware of rumors concerning his philandering, in particular his affair with the lady known as Rokujō (see below), she assumes the same attitude that we find displayed in Chapter 20. Towards the end of Chapter 10 (賢木 Sakaki “The Sacred Tree”), Genji’s archenemy, Kokiden (弘徽殿, The Grand and Beautiful Palace), the mother of the Suzaku (朱雀) Emperor, Genji’s half-brother, fumes that Genji has been secretly corresponding with Asagao, who, having recently become priestess of the Kamo (賀茂) Shrine, is strictly forbidden from engaging in any such communication. In Chapter 19, her father dies,

and, as noted at the beginning of Chapter 20, she is thus obliged to resign her position. In Chapter 21 (乙女 Otome “Maidens”), Asagao is no longer in mourning for her father, and Genji renews his pursuit. To her annoyance, those around her encourage her to welcome his advances. We last hear of her in Chapter 37 (鈴虫 Suzumushi “Bell Crickets”), by which time she has turned all the more fervently to religious practices.

Utsusemi (空蝉): Genji is aware that the Deputy Governor of Iyo has a young wife staying with her stepson, the Governor of Kii (紀伊) While spending the night at the latter’s residence, Genji makes his way into her sleeping quarters, spirits her away, and remains with her until the dawn. She tearfully protests that the vast difference in their social ranks makes any liaison impossible. In the days that follow, he attempts to meet her again, using her younger brother as a go-between, but without success. He bitterly compares her to a mythological broom tree (帚木 hahakigi), which, as one approaches it, recedes into the distance. Again at the Governor of Kii’s residence, he spies the woman playing Go with her step-daughter and makes his way into their darkened room. The lady senses his presence and flees, leaving behind a thin garment, which Genji then keeps, comparing it to the empty shell of a cicada (utsusemi). This then becomes the title of the chapter and her sobriquet. Despite her interest in Genji, she keeps him at a distance. On the death of her husband, she becomes a nun, though she then takes up residence in Genji’s splendid mansion.

Nokiba no Ogi (軒端の荻): Mistaking the stepdaughter for the stepmother, Genji concludes that he cannot admit his error and so easily coaxes the woman into a tryst. Her sobriquet (“reeds beneath the eaves”) comes from a verse sent to her by Genji via her brother. She goes on hoping that Genji will pay her another visit but eventually accepts her fate and marries.

Rokujō (六条): At the beginning of Chapter 4 (夕顔 Yūgao “Evening

Bloom"), we read: 六条わたりの御忍び歩きのころ..."At the time when he [Genji] was making clandestine visits to the area of the Sixth Avenue..." There has been no previous mention of the lady who has become Genji's paramour. The sudden introduction has been seen by some scholars as supporting the view that the current form of the tale differs substantially from the author's original composition. One faction maintains that material has been lost, another that the current order of the chapters does not correspond to the intended chronology. A further view is that the author simply had no qualms about teasing her readers/listeners. The widow of a crown prince, Rokujō ("Sixth Avenue") is seven years older than Genji, acutely conscious of her status, and deeply resentful when she feels slighted or neglected by her lover.

Yūgao (夕顔): In Chapter 2, Tō no Chūjō, the Secretary Captain, the sobriquet by which as Genji's cousin and brother-in-law is known, tells of a woman whom he has loved and with whom he has fathered a child. Already suffering from neglect, the young woman receives threats from her lover's wife and so disappears. In Chapter 4, Genji sees white flowers (hispida) growing on the fence of a seeming hovel, though it somehow suggests a distinguished resident. A servant tells him that the flowers are called yūgao, lit. 'evening faces'. He has a a bouquet picked, whereupon a maidservant emerges, bringing a fan on which he might place the blooms. On it is written an enticing message written in a feminine hand. Genji succeeds in wooing the lady and comes to suspect that she is none other than his brother-in-law's former lover. Seemingly possessed by the spirit of a jealous woman—that of Rokujō we may well surmise—Yūgao, the evening bloom, dies in Genji's arms.

Murasaki (紫): At the beginning of Chapter 5, Genji goes off into the mountains to seek treatment for a chronic fever. There he spies a young,

beautiful girl who reminds him of Fujitsubo, who, he subsequently learns, is her aunt. He schemes to take her away with him and eventually succeeds. Toward the end of the chapter, he encourages her to practice her calligraphy and writes down on paper the color of the dye drawn from Lithospermum erythrorhizon or purple gromwell (murasaki) a verse vaguely alluding to wisteria, which is of similar hue, a reference, of course, to Fujitsubo. Shortly after the death of Aoi, Genji concludes that his young charge has come of age and so, much to her surprise, he deflowers her. She is perhaps all of fifteen. Her father is Prince Hyōbu (兵部, minister of war), a son of a previous emperor, but her mother is of somewhat low estate, which means that Genji cannot make her his principal wife and that Asagao outranks her. Despite his infidelities, motivated by both libidinous habit and political ambition, Murasaki will remain for him the great love of his life. Her death leaves him a broken man, and soon he will himself be gone.

Suetsumuhana (末摘花): In Chapter 6, Genji and his brother-in-law Tō no Chūjō are for a brief time rivals in wooing the daughter of the late Hitachi Prince (常陸親王 Hitachi Shinnō) Genji seduces her without glimpsing her in the light of day. He eventually sees to his horror that she has what seems to him an elephantine nose, made all the more repulsive by its scarlet tip. He composes a verse with the (now archaic) term for safflower, Suetsumuhana, lit. flower plucked at the end, (Carthamus tinctorius), from which a red dye is made, hence her sobriquet and the title of the chapter.

Gen no Naishi-no-suke (源典侍): In Chapter 7 (紅葉賀 Momiji no Ga “Red Leaf Festival”), Genji hears of the Second Lady of the Inner Chambers, already in her late fifties, who is known for her lasciviousness. Left alone with her after she has been combing his father’s hair, he flirts with her, then starts to leave, when she pulls on his sleeve imploringly. All of this is observed by his father, who is much amused. Tō no Chūjō also learns of the

woman and becomes secretly involved with her, as then does Genji as well. The episode is seen as comic relief in a chapter in which Genji is otherwise beset with anxiety: Fujitsubo has given birth to a son who clearly resembles his biological father. In Genji's last verse to her, he replies to her reminder that she was once affectionately known as "Obaotodo" (祖母殿) 'Lady Grandmother' ("Venerable Dowager" in my translation) by alluding to the story of an unfilial grandson.

Oborozukiyo (朧月夜): In Chapter 8 (花宴 Hana no En "Cherry Blossom Festival"), a slightly intoxicated Genji goes wandering in search of nocturnal companionship and hears a young female voice singing "朧月夜に似るものぞなき" ('There is nothing to compare to a night of a misty moon'), hence the lady's sobriquet. He catches her sleeve and soon has his way with her. Despite shock and initial protest, she is apparently pleased with the experience. She is, however, Kokiden's younger sister and is intended to become the consort of the heir apparent. When during a further tryst with her, after his father's abdication, Genji is caught in flagrante delecto, he finds himself enmeshed in an unprecedented scandal and is eventually driven by his enemies into self-imposed exile.

Hanachirusato (花散里): In Chapter 11 (花散里 Hanachirusato "The Abode of the Falling Blossoms"), Genji, knowing that he will soon be preparing for his exile, goes to visit two sisters whom he has been assisting since the death of his father. The elder was once an imperial consort; the younger was once one of Genji's many lovers. The sobriquet of the latter derives from a verse that Genji composes in the company of the lady:

Yearning for the scent
Of falling orange blossoms,
The cuckoo has come,
Those wild shrubs now having stirred

Memories of long ago.

We last hear of her in Chapter 41 (夕霧 Yūgiri “Evening Mist”), when, living among Genji’s other ladies in his estate, she sends him summer clothes and a verse intended to comfort him, as he mourns the loss of his beloved Murasaki.

Gosechi (五節): Already in Chapter 11 there is a fleeting reference to a lovely young woman he once met, one carefully selected among members of the nobility to perform for a harvest festival (Gosechi). In the next chapter (須磨 “Suma”), we learn that she is the daughter of the Deputy Governor of Dazaifu, the administrative capital of Tsukushi (Kyūshū). Even as others are avoiding Genji for fear of guilt by association, she sends him an imploring message, as she sails by him, already settled on the desolate shore of Suma, southwest of Heian-kyō.

Akashi (明石): Already in Chapter 5, one of Genji’s men tells him of a former official, the one-time governor of Harima, who, an eccentric, is living in Akashi, which borders Suma, as a novice monk, together with a lovely daughter. In Suma chapter, he hears of Genji’s nearby presence and eagerly seeks to introduce the lady to him, only to be berated by his wife, who thinks it all socially impossible. A meeting nonetheless occurs, with the result that Genji becomes the father to a girl who will later become an empress. The Akashi Lady, though a country girl, has been trained as though she were of the capital, but her social status is such that Genji clearly places her below both Lady Asagao and his beloved Murasaki, who, otherwise childless, becomes the de-facto step-mother of Genji’s offspring, with whom she pretends to be preoccupied, as Genji makes excuses for going off to see Asagao.

My purpose in presenting this background information is to facilitate

understanding of the translation that follows without intrusive notes. In this, I wish to resist the deep-seated impulse of the academic to explain all: the text, I firmly believe, should be allowed to speak for itself.

Of course, that is easier said than done. The Genji is replete with literary allusions and plays on words, particularly in the verses, which, though no doubt familiar to the first listeners of the tale, were lost even on readers in the immediate centuries that followed. Thus. I shall add a few more headings, before concluding by noting passages where there are significant variations in interpretation and thus striking differences in translation.

The Fifth Princess (女五の宮 Onna Go no Miya): A sister of Genji's late father, she lives in Momozono-miya (桃園宮 Peach Garden Palace), located north of the First Avenue and west of Ōmiya Avenue. She is also sister to Asagao's late father and to the Third Princess, Genji's former mother-in-law, known as Ōmiya.

"the ill-clothed brine-boiler on the shore": Genji may be referring to a poem in the *Man'yōshū* (2622), which juxtaposes the familiar griminess of a robe worn by one boiling seawater for salt with enduring love. Of course, such is clearly not consistent with the implication of Genji's calculatingly self-deprecating remark, which in the original is simply: 塩焼き衣のあまり目馴れ、見だてなく..."The brine-boiler's garment made unattractive by becoming too common a sight..." Commentators note that the reference is obscure.

River Dalliance (いさら川 Isara-gawa): In the original, Genji is referring to a verse in which the poet engages in wordplay with "isa-" ('I do not know'), telling a woman with whom he has engaged in dalliance not speak his name. Of course, Genji has had no such relationship with Asagao, so that the mere comparison is indeed outrageous.

“orphaned sojourner beside the road”: This too is, as can be easily supposed, a poetic allusion. Genji frequently refers to himself as having lost early in life first his mother, then his grandmother, and here he is clearly referring to the death of his father.

Mistress of the Inner Rooms: (尚侍 Naishi no kami): The younger sister of Lady Kokiden, the aunt of Genji’s half-brother, the retired emperor, is known by her sobriquet Oborozukiyo—but, of course, not in the tale itself, in which she has no name. Even Murasaki, in private conversations with Genji, refers to her by her title. Why is the lady suddenly mentioned? Murasaki clearly knows about the relationship that her beloved has had with her, even as she feigns ignorance.

“Water immobile,/Turned to ice between the stones”: This verse by Murasaki is widely (but not universally) interpreted as suggesting that she is describing herself as the frozen water, with Genji as the moon, free to drift across the sky as he pleases.

wood duck: From China Japan adopted the notion of mandarin duck mates as symbolizing lifelong marital fidelity and bliss. In Japanese, the word is oshidori (鴛鴦 Aix galericulata). I prefer “wood duck,” a synonym, as “mandarin duck” is, I would contend, historically and culturally anomalous. Waley (1926–33) resorts to “love bird,” Seidensticker (1976) to “waterfowl.”

The River of Three Crossings (三つの瀬 Mitsunose): In Sino-Japanese Buddhist terminology, this is Sanzu (三途). Those who have left this world with the lightest burden of sin cross over a bridge or at least through the shallows; those more culpable must avail themselves of a ford; those still more weighed down must make their way through deep and hazardous waters.

Particularly in the verbal exchanges between characters, there is much

that is stated obliquely. Where there is reasonable certainty about the meaning, the question for translators is whether to approximate the original or to make explicit the seemingly implicit, and even where there is doubt, one may resort to a plausible guess. At the beginning of Chapter 20, the Fifth Princess speaks of life's cruel precariousness:

> いともいともあさましく、いづ方につけても定めなき世を、同じさまにて見たまへ過ぐす命長さの恨めしきこと多くはべれど..."Oh, how very wretched is it all! Everywhere I am reminded of the world's uncertainties, with many a cause for bitterness and regret at having gone on and on for so very long in this same dreary life of mine, and yet..."

The princess is no doubt thinking about both the demise of the late emperor and Genji's exile, but there is no explicit pairing of the two misfortunes. Moreover she is rambling and gushing rather incoherently. Contrasts in translation can be seen in the following excerpts from Yosano (1938–39), Waley (1926–33), Tyler (2001), and Orsi (2012):

> Y: あなたの不幸だったころの世の中はまあどうだったろう。昔の御代もそうした時代も同じようにながめていねばならぬことで私は長生きがいやでしたが、
>
> ["Ah, what was the state of the world at the time you suffered calamity? When I find myself forced to contemplate both the reign of yore and that era, I cannot bear my long, long life, and yet..."]
>
> W: "Oh, the changes, the changes," she broke in, "such terrible destruction I have seen on every side. Nothing seems safe from it, and often I feel as though I would give anything to have died before all this began."
>
> T: "It was dreadful, dreadful, and for many reasons I detest living on in this way, always the same, when either misfortune shows how little this world is to be trusted."

> O: Ciò che mi dite è davvero assurdo e fuori da ogni immaginazione. Per molti versi è detestabile aver vissuto una lunga e monotona vita sempre uguale, testimone di questi due eventi che rivelano la precarietà della esistenza umana, ma...
>
> ["What you tell me is truly absurd and beyond all imagination. In many ways it is detestable to have lived a long and monotonous life always the same, witnessing these two events that reveal the precariousness of human existence, but..."]

Tyler endnotes "misfortune" with: "The Kiritsubo Emperor's death or Genji's exile."

In other cases, the issue is not one of clear, albeit implicit, meaning but rather of genuine uncertainty. I shall limit myself to three examples.

As Genji prepares to visit Asagao, he hears an old woman calling to him and encounters Gen no Naishi-no-suke, someone he would have thought to be long since dead. The original reads: 今まであらむとも尋ね知りたまはざりつるを、あさましうなりぬ。 "As it had not in the least occurred to him that even now she might still be living, he was quite taken aback."

In Modern Japanese, asamashii (浅ましい) has an exclusively negative meaning: 'pathetic, disgraceful, appalling'. Classical Japanese asamasi has a broader meaning, including the more "neutral" sense of 'unexpected, surprising'. Yosano Akiko's rendition reads: 今まで生きていたとは思いがけないことであるとあきれてしまった。"Having not in the least expected her still to be alive, he was amazed." She is not alone among Japanese translators in resorting to akireru, cf. Setouchi (1997), Hayashi (2010), and Nakano (2016).[3)] The verb has a remarkable semantic resemblance to the Classical Japanese adjective but nonetheless tends to suggest unwelcome surprise and disgust. To say that Genji is appalled or disgusted that his sometime lover is still alive might unfairly suggest callousness on his part,

but here Waley seems to strike the proper balance:

> But it had not occurred to him that she could possibly still be in existence, and this sudden encounter was something of a shock.

In the wintry garden scene, we read:

...童女下ろして、雪まろばしせさせたまふ。

> His Grace ordered serving girls to go down to roll a giant snowball.

In pictorial representations of the scene, the girls are variously portrayed as rolling one giant snowball or several smaller snowballs. Translators of the relevant clause into Western languages are obliged to choose. Waley and Tyler are singularists; Seidensticker ("…he sent little maidservants, telling them that they must make snowmen") and Washburn are pluralists.

One argument in favor of a single giant snowball is the fact that the girls find themselves unable to carry on:

いと多うまろばさむと、ふくつけがれど、えも押し動かさでわぶめり。

> Attempting to further enlarge the snowball, they appeared to be at a loss, their strength unequal to the sheer weight.

Seidensticker:

> Rather outdoing themselves, several of them found that they had a snowball they could not budge.

Washburn:

> They tried to roll ever larger snowballs but when the snowballs became too big to move, the girls seemed to have no idea what to do.

The German, French, and Dutch translations assume a single snowball; the Italian translation reads:

> Sua Signoria chiese ad alcune giovanissime inservienti di scendere nel giardino per fare grosse palle di neve... Avrebbero voluto formare palle

ancora piú grandi, ma si trovavano nell'impossibilità di farle rotolare e sembravano molto preoccupate.

['His Lordship asked some very young maidservants to go down into the garden to make huge snowballs...They would have liked to make even larger snowballs, but they found themselves quite unable to roll them and appeared to be quite perplexed.']

At the end of the chapter, Genji has a vision of Fujitsubo and reacts in horror, awakening Murasaki:

女君、いかなることにかと思すに、うちもみじろかで臥したまへり。

His lady wondered what had befallen him, as s/he lay motionless beside him/her.

In 童女下ろして、雪まろばしせさせたまふ (above), we know, context aside, that the subject of the sentence must be Genji as -sesase-tamafu is a high honorific. Here fusi-tamafe-ri is likewise honorific, the verbal auxiliary -tamafu in the izenkei (已然形 perfective), followed by the perfective auxiliary -ri. In this case, however, such gives us no clue as to the referent, as honorific marking is also consistently applied to Murasaki.

The German, French, Dutch, and Italian translators all make Genji the subject, as do Nakano and Hayashi, while among the four English translators, all but Tyler opt for Murasaki, as do Yosano, Enchi, and Setouchi. Both Iwanami (1994) and Shokugakukan (1994) editions specify Genji as the subject of the second clause. Tanizaki's rendition is interesting, as he seems to assume that Genji deliberately does not move, for fear of having to explain his vision/dream to his beloved:

女君がどうしたことかとお案じになりますので、身じろぎもしないで打ち臥しておいでになります。

["What is it?' Her Ladyship asked with alarm, and so (he) continued to lie there without the slightest movement.']

Whatever one's interpretation, it is clear that the chapter does not end on a happy note. Both Genji and Murasaki have reason to be paralyzed with misery.

A New Translation[4)]

The Priestess of the Kamo Shrine had resigned her post and gone into mourning. Force of habit having rendered His Grace quite incapable of turning his attention forever away from anyone in whom he had once taken an interest, he had sent her numerous messages. Her Highness had not forgotten the unpleasantness that had arisen from their previous encounters and now responded with such strict formality that he was much disappointed.

In the long month of late autumn, having heard that she had moved to her late father's residence in Momozono, he resolved to pay her a visit, on the pretext of seeing the Fifth Princess, who was already residing there. The late Sovereign had always shown special consideration for Their Highnesses, thus allowing His Grace to carry on his association.

They now occupied the west and east wings of the same pavilion. There the mood was subdued, even melancholic, and although it had not been long since the passing of the prince, there was about the place a sense of gloom and incipient ruin.

The Fifth Princess agreed to receive His Grace. Often clearing her throat, she spoke in a low, rasping voice. She was of a bygone era, differing markedly from her elder sister, the widow of His Excellency, who, having lived under different circumstances, had been somehow able to maintain an aura of youthfulness.

"Since the passing of the Sovereign I have carried on a sad existence, and ever more tears have shed as the years pass. Now that yet another princely sibling has left me, I remain most precariously in this world, not quite knowing whether I am alive or dead. And yet your kind visit gives me

respite from my pain."

He was astounded at how old she seemed but nonetheless replied most respectfully:

"Indeed, all appeared to change with the demise of His Eminence. I found myself, through no fault of my own, set adrift to wander on alien shores, and when at last it pleased the Court to summon me home, I was given the most burdensome tasks, such that, most regrettably, I have let time slip by without coming to converse with you on all manner of things past."

"Oh, how very wretched is it all! Everywhere I am reminded of the world's uncertainties, with many a cause for bitterness and regret at having gone on and on for so very long in this same dreary life of mine, and yet the joy now of seeing you returned to us in splendor tells me what a pity it would have been, had I been taken away during that most unfortunate interlude."

She spoke in an uncertain voice but nonetheless prattled on:

"What a handsome man you have become! When I first saw you in your boyhood, I was so astounded that such beauty could be found in this world that I feared its evanescence. It is said that His Majesty is very much like Your Grace, but I wonder how even he could match you."

"How strange to have one's appearance praised to one's face!" he thought, much amused, then replied:

"I was much diminished by that grim time when I was made to lead the life of a rustic. His Majesty is of a rare beauty, for which I believe no one, today or yesterday, is the match. He is not as you seem to imagine."

"If only on occasion I could meet Your Grace, my otherwise drearily long life might be prolonged. I have now forgotten the anxieties of old age, as though the sufferings of this unhappy world had vanished. The Third Princess," she added, as she wept, "has been most fortunate in having found

a closer bond with you, and I am envious of her, even as I also think of my late brother's wishes."

These words having in particular caught his ear, he responded with dissatisfaction and regret: "I should have been pleased indeed to have had such association with His Excellency, but then neither he nor his would have me."

He turned to look at the garden across from them, and gazed with unhurried pleasure at the beauty of leaves just beginning to wither, and now he found his mind ineluctably and longingly drawn to the lovely lady, who, he imagined, was passing lugubrious and lonely days.

"As I have come to visit you, it would be unpardonably discourteous not to make another call." So saying, he set out along the veranda toward the west wing. In the penumbra, he was touched by what lay behind the somber reed screen and black curtain stands and was all the more delighted by the faint scent of incense born by the breeze. It was all in the finest taste.

As it would have been quite unsuitable to leave him on the veranda, he was admitted to the south room. A lady-in-waiting known as Senji welcomed him and listened to his message:

"Am I to be received even now on this side of the screen, as though I were still a mere youth? Considering the dedication I have shown you during the long years of your service to the gods, I had hoped that I would be allowed to come freely to you," he remarked in a tone of dissatisfaction.

"Those years now appear to me as though a dream," her mistress replied, "and perhaps even now, as I wake, all seems insubstantial and vain, so very nebulous. You must therefore allow me calmly to consider the meaning of your dedication."

"Coldly nebulous indeed!" he grumbled to himself, adding:

No, no one can know

How patiently I waited
For divine consent,
Nor how in this cruel world
I have endured indifference.

"To what proscription would you now resort? Words fail me in telling you of what sufferings the world has inflicted upon me?" he continued. His conduct had, by comparison to the past, become more measured and sober, but even if he had indeed matured, it was still not in keeping with his status in life. To his words, she replied:

To have lent my ear
To all that you have suffered
In this vale of tears,
I would have surely broken
Vows to our most sacred gods.

"Oh, how cruelly you speak! The god of the wind has swept away the sins of that time," he replied with unsurpassed charm.

Her Highness's ladies were troubled by her deepening reluctance to accept the ways of the world. To her great discomfort, she heard Senji ask ever so coyly: "Have the deities now granted His Grace purification and release from his attachment?"

"You would see naught but frivolity in my intensions," he said with a deep sigh, as he rose to take his leave. "I am now at an age when to be treated thus is most humiliating. Surely I am then entitled to ask that you look upon me in my state of misery." In the wake of his departure, the ladies poured forth their praise of him.

It was the season when the sky is revealed in all its beauty, the fluttering of leaves in the wind evoking days gone by—and memories of a young man whose immense charm blended with propensities that had brought pain and

distress.

Meanwhile, His Grace returned to his residence in a mood of disappointment. At dawn, having brooded through the night in a state of sleeplessness, he had the shutters raised and looked out at the morning mist. The vegetation had withered, but winding their way about here and there were a few bellflowers. He had one picked that had faded with particular splendor with the advancing season.

"Your tepid treatment left me feeling quite forlorn and wondering with chagrin how you might have seen your departing visitor. And yet…

The fair bellflower,
Which, once glimpsed, I ne'er forgot:
Might it now have lost
Any of the wondrous bloom
I then knew in days of yore?

"I had held out hope that you would be other than indifferent to the many years I have spent in devotion to you?"

His message, reflecting as it did a new maturity, told her that simply to ignore it would give the impression of heartlessness. Her ladies now brought her an inkstone:

Wrapped about a hedge
In the mists of late autumn:
The frail bellflower,
Now fading and withering,
As though already no more…

"Tears come to my eyes at the aptness of your description."

More she did not say, but though there was nothing of particular interest in her message, His Grace gazed at it longingly, unable to put it aside. Perhaps he was drawn to the soft brush strokes on the dull blue paper.

(When one attempts to convey such exchanges with all due consideration to the status and rank of persons and their manner of expression, what appears at the time to be without distortion may nonetheless be flawed. Thus, it may well be that my account is marred by many a misunderstanding.)

His Grace reflected that it would be unsuitable for him to attempt to return to the past and compose the passionate messages of his callow youth, and yet, unwilling to dismiss as futile all past efforts to woo her and still hopeful that she had not utterly rejected him, he now resumed his ardent courtship.

He made his way to the east wing and had Senji summoned. Among the maidservants were those willing to yield to any man, even if less than of high estate. They were thus all the more mindlessly effusive in their praise of His Grace. For her part, however, Her Highness had long since put aside whatever inclination she might once have felt, her present age and station rendering all the more perilous any dalliances. Even responses to messages with no more than allusions to shrubs and flowers would, she feared, give encouragement to wagging tongues, marking her as a woman of amorous disposition. Thus it was that she remained unmoved. His Grace saw in her constancy over the years the sign of a woman who was like no other, and for that he was filled with feelings of both high regard and deep resentment.

Yet rumors spread: “He is most ardently pursuing the former Kamo priestess and all with the apparent approval of the Fifth Princess. Ah, would it not be a most suitable pairing?” Such whisperings reached the ears of the lady in the west wing. “If it any of it were true,” she initially told herself, “he would most certainly not keep it concealed from me.”

On further observation, she noted, however, that he was displaying a restlessness that was not his wont. “Ah,” she thought, “perhaps he is laughingly dismissive of what is indeed for him a serious matter. My lineage

is equal to hers, but he has long held her in high esteem. If he should make her his own, what would then become of me? Am I to be cast aside, having had until now no rival?" Thus, unbeknownst to all, she brooded in torment.

"It might not come to a definitive separation," she thought again in anguish, "but the very intimacy with which over the years he has kept me, a person of insignificance, ever near him would allow him to put me more subtly aside." She had once gently chided him over fleeting adventures, but now, having suffered far deeper hurt, she betrayed nothing of her feelings. Seeing him sitting lost in thought near the veranda or noting the long hours he spent at Court and in the composition of endless letters, she concluded that the gossip might indeed be well founded. Her heart was full of quiet resentment: "Ah, but if only he had at least confided in me!"

One evening, the ceremonies in honor of the deities having been suspended, His Grace sought to fill the time by paying yet another visit to the residence of the Fifth Princess. The setting sun was all the more beautiful as it shone upon the freshly fallen snow. He had carefully prepared himself, with particular attention to the incense applied to his robes. One might well have wondered how any woman of even the slightest amorous impulse would have been able to resist him. Before departing, he went to his lady:

"I have heard that the Fifth Princess is not well and would therefore like to visit her," he said, sitting down for a moment. Feigning a preoccupation with the child in her company, she did not raise her eyes to him. Seeing her impassive face in profile, he knew that something in her had changed.

"You are not looking your usual self," he remarked. "There is no reason for you to feel concern. If I have been away from you, it is only because I feared that you had had quite enough of the ill-clothed brine-boiler on the shore. And now it appears that I have caused you to worry."

"One indeed seems to grow weary of the commonplace," she said in

reply and lay down with no further word. He was sorry to leave her there, her face turned away from him, but he had already informed the princess of his visit, and so he took his leave. Still prostrate, his lady wondered how she had continued to deceive herself and to allow her position to become so perilous. Though he was still obliged to don garments of duller shades, the elegantly layered hues of his dress gave him a most splendid appearance, and as she watched him depart, his figure made all the more handsome by the refracted light of the snow, she felt the full weight of her misery and the fear of abandonment.

His escorts were few, as he wished to remain inconspicuous. “I am old enough now to have little desire to go anywhere other than to the Court, but the Fifth Princess is in quite pitiable circumstances, and with the passing of His Highness of Ceremonial, who cared so long for her, it is now only to be expected that she should turn to me.” He repeated the same to the ladies-in-waiting, who whispered to one other: “How could that be true? He is surely still the sort of incurable philanderer who is bound to suffer for it.”

Arriving at Her Highness’s residence, he was obliged by his rank to avoid the ordinary northern gate and to make his way to the imposing western side, where he sent his men ahead to announce his arrival. Having been certain that he would not be visiting that day, the princess, both surprised and delighted, ordered the gate to be opened immediately. A shivering guard arrived in haste but was unable to open the portal and had no one to help him. “The lock has rusted shut and will not yield!” he exclaimed in a wailing tone, pulling at it with all of his strength. His Grace was moved and pondered to himself: “Today? Yesterday? Ah, but then thirty years…And still would I tarry in this passing world, enchanted by its trees and flowers.” He murmured to himself:

As though suddenly

Quite lost amidst the mugwort
Is the ancient house,
Its pitiful, crumbling hedge
Covered now in falling snow.

The guard at last succeeded with great difficulty in opening the gate, allowing His Grace to enter. In the rooms of the Fifth Princess, as always, he conversed with her. She went on interminably with confused memories of the past, and as nothing in them aroused his interest, he was soon drowsy, while the princess fell to yawning: “Sleep overtakes me early in the evening, so I fear that I cannot continue,” she said, and soon he heard a strange sound, as though she were snoring.

Relieved, he was about to rise to go, when in from behind the reed curtain came a woman whose discreet cough revealed her to be quite advanced in years.

“I would most humbly beg Your Grace’s pardon. I thought that perhaps you have been made aware that I am in service to this house, though it may well be that you would count me among those no longer dwelling in this world. His late Majesty, Your Grace’s father, most jocularly called me ‘The Venerable Dowager’.”

Hearing these words, he remembered her. He had heard that this person, known as the Second Lady of the Inner Chambers, had retired from the world and was now devoting herself to religious practices under the guidance of the Fifth Princess. As it had not in the least occurred to him that even now she might still be living, he was quite taken aback.

“Yours is a voice I am most pleased to hear,” he replied, “though it recalls days of long ago and a distant time remembered with pain. Please bestow your blessings on this ‘orphaned sojourner beside the road’.”

Glimpsing him only a short distance removed, she too was reminded of

the past, as she reverted to her coquettish badinage of old, though in quavering tones and with a mouth shrunken by the years.

"Ah, the chagrin of knowing that time has gone on for us even as we speak!" she sighed.

"So now she sees just who has aged!" he thought with a wry smile, even as he felt a measure of compassion. "Among the consorts and court ladies who, when she was in her prime, vied for our Sovereign's favor, some have perished, while others, in this fleeting life, with nowhere to turn, have vanished from sight. How very young was Her Cloistered Eminence! And yet this foolish crone endures, immersed in her devotions, in this heartless world and with what should be so few days remaining. Ah, vanity!"

Seeing him there, lost in thought, the lady mistook his sentiments for affection and thus felt herself rejuvenated:

Though the years have passed,
I shall not forget the ties
That have bound our fates
Nor that name so dear to me:
Venerable Dowager.

Utterly appalled, he offered in reply:

When in the next world,
You are happily reborn,
You may well inquire
Whether there is anyone
Who might forget his mother.

"Strong is indeed the bond. We shall talk again at length." And with that, he arose and departed.

In the rooms of the west wing the latticed windows had been lowered, but the ladies-in-waiting had left one or two open so as not to suggest that

His Grace's visit was unwelcome. The moonbeams illuminated the thin blanket of snow, lending to the winter night its own seasonal beauty. With amusement His Lordship recalled having heard that misty feelings gushing from old women, such as he had just witnessed, were among the world's greater miseries. That evening, in the west wing, he was in a far more serious mood:

"If only you would tell me yourself—and not through any mediator—that you find me odious, I might find the means to accept my fate," he said imploringly. Still unmoved, she thought:

"Even in our long-lost youth, when the world might well have been forgiving of a liaison, I dismissed as quite unsuitable the wishes of His late Highness. And now, after all this time, my youth now past, to speak a single word to him would surely be unseemly."

Her obstinacy left His Grace most perplexed: "Ah, how heartless!"

Though in avoiding a direct refusal she intended to save him from humiliation, he was nonetheless much perturbed by her insistence on speaking through her maidservant. As the evening advanced and the wind grew stronger, he was plunged into melancholy. With elegant gestures, he wiped away his tears:

From past cruelties,
There is naught that I have learned,
And thus even so,
Must now suffer once again
Pitiless indifference.

"And it is all of my own doing…" he added in a bitter tone.

Her women, as was their wont, murmured their sympathy for him, but she replied.

Why must I needs change

And now yield myself to you?
Though 'tis true I hear
That indeed there have been those
To have known a change of heart.

"Yet for me to alter my ways is not within my nature."

Words were all in vain, and to pour out his resentment would have only made him seem to be still a tempestuous youth, and so he made a final plea, as he prepared to depart:

"I beseech you," he said in a whisper to her servant, "to say nothing of this, lest I become an object of derision for all the world, though to urge a silence fit for the River Dalliance might well appear presumptuous."

The ladies expressed no little sympathy.

"Such a shame! To be so needlessly withdrawn!"

"And it is not as though he would rashly impose himself upon her. Ah, the pity of it all!"

Her Highness was by no means unaware of His Grace's charm and sensibility but nonetheless reflected:

"Were I to show any acceptance of his feelings, I would only find myself in the multitude of those who sing his praises and thereby reveal my weakness in succumbing to one of such awe-inspiring grandeur. And any show of greater cordiality would surely be no lesser folly. No, I shall carry on as before, sending bland but constant messages and always through my ladies, never showing the slightest discourtesy, even as I devote myself to making amends for all the long years in which I have neglected the Lord Buddha."

Such was her resolve, even as she continued to ponder:

"And were I suddenly to end my association with His Grace, such would also invite suspicion and, with such, malicious gossip."

Thus, Her Highness became all the more circumspect, refraining from confiding even in her servants and otherwise giving herself over all the more to prayer and worship. She had many brothers and sisters, but since they were not children of the same mother, she was distant from them. As her house thus grew more forlorn, her ladies were all the more inclined to espouse the cause of so enchanting a suitor.

As for His Grace, he was taken less by infatuation than by dismay at the lady's adamant will and by the sheer humiliation of defeat. He was, after all, a man of exalted position and repute, with a profound understanding of the ways of the world and the manner of human life. The years had taught him that as he grew older, frivolity would not escape opprobrium. "Even so," as he told himself restlessly, "ignominious surrender now might well give rise to no less mockery. What am I to do?"

Meanwhile, he remained distant from the western wing of his residence in the Second Avenue. There his lady found it not the least amusing that he might be playing the distant lover. Despite all her endeavors to maintain forbearance and fortitude, there were times when she gave way to tears.

"Your manner is now so very strange. I cannot comprehend it," he said to her, stroking her hair with such affection that one might have yearned to draw a picture of them there together. "I am greatly saddened to see how bereft and lonely His Majesty has become with the passing of Her Eminence, and now that the Grand Minister too is no longer here to render assistance, duties I cannot leave to others have greatly increased. These long absences of mine, to which you are unaccustomed, must, of course, be most difficult for you, and for that I am truly sorry. But rest assured. Though you have come of age, there is still much that you cannot yet imagine, and there is much in the intentions of others that you do not yet understand. It is this most innocent quality in you that makes you so dear to me."

He smoothed the hair on her tear-damp forehead, but she turned wordlessly away.

“Ah, who has reared you to be so childish?” he asked, even as he silently brooded: “Why in this fleeting and uncertain life should we be mindful of such trivialities?”

“You may well have most erroneous notions concerning the insignificant messages I have sent to the Priestess of Kamo. If so, I can again reassure you that whatever worries you have are quite unfounded and that you will come to see that yourself. In the past she has kept me at a distance, and so in my chagrin I have sometimes written to her as though wooing her, and, perchance in her idleness, she has on occasion responded. As it is of no import, I have not troubled you with these petty cares of mine. You must not be yourself concerned.”

Thus he spent the day attempting to console her.

The snow, which had already fallen in drifts, was still fluttering in the air. The contrast between pine and bamboo stood out most delightfully in the light of dusk; His Grace’s countenance was more radiant than ever.

“As the seasons pass, we are enchanted by the cherry blossoms of spring and by the red leaves of autumn in all their glory. And yet we are strangely moved by the sky of a winter night, when the snow glistens in the clear light of the moon, absent of all color, and draws us toward another world. Such wondrous beauty knows no rival. How shallow are the thoughts of those who would dismiss such as somehow repellent!”

So saying, His Grace called for the curtains to be raised. The moon had filled the garden, driving out all colors but its own. The wilted grass and shrugs were a dismal sight, and the brook itself seemed to cry out in the cold, the frozen pond unspeakably forlorn.

His Grace ordered serving girls to go down to roll a giant snowball.

They made a most endearing appearance, their hair shining in the moonlight. The casual dress of the older and more experienced among them, gowns with sashes loosened, as though they were prepared for slumber, yet all the more full of youthful exuberance, revealed the long ends of their tresses, which reached down below their hems to shine brilliantly black against the snow.

The younger ones, running to and fro in childlike glee, had dropped their fans, delightfully revealing their innocent faces. Attempting to further enlarge the snowball, they appeared to be at a loss, their strength unequal to the sheer weight. Other girls, who had come out to sit at the east end of veranda, watched laughingly in both amusement and annoyance.

"Some years ago, Her Eminence had a snow hill built in her garden, and though such is a common enough occurrence, it was the care she took in the endeavor that rendered it most unusual. How on every occasion we are poignantly reminded of her! I was far removed from her, and I cannot say that I knew her well, but in what association we did have when she was still at Court, she bestowed on me her trust. I relied on her, turning to her for advice on sundry matters, and though she never put on a display of her wisdom, there was no concern, in which I did not benefit from her counsel, for even in the smallest things she had an unerring sense. Will there in this world ever be again one quite like her?

"She was modest and withdrawn, yet possessed of matchless refinement and discernment. You are not dissimilar, springing as you do from that same lavender root, though you tend to be quite difficult to please.

"The character of the Kamo priestess is again of a different sort. When in idle moments I am suffering from solitude, I may exchange a few messages with her, though there is no one with whom I am obliged to be so guarded."

“The Mistress of the Inner Rooms is unmatched in sagacity and refinement,” his lady remarked. “Her demeanor is entirely foreign to any sort of frivolity. And yet…”

“Indeed. One may well see her as exemplary of beauty and charm. On reflection, I know I have much for which I might accept reproach. Though I have thought of myself as having led a more tranquil life than most, I nonetheless have pondered whether, as the years pass, those of amorous disposition may come to regret their adventures.”

Talk of the Mistress of the Inner Rooms brought him to tears.

“As for that person who lives in the mountain village and whom you regard as beyond any consideration, she is possessed of greater understanding than her station might seem to permit, but, however proud she may be, she is nonetheless of low estate, and so I endeavor to pay her little heed. I have never known anyone so unworthy as not to merit a passing thought, but it must also be said that in this world the truly superior are rare indeed.

“The lady now spending lonely days in the eastern pavilion has long been blessed with a singularly amiable temperament. Ever since I began to care for her, she has been the very embodiment of modesty and discretion. I would never think of parting from her, and she remains most dear to me.”

Thus His Grace continued to speak late into the night of matters past and present. The moon shone ever more clearly. Now out of a wondrous stillness, his lady spoke:

Water immobile,
Turned to ice between the stones,
Seeks in vain to flow,
Even as a gleaming moon
Sails across the limpid sky.

With her head slightly tilted in order to look outside, she was of incomparable beauty. Her features and the form of her hair again suddenly reminded him of the one he had loved, and now, though his heart had for a time gone wandering, it now returned. The call of a wood duck was heard.

The floating wood duck
Rouses with its poignant call
Endless memories:
Evening snow of yesteryear
And my love forever lost.

Even after he had retired for the night, his thoughts continued to turn to Her Eminence. He saw her now, faint but real, and not as in a dream. She was angry:

"You said that naught would be revealed. Yet now there is no hiding of our shame. How I resent the suffering you are causing me!"

He started to reply but was held back by fear and then by the voice of his lady:

"What is it?"

He awoke in utter chagrin, his heart wildly beating. As he grew calmer, he realized that he had been weeping and that even now tears were flowing.

His lady wondered what had befallen him, as he lay motionless beside her:

A fleeting vision:
All too soon it vanishes.
In bleakest spirits
I lie restlessly awake
On this dreary winter's eve…

Still sorrowing, he arose early and discreetly went about arranging for sutras to be read in various temples.

"She has chastised me for bringing upon her great suffering," he thought, indeed with ample reason, and though she turned to the life of a contemplative, thereby lightening the load of sin, it seems that her one grievous transgression has left her unable to be cleansed entirely of worldly dross."

As he contemplated it all, his sadness only grew.

"By whatever means," he said to himself, deeply moved, "I would venture into that world unknown to men to be at her side and take her sins upon myself!

"Ah," but he thought, "were I to invoke her name in ordering special ceremonies, such would surely raise suspicions and censure, and even His Majesty would be beset with anguish."

And so he yielded to discretion, praying only to Amitabha:

"Oh, grant that I might sit beside her on the same lotus leaf!"

Even so, he murmured to himself:

Were I to follow
That deep longing of my heart,
Yet fail to find her,
Would I myself then wander
The River of Three Crossings?

Such, it would seem, did indeed express his sorrow and despair.

Notes

1) Arthur Waley entitles the chapter "Asagao," as does the German translator Oscar Benl. In the renditions of Edward Seidensticker, René Sieffert, Royall Tyler, Jos Vos, Maria Teresa Orsi, and Dennis Washburn, the titles are respectively: "The Morning Glory," "La-belle-du-matin," "The Bluebell," "Het Graslokje," "Il Convolvolo," and "The Bellflowers." Asagao is usually written in Japanese as 朝顔, lit. 'morning face',

but in their translations into Modern Japanese, both Tanizaki (1965) and Enchi (1973) write the word as 槿, usually read mukuge 'Hibiscus syriacus, rose of Sharon'. In at least two Korean translations, Cheon (1999–2002) and Kim (2007), whose sources are Modern Japanese translations, the name of the Japanese flower is mistranslated as naphal-kkoch (나팔꽃), which is Ipomoea nil. Platycodon grandiflorus is in Korean toraji (도라지), whose roots are used in both Korean cuisine and traditional medicine. It is celebrated in a well-known folksong.

2) In the original, Genji, who has risen to the status of Palace Minister, is referred to as 大臣 (Otodo)—and even then only twice. In my translation, I refer to him—with far greater frequency—as His Grace or Your Grace.

3) In Kawabata Yasunari's *Yukiguni* (雪国), the protagonist Shimamura asks his lover-to-be Komako to call for him a geisha, clearly for sexual purposes. When she expresses indignation, he tells her that he has refrained from enticing her because he wants to maintain an unmuddled relationship. She is only further disgusted, saying "Akireru wa." Seidensticker (1957) renders this as "you've said enough." However one may question the translation, the fact remains that a perfect semantic match may be impossible, though mid-1980s American female teenage talk may come close: "I can't believe you just said that."

4) The original text is taken from both the Iwanami (1994) and Shogakukan (1994) editions.

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