

THE PILLOW BOOK OF SEI SHŌNAGON

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1. *In Spring It Is the Dawn*

In spring it is the dawn that is most beautiful.¹ As the light creeps over the hills, their outlines are dyed a faint red and wisps of purplish cloud trail over them.

In summer the nights. Not only when the moon shines, but on dark nights too, as the fireflies flit to and fro, and even when it rains, how beautiful it is!

In autumn the evenings, when the glittering sun sinks close to the edge of the hills and the crows fly back to their nests in threes and fours and twos; more charming still is a file of wild geese, like specks in the distant sky. When the sun has set, one's heart is moved by the sound of the wind and the hum of the insects.

In winter the early mornings. It is beautiful indeed when snow has fallen during the night, but splendid too when the ground is white with frost; or even when there is no snow or frost, but it is simply very cold and the attendants hurry from room to room stirring up the fires and bringing charcoal, how well this fits the season's mood! But as noon approaches and the cold wears off, no one bothers to keep the braziers alight, and soon nothing remains but piles of white ashes.

2. *Especially Delightful Is the First Day*

Especially delightful is the first day of the First Month, when the mists so often shroud the sky. Everyone pays great attention to his appearance and dresses with the utmost care. What a pleasure it is to see them all offer their congratulations to the Emperor and celebrate their own new year!²

I also enjoy the seventh day, when people pluck the young herbs that have sprouted fresh and green beneath the snow.³ It is amusing to see their excitement when they find such plants

growing near the Palace, by no means a spot where one might expect them.⁴

This is the day when members of the nobility who live outside the Palace arrive in their magnificently decorated carriages to admire the blue horses.⁵ As the carriages are drawn over the ground-beam of the Central Gate,⁶ there is always a tremendous bump, and the heads of the women passengers are knocked together; the combs fall out of their hair, and may be smashed to pieces if the owners are not careful. I enjoy the way everyone laughs when this happens.

I remember one occasion when I visited the Palace to see the procession of blue horses. Several senior courtiers⁷ were standing outside the guard-house of the Left Division; they had borrowed bows from the escorts, and, with much laughter, were twanging them to make the blue horses prance. Looking through one of the gates of the Palace enclosure, I could dimly make out a garden fence, near which a number of ladies, several of them from the Office of Grounds, went to and fro. What lucky women, I thought, who could walk about the Nine-Fold Enclosure as though they had lived there all their lives! Just then the escorts passed close to my carriage – remarkably close, in fact, considering the vastness of the Palace grounds – and I could actually see the texture of their faces. Some of them were not properly powdered; here and there their skin showed through unpleasantly like the dark patches of earth in a garden where the snow has begun to melt. When the horses in the procession reared wildly, I shrank into the back of my carriage and could no longer see what was happening.

On the eighth day⁸ there is great excitement in the Palace as people hurry to express their gratitude, and the clatter of carriages is louder than ever – all very fascinating.

The fifteenth day is the festival of the full-moon gruel,⁹ when a bowl of gruel is presented to His Majesty. On this day all the women of the house carry gruel-sticks, which they hide carefully from each other. It is most amusing to see them walking about, as they await an opportunity to hit their companions. Each one

is careful not to be struck herself and is constantly looking over her shoulder to make sure that no one is stealing up on her. Yet the precautions are useless, for before long one of the women manages to score a hit. She is extremely pleased with herself and laughs merrily. Everyone finds this delightful – except, of course, the victim, who looks very put out.

In a certain household a young gentleman had been married during the previous year to one of the girls in the family.¹⁰ Having spent the night with her, he was now, on the morning of the fifteenth, about to set off for the Palace. There was a woman¹¹ in the house who was in the habit of lording it over everyone. On this occasion she was standing in the back of the room, impatiently awaiting an opportunity to hit the man with her gruel-stick as he left. One of the other women realized what she had in mind and burst out laughing. The woman with the stick signalled excitedly that she should be quiet. Fortunately the young man did not notice what was afoot and he stood there unconcernedly.

‘I have to pick up something over there,’ said the woman with the stick, approaching the man. Suddenly she darted forward, gave him a great whack, and made her escape. Everyone in the room burst out laughing; even the young man smiled pleasantly, not in the least annoyed. He was not too startled; but he did blush a little, which was charming.

Sometimes when the women are hitting each other the men also join in the fun. The strange thing is that, when a woman is hit, she often gets angry and bursts into tears; then she will upbraid her assailant and say the most awful things about him – most amusing. Even in the Palace, where the atmosphere is usually so solemn, everything is in confusion on this day, and no one stands on ceremony.

It is fascinating to see what happens during the period of appointments. However snowy and icy it may be, candidates of the Fourth and Fifth Ranks come to the Palace with their official requests. Those who are still young and merry seem full of confidence. For the candidates who are old and white-haired things do not go so smoothly. Such men have to apply for help

from people with influence at Court; some of them even visit ladies-in-waiting in their quarters and go to great lengths in pointing out their own merits. If young women happen to be present, they are greatly amused. As soon as the candidates have left, they mimic and deride them – something that the old men cannot possibly suspect as they scurry from one part of the Palace to another, begging everyone, ‘Please present my petition favourably to the Emperor’ and ‘Pray inform Her Majesty about me.’ It is not so bad if they finally succeed, but it really is rather pathetic when all their efforts prove in vain.

3. *On the Third Day of the Third Month*

On the third day of the Third Month I like to see the sun shining bright and calm in the spring sky. Now is the time when the peach trees come into bloom, and what a sight it is! The willows too are most charming at this season, with the buds still enclosed like silkworms in their cocoons. After the leaves have spread out, I find them unattractive; in fact all trees lose their charm once the blossoms have begun to scatter.

It is a great pleasure to break off a long, beautifully flowering branch from a cherry tree and to arrange it in a large vase. What a delightful task to perform when a visitor is seated nearby conversing! It may be an ordinary guest, or possibly one of Their Highnesses, the Empress’s¹² elder brothers; but in any case the visitor will wear a cherry-coloured¹³ Court cloak, from the bottom of which his under-robe emerges. I am even happier if a butterfly or a small bird flutters prettily near the flowers and I can see its face.

4. *How Delightful Everything Is!*

How delightful everything is at the time of the Festival!¹⁴ The leaves, which still do not cover the trees too thickly, are green

and fresh. In the daytime there is no mist to hide the sky and, glancing up, one is overcome by its beauty. On a slightly cloudy evening, or again at night, it is moving to hear in the distance the song of a *hototogisu*¹⁵ – so faint that one doubts one’s own ears.

When the Festival approaches, I enjoy seeing the men go to and fro with rolls of yellowish green and deep violet material which they have loosely wrapped in paper and placed in the lids of long boxes. At this time of the year, border shading, uneven shading, and rolled dyeing all seem more attractive than usual.¹⁶ The young girls who are to take part in the procession have had their hair washed and arranged; but they are still wearing their everyday clothes, which sometimes are in a great mess, wrinkled and coming apart at the seams. How excited they are as they run about the house, impatiently awaiting the great day, and rapping out orders to the maids: ‘Fit the cords on my clogs’ or ‘See that the soles of my sandals are all right.’ Once they have put on their Festival costumes, these same young girls, instead of prancing about the rooms, become extremely demure and walk along solemnly like priests at the head of a procession. I also enjoy seeing how their mothers, aunts, and elder sisters, dressed according to their ranks, accompany the girls and help keep their costumes in order.

5. *Different Ways of Speaking*

A priest’s language.

The speech of men and of women.¹⁷

The common people always tend to add extra syllables to their words.

6. *That Parents Should Bring Up Some Beloved Son*

That parents should bring up some beloved son of theirs to be a priest is really distressing. No doubt it is an auspicious¹⁸ thing

to do; but unfortunately most people are convinced that a priest is as unimportant as a piece of wood, and they treat him accordingly. A priest lives poorly on meagre food, and cannot even sleep without being criticized. While he is young, it is only natural that he should be curious about all sorts of things, and, if there are women about, he will probably peep in their direction (though, to be sure, with a look of aversion on his face). What is wrong about that? Yet people immediately find fault with him for even so small a lapse.

The lot of an exorcist is still more painful. On his pilgrimages to Mitake, Kumano, and all the other sacred mountains he often undergoes the greatest hardships. When people come to hear that his prayers are effective, they summon him here and there to perform services of exorcism: the more popular he becomes, the less peace he enjoys. Sometimes he will be called to see a patient who is seriously ill and he has to exert all his powers to cast out the spirit that is causing the affliction. But if he dozes off, exhausted by his efforts, people say reproachfully, 'Really, this priest does nothing but sleep.' Such comments are most embarrassing for the exorcist, and I can imagine how he feels.

That is how things used to be; nowadays priests have a somewhat easier life.

7. *When the Empress Moved*

When the Empress moved into the house of the Senior Steward, Narimasa, the east gate of his courtyard had been made into a four-pillared structure,¹⁹ and it was here that Her Majesty's palanquin entered. The carriages in which I and the other ladies-in-waiting were travelling arrived at the north gate. As there was no one in the guard-house, we decided to enter just as we were, without troubling to tidy ourselves; many of the women had let their hair become disordered during the journey, but they did not bother to rearrange it, since they assumed that the carriages would be pulled directly up to the veranda of the house. Un-

fortunately the gate was too narrow for our palm-leaf carriages. The attendants laid down mats for us from the gate to the house, and we had to get out and walk. It was extremely annoying and we were all very cross; but what could we do about it? To make matters worse, there was a group of men, including senior courtiers and even some of lower rank, standing next to the guard-house and staring at us in a most irritating fashion.

When I entered the house and saw Her Majesty, I told her what had happened. 'Do you suppose it is only people outside the house who can see what a state you are in?' she said. 'I wonder what has made you all so careless today.'

'But, Your Majesty,' I replied, 'the people here are all used to us, and it would surprise them if we suddenly took great trouble over our appearance. In any case, it does seem rather strange that the gates of a house like this should be too small for a carriage. I shall have to tease your steward about it when I see him.'

At that very moment Narimasa arrived with an inkstone and other writing implements, which he thrust under the screen, saying, 'Pray give these to Her Majesty.'

'Well, well,' said I, 'you really are a disgraceful man! Why do you live in a house with such narrow gates?'

'I have built my house to suit my station in life,' he laughingly replied.

'That's all very well,' I said, 'but I seem to have heard of someone who built his gate extremely high, out of all proportion to the rest of his house.'

'Good heavens!' exclaimed Narimasa. 'How remarkable! You must be referring to Yü Ting-kuo.²⁰ I thought it was only veteran scholars who had heard about such things. Even I, Madam, should not have understood you except that I happen to have strayed in these paths myself.'

'Paths!' said I. 'Yours leave something to be desired. When your servants spread out the mats for us, we couldn't see how uneven the ground was and we stumbled all over the place.'

'To be sure, Madam,' said Narimasa. 'It has been raining,

and I am afraid it is a bit uneven. But let's leave it at that. You'll be making some other disagreeable remark in a moment. So I shall be off before you have time.' And with this he went away.

'What happened?' asked the Empress when I rejoined her. 'Narimasa seemed terribly put out.'

'Oh no,' I answered. 'I was only telling him how our carriage could not get in.' Then I withdrew to my own room.

I shared this room with several of the younger ladies-in-waiting. We were all sleepy and, without paying much attention to anything, dozed off immediately. Our room was in the east wing of the house. Though we were unaware of the fact, the clasp of the sliding-door in the back of the western ante-room²¹ was missing. Of course the owner of the house knew about this, and presently he came and pushed open the door.

'May I presume to come in?' he said several times in a strangely husky and excited voice. I looked up in amazement, and by the light of the lamp that had been placed behind the curtain of state²² I could see that Narimasa was standing outside the door, which he had now opened about half a foot. The situation amused me. As a rule he would not have dreamt of indulging in such lecherous behaviour; as the Empress was staying in his house, he evidently felt he could do as he pleased. Waking up the young women next to me, I exclaimed, 'Look who is there! What an unlikely sight!' They all sat up and, seeing Narimasa by the door, burst into laughter. 'Who are you?' I said. 'Don't try to hide!' 'Oh no,' he replied. 'It's simply that the master of the house has something to discuss with the lady-in-waiting in charge.'

'It was your gate I was speaking about,' I said. 'I don't remember asking you to open the sliding-door.'

'Yes indeed,' he answered. 'It is precisely the matter of the gate that I wanted to discuss with you. May I not presume to come in for a moment?'

'Really!' said one of the young women. 'How unpleasant! No, he certainly cannot come in.'

'Oh, I see,' said Narimasa. 'There are other young ladies in the

room.' Closing the door behind him, he left, followed by our loud laughter.

How absurd! Once he had opened the door, he should obviously have walked straight in, without bothering to ask for permission. After all, what woman would be likely to say, 'It's all right. Please come in'?

On the following day I told the Empress about the incident. 'It does not sound like Narimasa at all,' she said, laughing. 'It must have been your conversation last night that roused his interest in you. Really, I can't help feeling sorry for the poor man. You have been awfully hard on him.'

One day when the Empress was giving orders about the costumes for the little girls who were to wait upon the Princess Imperial,²³ Narimasa asked, 'Has Your Majesty decided on the colour of the garments²⁴ that will cover the girls' vests?' This made us all laugh; and surely no one could blame us for being amused. Next Narimasa discussed the Princess's meals. 'I believe it would look rather clumsy, Your Majesty, if they were served in ordinary utensils. If I may say so, she ought to have a *smahl* platter and a *smahl* tray.'²⁵

'And be waited upon,' I added, 'by little girls with those garments that cover their vests.'

'You should not make fun of him as the others do,' the Empress told me afterwards. 'He is a very sincere man, and I feel sorry for him.' I found even her reprimand delightful.

Once when I was busy attending the Empress a messenger came and said that Narimasa had arrived and wished to tell me something. Overhearing this, the Empress said, 'I wonder what he will do this time to make himself a laughing-stock. Find out what he has to say.' Delighted by her remark, I decided to go out myself, rather than send a maid. 'Madam,' announced Narimasa, 'I told my brother, the Middle Counsellor,²⁶ what you said the other night about the gate. He was most impressed and asked me to arrange a meeting for him at some convenient time when he could hear what you had to say.'

I wondered whether Narimasa would make some reference to

his own visit the other night and I felt my heart pounding; but he said nothing further, merely adding as he left, 'I should like to come and see you quietly one of these days.'

'Well,' said the Empress when I returned, 'what happened?' I told her exactly what Narimasa had said, adding with a smile, 'I should hardly have thought it was so important that he had to send a special message for me when I was in attendance. Surely he could have waited until I had settled down quietly in my own room.'

'He probably thought you would be pleased to hear of his brother's high opinion and wanted to let you know at once. He has the greatest respect for his brother, you know.' Very charming the Empress looked as she said this.

8. *The Cat Who Lived in the Palace*

The cat who lived in the Palace had been awarded the head-dress of nobility and was called Lady Myōbu. She was a very pretty cat, and His Majesty saw to it that she was treated with the greatest care.²⁷

One day she wandered on to the veranda, and Lady Uma, the nurse in charge of her, called out, 'Oh, you naughty thing! Please come inside at once.' But the cat paid no attention and went on basking sleepily in the sun. Intending to give her a scare, the nurse called for the dog, Okinamaro.

'Okinamaro, where are you?' she cried. 'Come here and bite Lady Myōbu!' The foolish Okinamaro, believing that the nurse was in earnest, rushed at the cat, who, startled and terrified, ran behind the blind in the Imperial Dining Room,²⁸ where the Emperor happened to be sitting. Greatly surprised, His Majesty picked up the cat and held her in his arms. He summoned his gentlemen-in-waiting. When Tadataka, the Chamberlain,²⁹ appeared, His Majesty ordered that Okinamaro be chastised and banished to Dog Island. The attendants all started to chase the dog amid great confusion. His Majesty also reproached Lady

Uma. 'We shall have to find a new nurse for our cat,' he told her. 'I no longer feel I can count on you to look after her.' Lady Uma bowed; thereafter she no longer appeared in the Emperor's presence.

The Imperial Guards quickly succeeded in catching Okinamaro and drove him out of the Palace grounds. Poor dog! He used to swagger about so happily. Recently, on the third day of the Third Month,³⁰ when the Controller First Secretary paraded him through the Palace grounds, Okinamaro was adorned with garlands of willow leaves, peach blossoms on his head, and cherry blossoms round his body. How could the dog have imagined that this would be his fate? We all felt sorry for him. 'When Her Majesty was having her meals,' recalled one of the ladies-in-waiting, 'Okinamaro always used to be in attendance and sit opposite us. How I miss him!'

It was about noon, a few days after Okinamaro's banishment, that we heard a dog howling fearfully. How could any dog possibly cry so long? All the other dogs rushed out in excitement to see what was happening. Meanwhile a woman who served as a cleaner in the Palace latrines ran up to us. 'It's terrible,' she said. 'Two of the Chamberlains are flogging a dog. They'll surely kill him. He's being punished for having come back after he was banished. It's Tadataka and Sanefusa who are beating him.' Obviously the victim was Okinamaro. I was absolutely wretched and sent a servant to ask the men to stop; but just then the howling finally ceased. 'He's dead,' one of the servants informed me. 'They've thrown his body outside the gate.'

That evening, while we were sitting in the Palace bemoaning Okinamaro's fate, a wretched-looking dog walked in; he was trembling all over, and his body was fearfully swollen.

'Oh dear,' said one of the ladies-in-waiting. 'Can this be Okinamaro? We haven't seen any other dog like him recently, have we?'

We called to him by name, but the dog did not respond. Some of us insisted that it was Okinamaro, others that it was not. 'Please send for Lady Ukon,'³¹ said the Empress, hearing our

discussion. 'She will certainly be able to tell.' We immediately went to Ukon's room and told her she was wanted on an urgent matter.

'Is this Okinamaro?' the Empress asked her, pointing to the dog.

'Well,' said Ukon, 'it certainly looks like him, but I cannot believe that this loathsome creature is really our Okinamaro. When I called Okinamaro, he always used to come to me, wagging his tail. But this dog does not react at all. No, it cannot be the same one. And besides, wasn't Okinamaro beaten to death and his body thrown away? How could any dog be alive after being flogged by two strong men?' Hearing this, Her Majesty was very unhappy.

When it got dark, we gave the dog something to eat; but he refused it, and we finally decided that this could not be Okinamaro.

On the following morning I went to attend the Empress while her hair was being dressed and she was performing her ablutions. I was holding up the mirror for her when the dog we had seen on the previous evening slunk into the room and crouched next to one of the pillars. 'Poor Okinamaro!' I said. 'He had such a dreadful beating yesterday. How sad to think he is dead! I wonder what body he has been born into this time. Oh, how he must have suffered!'

At that moment the dog lying by the pillar started to shake and tremble, and shed a flood of tears. It was astounding. So this really was Okinamaro! On the previous night it was to avoid betraying himself that he had refused to answer to his name. We were immensely moved and pleased. 'Well, well, Okinamaro!' I said, putting down the mirror. The dog stretched himself flat on the floor and yelped loudly, so that the Empress beamed with delight. All the ladies gathered round, and Her Majesty summoned Lady Ukon. When the Empress explained what had happened, everyone talked and laughed with great excitement.

The news reached His Majesty, and he too came to the Em-

press's room. 'It's amazing,' he said with a smile. 'To think that even a dog has such deep feelings!' When the Emperor's ladies-in-waiting heard the story, they too came along in a great crowd. 'Okinamaro!' we called, and this time the dog rose and limped about the room with his swollen face. 'He must have a meal prepared for him,' I said. 'Yes,' said the Empress, laughing happily, 'now that Okinamaro has finally told us who he is.'

The Chamberlain, Tadataka, was informed, and he hurried along from the Table Room.³² 'Is it really true?' he asked. 'Please let me see for myself.' I sent a maid to him with the following reply: 'Alas, I am afraid that this is not the same dog after all.' 'Well,' answered Tadataka, 'whatever you say, I shall sooner or later have occasion to see the animal. You won't be able to hide him from me indefinitely.'

Before long, Okinamaro was granted an Imperial pardon and returned to his former happy state. Yet even now, when I remember how he whimpered and trembled in response to our sympathy, it strikes me as a strange and moving scene; when people talk to me about it, I start crying myself.

9. *On the First Day of the First Month*³³

On the first day of the First Month and on the third of the Third I like the sky to be perfectly clear.

On the fifth of the Fifth Month I prefer a cloudy sky.

On the seventh day of the Seventh Month it should also be cloudy; but in the evening it should clear, so that the moon shines brightly in the sky and one can see the outline of the stars.³⁴

On the ninth of the Ninth Month there should be a drizzle from early dawn. Then there will be heavy dew on the chrysanthemums, while the floss silk that covers them will be wet through and drenched also with the precious scent of blossoms.³⁵ Sometimes the rain stops early in the morning, but the sky is still overcast, and it looks as if it may start raining again at any moment. This too I find very pleasant.

10. *I Enjoy Watching the Officials*

I enjoy watching the officials when they come to thank the Emperor for their new appointments. As they stand facing His Majesty with their batons³⁶ in their hands, the trains of their robes trail along the floor. Then they make obeisance and begin their ceremonial movements³⁷ with great animation.

11. *The Sliding Screen in the Back of the Hall*

The sliding screen in the back of the hall in the north-east corner of Seiryō Palace is decorated with paintings of the stormy sea and of the terrifying creatures with long arms and long legs that live there.³⁸ When the doors of the Empress's room were open, we could always see this screen. One day we were sitting in the room, laughing at the paintings and remarking how unpleasant they were. By the balustrade of the veranda stood a large celadon vase, full of magnificent cherry branches; some of them were as much as five foot long, and their blossoms overflowed to the very foot of the railing. Towards noon the Major Counsellor,³⁹ Fujiwara no Korechika, arrived. He was dressed in a cherry-coloured Court cloak, sufficiently worn to have lost its stiffness, a white under-robe, and loose trousers of dark purple; from beneath the cloak shone the pattern of another robe of dark red damask. Since His Majesty was present, Korechika knelt on the narrow wooden platform before the door and reported to him on official matters.

A group of ladies-in-waiting was seated behind the bamboo blinds. Their cherry-coloured Chinese jackets hung loosely over their shoulders with the collars pulled back; they wore robes of wistaria, golden yellow, and other colours, many of which showed beneath the blind covering the half-shutter. Presently the noise of the attendants' feet told us that dinner was about to be served in the Daytime Chamber,⁴⁰ and we heard cries of 'Make way. Make way.'

The bright, serene day delighted me. When the Chamberlains had brought all the dishes into the Chamber, they came to announce that dinner was ready, and His Majesty left by the middle door. After accompanying the Emperor, Korechika returned to his previous place on the veranda beside the cherry blossoms. The Empress pushed aside her curtain of state and came forward as far as the threshold.⁴¹ We were overwhelmed by the whole delightful scene. It was then that Korechika slowly intoned the words of the old poem,

The days and the months flow by,
But Mount Mimoro lasts forever.⁴²

Deeply impressed, I wished that all this might indeed continue for a thousand years.

As soon as the ladies serving in the Daytime Chamber had called for the gentlemen-in-waiting to remove the trays, His Majesty returned to the Empress's room. Then he told me to rub some ink on the inkstone. Dazzled, I felt that I should never be able to take my eyes off his radiant countenance. Next he folded a piece of white paper. 'I should like each of you,' he said, 'to copy down on this paper the first ancient poem that comes into your head.'

'How am I going to manage this?' I asked Korechika, who was still out on the veranda.

'Write your poem quickly,' he said, 'and show it to His Majesty. We men must not interfere in this.' Ordering an attendant to take the Emperor's inkstone to each of the women in the room, he told us to make haste. 'Write down any poem you happen to remember,' he said. 'The Naniwazu⁴³ or whatever else you can think of.'

For some reason I was overcome with timidity; I flushed and had no idea what to do. Some of the other women managed to put down poems about the spring, the blossoms, and such suitable subjects; then they handed me the paper and said, 'Now it's your turn.' Picking up the brush, I wrote the poem that goes,

The years have passed
And age has come my way.
Yet I need only look at this fair flower
For all my cares to melt away.

I altered the third line, however, to read, 'Yet I need only look upon my lord.'⁴⁴

When he had finished reading, the Emperor said, 'I asked you to write these poems because I wanted to find out how quick you really were.

'A few years ago,' he continued, 'Emperor Enyū ordered all his courtiers to write poems in a notebook. Some excused themselves on the grounds that their handwriting was poor; but the Emperor insisted, saying that he did not care in the slightest about their handwriting or even whether their poems were suitable for the season. So they all had to swallow their embarrassment and produce something for the occasion. Among them was His Excellency, our present Chancellor, who was then Middle Captain of the Third Rank.'⁴⁵ He wrote down the old poem,

Like the sea that beats
Upon the shores of Izumo
As the tide sweeps in,
Deeper it grows and deeper –
The love I bear for you.

But he changed the last line to read, "The love I bear my lord!", and the Emperor was full of praise.'

When I heard His Majesty tell this story, I was so overcome that I felt myself perspiring. It occurred to me that no younger woman⁴⁶ would have been able to use my poem and I felt very lucky. This sort of test can be a terrible ordeal: it often happens that people who usually write fluently are so overawed that they actually make mistakes in their characters.

Next the Empress placed a notebook of *Kokin Shū* poems before her and started reading out the first three lines of each one, asking us to supply the remainder. Among them were several famous poems that we had in our minds day and night; yet for

some strange reason we were often unable to fill in the missing lines. Lady Saishō, for example, could manage only ten, which hardly qualified her as knowing her *Kokin Shū*. Some of the other women, even less successful, could remember only about half a dozen poems. They would have done better to tell the Empress quite simply that they had forgotten the lines; instead they came out with great lamentations like 'Oh dear, how could we have done so badly in answering the questions that Your Majesty was pleased to put to us?' – all of which I found rather absurd.

When no one could complete a particular poem, the Empress continued reading to the end. This produced further wails from the women: 'Oh, we all knew that one! How could we be so stupid?'

'Those of you,' said the Empress, 'who had taken the trouble to copy out the *Kokin Shū* several times would have been able to complete every single poem I have read. In the reign of Emperor Murakami there was a woman at Court known as the Imperial Lady⁴⁷ of Senyō Palace. She was the daughter of the Minister of the Left who lived in the Smaller Palace of the First Ward, and of course you have all heard of her. When she was still a young girl, her father gave her this advice: "First you must study penmanship. Next you must learn to play the seven-string zither better than anyone else. And also you must memorize all the poems in the twenty volumes of the *Kokin Shū*."

'Emperor Murakami,' continued Her Majesty, 'had heard this story and remembered it years later when the girl had grown up and become an Imperial Concubine. Once, on a day of abstinence,⁴⁸ he came into her room, hiding a notebook of *Kokin Shū* poems in the folds of his robe. He surprised her by seating himself behind a curtain of state; then, opening the book, he asked, "Tell me the verse written by such-and-such a poet, in such-and-such a year and on such-and-such an occasion." The lady understood what was afoot and that it was all in fun, yet the possibility of making a mistake or forgetting one of the poems must have worried her greatly. Before beginning the test, the

Emperor had summoned a couple of ladies-in-waiting who were particularly adept in poetry and told them to mark each incorrect reply by a *go* stone.⁴⁹ What a splendid scene it must have been! You know, I really envy anyone who attended that Emperor even as a lady-in-waiting.

'Well,' Her Majesty went on, 'he then began questioning her. She answered without any hesitation, just giving a few words or phrases to show that she knew each poem. And never once did she make a mistake. After a time the Emperor began to resent the lady's flawless memory and decided to stop as soon as he detected any error or vagueness in her replies. Yet, after he had gone through ten books of the *Kokin Shū*, he had still not caught her out. At this stage he declared that it would be useless to continue. Marking where he had left off, he went to bed. What a triumph for the lady!

'He slept for some time. On waking, he decided that he must have a final verdict and that if he waited until the following day to examine her on the other ten volumes, she might use the time to refresh her memory. So he would have to settle the matter that very night. Ordering his attendants to bring up the bedroom lamp, he resumed his questions. By the time he had finished all twenty volumes, the night was well advanced; and still the lady had not made a mistake.

'During all this time His Excellency, the lady's father, was in a state of great agitation. As soon as he was informed that the Emperor was testing his daughter, he sent his attendants to various temples to arrange for special recitations of the Scriptures. Then he turned in the direction of the Imperial Palace and spent a long time in prayer. Such enthusiasm for poetry is really rather moving.'

The Emperor, who had been listening to the whole story, was much impressed. 'How can he possibly have read so many poems?' he remarked when Her Majesty had finished. 'I doubt whether I could get through three or four volumes. But of course things have changed. In the old days even people of humble station had a taste for the arts and were interested in elegant

pastimes. Such a story would hardly be possible nowadays, would it?'

The ladies in attendance on Her Majesty and the Emperor's own ladies-in-waiting who had been admitted into Her Majesty's presence began chatting eagerly, and as I listened I felt that my cares had really 'melted away'.

12. *When I Make Myself Imagine*

When I make myself imagine what it is like to be one of those women who live at home, faithfully serving their husbands – women who have not a single exciting prospect in life yet who believe that they are perfectly happy – I am filled with scorn. Often they are of quite good birth, yet have had no opportunity to find out what the world is like. I wish they could live for a while in our society, even if it should mean taking service as Attendants,⁵⁰ so that they might come to know the delights it has to offer.

I cannot bear men who believe that women serving in the Palace are bound to be frivolous and wicked. Yet I suppose their prejudice is understandable. After all, women at Court do not spend their time hiding modestly behind fans and screens, but walk about, looking openly at people they chance to meet. Yes, they see everyone face to face, not only ladies-in-waiting like themselves, but even Their Imperial Majesties (whose august names I hardly dare mention), High Court Nobles,⁵¹ senior courtiers, and other gentlemen of high rank. In the presence of such exalted personages the women in the Palace are all equally brazen, whether they be the maids of ladies-in-waiting, or the relations of Court ladies who have come to visit them, or house-keepers, or latrine-cleaners, or women who are of no more value than a roof-tile or a pebble. Small wonder that the young men regard them as immodest! Yet are the gentlemen themselves any less so? They are not exactly bashful when it comes to looking at the great people in the Palace. No, everyone at Court is much the same in this respect.

names
Palace

Women who have served in the Palace, but who later get married and live at home, are called Madam and receive the most respectful treatment. To be sure, people often consider that these women, who have displayed their faces to all and sundry during their years at Court, are lacking in feminine grace. How proud they must be, nevertheless, when they are styled Assistant Attendants, or summoned to the Palace for occasional duty, or ordered to serve as Imperial envoys during the Kamo Festival! Even those who stay at home lose nothing by having served at Court. In fact they make very good wives. For example, if they are married to a provincial governor and their daughter is chosen to take part in the Gosechi dances,⁵² they do not have to disgrace themselves by acting like provincials and asking other people about procedure. They themselves are well versed in the formalities, which is just as it should be.

13. *Depressing Things*

A dog howling in the daytime. A wickerwork fish-net in spring.⁵³ A red plum-blossom dress⁵⁴ in the Third or Fourth Months. A lying-in room when the baby has died. A cold, empty brazier. An ox-driver who hates his oxen. A scholar whose wife has one girl child after another.⁵⁵

One has gone to a friend's house to avoid an unlucky direction,⁵⁶ but nothing is done to entertain one; if this should happen at the time of a Seasonal Change, it is still more depressing.

A letter arrives from the provinces, but no gift accompanies it. It would be bad enough if such a letter reached one in the provinces from someone in the capital; but then at least it would have interesting news about goings-on in society, and that would be a consolation.

One has written a letter, taking pains to make it as attractive as possible, and now one impatiently awaits the reply. 'Surely the messenger should be back by now,' one thinks. Just then he returns; but in his hand he carries, not a reply, but one's own

letter, still twisted or knotted⁵⁷ as it was sent, but now so dirty and crumpled that even the ink-mark on the outside has disappeared. 'Not at home,' announces the messenger, or else, 'They said they were observing a day of abstinence and would not accept it.' Oh, how depressing!

Again, one has sent one's carriage to fetch someone who had said he would definitely pay one a visit on that day. Finally it returns with a great clatter, and the servants hurry out with cries of 'Here they come!' But next one hears the carriage being pulled into the coach-house, and the unfastened shafts clatter to the ground. 'What does this mean?' one asks. 'The person was not at home,' replies the driver, 'and will not be coming.' So saying, he leads the ox back to its stall, leaving the carriage in the coach-house.

With much bustle and excitement a young man has moved into the house of a certain family as the daughter's husband. One day he fails to come home, and it turns out that some high-ranking Court lady has taken him as her lover. How depressing! 'Will he eventually tire of the woman and come back to us?' his wife's family wonder ruefully.

The nurse who is looking after a baby leaves the house, saying that she will be back presently. Soon the child starts crying for her. One tries to comfort it by games and other diversions, and even sends a message to the nurse telling her to return immediately. Then comes her reply: 'I am afraid that I cannot be back this evening.' This is not only depressing; it is no less than hateful. Yet how much more distressed must be the young man who has sent a messenger to fetch a lady friend and who awaits her arrival in vain!

It is quite late at night and a woman has been expecting a visitor. Hearing finally a stealthy tapping, she sends her maid to open the gate and lies waiting excitedly. But the name announced by the maid is that of someone with whom she has absolutely no connexion. Of all the depressing things this is by far the worst.

With a look of complete self-confidence on his face an exorcist

who may even have some grandchildren crawling about the house, are taking a nap in the daytime. The children who see them in this state are overcome by a forlorn feeling, and for other people it is all very depressing.⁶⁶

To take a hot bath when one has just woken is not only depressing; it actually puts one in a bad humour.

Persistent rain on the last day of the year.⁶⁷

One has been observing a period of fast, but neglects it for just one day – most depressing.⁶⁸

A white under-robe in the Eighth Month.⁶⁹

A wet-nurse who has run out of milk.

14. *Hateful Things*

One is in a hurry to leave, but one's visitor keeps chattering away. If it is someone of no importance, one can get rid of him by saying, 'You must tell me all about it next time'; but, should it be the sort of visitor whose presence commands one's best behaviour, the situation is hateful indeed.

One finds that a hair has got caught in the stone on which one is rubbing one's inkstick, or again that gravel is lodged in the inkstick, making a nasty, grating sound.

Someone has suddenly fallen ill and one summons the exorcist. Since he is not at home, one has to send messengers to look for him. After one has had a long fretful wait, the exorcist finally arrives, and with a sigh of relief one asks him to start his incantations. But perhaps he has been exorcizing too many evil spirits recently; for hardly has he installed himself and begun praying when his voice becomes drowsy. Oh, how hateful!

A man who has nothing in particular to recommend him discusses all sorts of subjects at random as though he knew everything.

An elderly person warms the palms of his hands over a brazier and stretches out the wrinkles. No young man would dream of behaving in such a fashion; old people can really be quite shame-

less. I have seen some dreary old creatures actually resting their feet on the brazier and rubbing them against the edge while they speak. These are the kind of people who in visiting someone's house first use their fans to wipe away the dust from the mat and, when they finally sit on it, cannot stay still but are forever spreading out the front of their hunting costume⁷⁰ or even tucking it up under their knees. One might suppose that such behaviour was restricted to people of humble station; but I have observed it in quite well-bred people, including a Senior Secretary of the Fifth Rank in the Ministry of Ceremonial and a former Governor of Suruga.

I hate the sight of men in their cups who shout, poke their fingers in their mouths, stroke their beards, and pass on the wine to their neighbours with great cries of 'Have some more! Drink up!' They tremble, shake their heads, twist their faces, and gesticulate like children who are singing, 'We're off to see the Governor.' I have seen really well-bred people behave like this and I find it most distasteful.

To envy others and to complain about one's own lot; to speak badly about people; to be inquisitive about the most trivial matters and to resent and abuse people for not telling one, or, if one does manage to worm out some facts, to inform everyone in the most detailed fashion as if one had known all from the beginning – oh, how hateful!

One is just about to be told some interesting piece of news when a baby starts crying.

A flight of crows circle about with loud caws.

An admirer has come on a clandestine visit, but a dog catches sight of him and starts barking. One feels like killing the beast.

One has been foolish enough to invite a man to spend the night in an unsuitable place – and then he starts snoring.

A gentleman has visited one secretly. Though he is wearing a tall, lacquered hat,⁷¹ he nevertheless wants no one to see him. He is so flurried, in fact, that upon leaving he bangs into something with his hat. Most hateful! It is annoying too when he lifts up the Iyo blind⁷² that hangs at the entrance of the room,

then lets it fall with a great rattle. If it is a head-blind, things are still worse, for being more solid it makes a terrible noise when it is dropped. There is no excuse for such carelessness. Even a head-blind does not make any noise if one lifts it up gently on entering and leaving the room; the same applies to sliding-doors. If one's movements are rough, even a paper door will bend and resonate when opened; but, if one lifts the door a little while pushing it, there need be no sound.

One has gone to bed and is about to doze off when a mosquito appears, announcing himself in a reedy voice. One can actually feel the wind made by his wings and, slight though it is, one finds it hateful in the extreme.

A carriage passes with a nasty, creaking noise. Annoying to think that the passengers may not even be aware of this! If I am travelling in someone's carriage and I hear it creaking, I dislike not only the noise but also the owner of the carriage.

One is in the middle of a story when someone butts in and tries to show that he is the only clever person in the room. Such a person is hateful, and so, indeed, is anyone, child or adult, who tries to push himself forward.

One is telling a story about old times when someone breaks in with a little detail that he happens to know, implying that one's own version is inaccurate – disgusting behaviour!

Very hateful is a mouse that scurries all over the place.

Some children have called at one's house. One makes a great fuss of them and gives them toys to play with. The children become accustomed to this treatment and start to come regularly, forcing their way into one's inner rooms and scattering one's furnishings and possessions. Hateful!

A certain gentleman whom one does not want to see visits one at home or in the Palace, and one pretends to be asleep. But a maid comes to tell one and shakes one awake, with a look on her face that says, 'What a sleepyhead!' Very hateful.

A newcomer pushes ahead of the other members in a group; with a knowing look, this person starts laying down the law and forcing advice upon everyone – most hateful.

A man with whom one is having an affair keeps singing the praises of some woman he used to know. Even if it is a thing of the past, this can be very annoying. How much more so if he is still seeing the woman! (Yet sometimes I find that it is not as unpleasant as all that.)

A person who recites a spell himself after sneezing.⁷³ In fact I detest anyone who sneezes, except the master of the house.

Fleas, too, are very hateful. When they dance about under someone's clothes, they really seem to be lifting them up.

The sound of dogs when they bark for a long time in chorus is ominous and hateful.

I cannot stand people who leave without closing the panel behind them.

How I detest the husbands of nurse-maids! It is not so bad if the child in the maid's charge is a girl, because then the man will keep his distance. But, if it is a boy, he will behave as though he were the father. Never letting the boy out of his sight, he insists on managing everything. He regards the other attendants in the house as less than human, and, if anyone tries to scold the child, he slanders him to the master. Despite this disgraceful behaviour, no one dare accuse the husband; so he strides about the house with a proud, self-important look, giving all the orders.

I hate people whose letters show that they lack respect for worldly civilities, whether by discourtesy in the phrasing or by extreme politeness to someone who does not deserve it. This sort of thing is, of course, most odious if the letter is for oneself, but it is bad enough even if it is addressed to someone else.

As a matter of fact, most people are too casual, not only in their letters but in their direct conversation. Sometimes I am quite disgusted at noting how little decorum people observe when talking to each other. It is particularly unpleasant to hear some foolish man or woman omit the proper marks of respect when addressing a person of quality; and, when servants fail to use honorific forms of speech in referring to their masters, it is very bad indeed. No less odious, however, are those masters who, in addressing their servants, use such phrases as 'When you were

good enough to do such-and-such' or 'As you so kindly remarked'. No doubt there are some masters who, in describing their own actions to a servant, say, 'I presumed to do so-and-so'!⁷⁴

Sometimes a person who is utterly devoid of charm will try to create a good impression by using very elegant language; yet he only succeeds in being ridiculous. No doubt he believes this refined language to be just what the occasion demands, but, when it goes so far that everyone bursts out laughing, surely something must be wrong.

It is most improper to address high-ranking courtiers, Imperial Advisers, and the like simply by using their names without any titles or marks of respect; but such mistakes are fortunately rare.

If one refers to the maid who is in attendance on some lady-in-waiting as 'Madam' or 'that lady', she will be surprised, delighted, and lavish in her praise.

When speaking to young noblemen and courtiers of high rank, one should always (unless Their Majesties are present) refer to them by their official posts. Incidentally, I have been very shocked to hear important people use the word 'I' while conversing in Their Majesties' presence.⁷⁵ Such a breach of etiquette is really distressing, and I fail to see why people cannot avoid it.

A man who has nothing in particular to recommend him but who speaks in an affected tone and poses as being elegant.

An inkstone with such a hard, smooth surface that the stick glides over it without leaving any deposit of ink.

Ladies-in-waiting who want to know everything that is going on.

Sometimes one greatly dislikes a person for no particular reason – and then that person goes and does something hateful.

A gentleman who travels alone in his carriage to see a procession or some other spectacle. What sort of a man is he? Even though he may not be a person of the greatest quality, surely he should have taken along a few of the many young men who are

anxious to see the sights. But no, there he sits by himself (one can see his silhouette through the blinds), with a proud look on his face, keeping all his impressions to himself.

A lover who is leaving at dawn announces that he has to find his fan and his paper.⁷⁶ 'I know I put them somewhere last night,' he says. Since it is pitch dark, he gropes about the room, bumping into the furniture and muttering, 'Strange! Where on earth can they be?' Finally he discovers the objects. He thrusts the paper into the breast of his robe with a great rustling sound; then he snaps open his fan and busily fans away with it. Only now is he ready to take his leave. What charmless behaviour! 'Hateful' is an understatement.

Equally disagreeable is the man who, when leaving in the middle of the night, takes care to fasten the cord of his head-dress. This is quite unnecessary; he could perfectly well put it gently on his head without tying the cord. And why must he spend time adjusting his cloak or hunting costume? Does he really think someone may see him at this time of night and criticize him for not being impeccably dressed?

A good lover will behave as elegantly at dawn as at any other time. He drags himself out of bed with a look of dismay on his face. The lady urges him on: 'Come, my friend, it's getting light. You don't want anyone to find you here.' He gives a deep sigh, as if to say that the night has not been nearly long enough and that it is agony to leave. Once up, he does not instantly pull on his trousers. Instead he comes close to the lady and whispers whatever was left unsaid during the night. Even when he is dressed, he still lingers, vaguely pretending to be fastening his sash.

Presently he raises the lattice, and the two lovers stand together by the side door while he tells her how he dreads the coming day, which will keep them apart; then he slips away. The lady watches him go, and this moment of parting will remain among her most charming memories.

Indeed, one's attachment to a man depends largely on the elegance of his leave-taking. When he jumps out of bed, scurries about the room, tightly fastens his trouser-sash, rolls up the

sleeves of his Court cloak, over-robe, or hunting costume, stuffs his belongings into the breast of his robe and then briskly secures the outer sash – one really begins to hate him.

15. *The Palace of the First Ward*

The Palace of the First Ward is also known as the Palace of Today; and, when His Majesty is staying there, it is called Seiryō Palace. The Empress's residence is to the north and connected to it by galleries on the left and right. Sometimes His Majesty proceeds along these galleries to visit the Empress, but usually it is the Empress who visits him. In front of the Empress's building is a charming little garden, planted with shrubs and flowers, and surrounded by a bamboo fence.

On the tenth day of the Second Month, with the sun shining down from a clear, peaceful sky, His Majesty was playing the flute under the eaves near the western part of the gallery. He was attended by that excellent flautist, Takatō, the Senior Assistant Governor-General. They played the Takasago⁷⁷ tune in unison several times, and Takatō explained various points about the flute to His Majesty. To describe the scene as 'most splendid' would be hopelessly inadequate. I was sitting behind the bamboo blinds with some other women, and, as I observed everything, I felt that I had never in my life been unhappy.

Next the Emperor started to play the song of Suketada. Now, this Suketada⁷⁸ was a Secretary in the Bureau of Carpentry who had been appointed Chamberlain; but, since he was extremely uncouth, the high-ranking ladies and gentlemen at Court had nicknamed him 'rough crocodile' and written a song about him:

Who can stand next to this fine fellow?
Truly is he of Owari stock!⁷⁹

(His mother was, in fact, the daughter of a certain Kanetoki from Owari Province.) Hearing the Emperor play this tune, Takatō sat down next to him and said, 'Would Your Majesty be

pleased to blow a little more loudly? Suketada cannot possibly hear, and even if he did he wouldn't understand.'

'How so?' replied the Emperor. 'I am sure he would recognize the tune.' For a while he continued to play softly, then walked down the gallery in the direction of the Empress's building. 'He certainly cannot hear me from here,' explained His Majesty. 'Now I can really let myself go!' So saying, he blew out the tune heartily, and it was most delightful.

16. *Things That Make One's Heart Beat Faster*

Sparrows feeding their young. To pass a place where babies are playing. To sleep in a room where some fine incense has been burnt. To notice that one's elegant Chinese mirror has become a little cloudy. To see a gentleman stop his carriage before one's gate and instruct his attendants to announce his arrival. To wash one's hair, make one's toilet, and put on scented robes; even if not a soul sees one, these preparations still produce an inner pleasure.

It is night and one is expecting a visitor. Suddenly one is startled by the sound of rain-drops, which the wind blows against the shutters.

17. *Things That Arouse a Fond Memory of the Past*

Dried hollyhock.⁸⁰ The objects used during the Display of Dolls.⁸¹ To find a piece of deep violet⁸² or grape-coloured material that has been pressed between the pages of a notebook.

It is a rainy day and one is feeling bored. To pass the time, one starts looking through some old papers. And then one comes across the letters of a man one used to love.

Last year's paper fan.⁸³ A night with a clear moon.⁸⁴

father's frightening nature, abandoned the unsuspecting child, having first wrapped him in a dirty piece of clothing. 'Wait for me,' she said as she left. 'I shall return to you as soon as the autumn winds blow.' So, when autumn comes and the wind starts blowing, the wretched child hears it and desperately cries, 'Milk! Milk!' ¹³⁸

The clear-toned cicada.

The snap-beetle also impresses me. They say that the reason it bows while crawling along the ground is that the faith of Buddha has sprung up in its insect heart. Sometimes one suddenly hears the snap-beetle tapping away in a dark place, and this is rather pleasant.

The fly should have been included in my list of hateful things; ¹³⁹ for such an odious creature does not belong with ordinary insects. It settles on everything, and even alights on one's face with its clammy feet. I am sorry that anyone should have been named after it. ¹⁴⁰

The tiger moth is very pretty and delightful. When one sits close to a lamp reading a story, a tiger moth will often flutter prettily in front of one's book.

The ant is an ugly insect; but it is light on its feet and I enjoy watching as it skims quickly over the surface of the water.

31. *In the Seventh Month*

In the Seventh Month, when there are fierce winds and heavy showers, it is quite cool and one does not bother to carry a fan. On such days I find it is pleasant to take a nap, having covered myself with some clothing that gives off a faint smell of perspiration. ¹⁴¹

32. *Unsuitable Things*

A woman with ugly hair wearing a robe of white damask. *rank*

Hollyhock worn in frizzled hair.

Ugly handwriting on red paper.

Snow on the houses of common people. This is especially regrettable when the moonlight shines down on it. ¹⁴²

A plain wagon ¹⁴³ on a moonlit night; or a light auburn ox harnessed to such a wagon.

A woman who, though well past her youth, is pregnant and walks along panting. It is unpleasant to see a woman of a certain age with a young husband; and it is most unsuitable when she becomes jealous of him because he has gone to visit someone else.

An elderly man who has overslept and who wakes up with a start; or a greybeard munching some acorns that he has plucked. An old woman who eats a plum and, finding it sour, puckers her toothless mouth.

A woman of the lower classes dressed in a scarlet trouser-skirt. The sight is all too common these days.

A handsome man with an ugly wife.

An elderly man with a black beard and a disagreeable expression playing with a little child who has just learnt to talk.

It is most unseemly for an Assistant Captain of the Quiver Bearers ¹⁴⁴ to make his night patrol in a hunting costume. And, if he wanders outside the woman's quarters, ostentatiously clad in his terrifying red cloak, people will be sure to look down on him. They disapprove of his behaviour and taunt him with remarks like 'Are you searching for someone suspicious?'

A Lieutenant in the Imperial Police who serves as a Chamberlain of the Sixth Rank, and therefore has access to the Senior Courtiers' Chamber, is regarded as being splendid beyond words. ¹⁴⁵ Country folk and people of the lower orders believe that he cannot be a creature of this world: in his presence they tremble with fear and dare not meet his eyes. It is very unsuitable that

such a man should slink along the narrow corridors of some Palace building in order to steal into a woman's room.¹⁴⁶

A man's trouser-skirt hanging over a curtain of state that has been discreetly perfumed with incense.¹⁴⁷ The material of the trouser-skirt is disagreeably heavy; and, even though it may be shining whitely in the lamp-light, there is something unsuitable about it.

An officer who thinks he is very fashionable in his open over-robe and who folds it thinly as a rat's tail before hanging it over the curtain of state – well, such a man is simply unfit for night patrol. Officers on duty should abstain from visiting the women's quarters; the same applies to Chamberlains of the Fifth Rank.

33. *I Was Standing in a Corridor*

I was standing in a corridor of the Palace with several other women when we noticed some servants passing. We summoned them to us (in what I admit was a rather unladylike fashion) and they turned out to be a group of handsome male attendants and pages carrying attractively wrapped bundles and bags. Trouser-cords protruded from some, and I noticed that others contained bows, arrows, shields, halberds, and swords.¹⁴⁸ 'Whom do these things belong to?' we asked each of the servants in turn. Some of them knelt down respectfully and replied, 'They belong to Lord So-and-so.' Then they stood up and continued on their way, which was all very nice. But others gave themselves airs, or else were embarrassed and said, 'I don't know', or even went off without replying at all, which I found hateful indeed.

34. *Gentlemen Should Always Have Escorts*

Gentlemen should always have escorts. Even young noblemen, however handsome and charming, strike me as dull creatures if they are unescorted.

I have always regarded the position of Controller¹⁴⁹ as a fine and honourable one; but it is a shame that the train of his under-robe should be so short and that he is not provided with an escort.

35. *Once I Saw Yukinari*

Once I saw Yukinari, the Controller First Secretary, engaged in a long conversation with a lady near the garden fence by the western side of the Empress's Office.¹⁵⁰ When at last they had finished, I came out and asked, 'Who was she?' 'Ben no Naishi,'¹⁵¹ he replied. 'And what on earth did you find to discuss with her for such a long time? If the Major Controller had seen you, she would have left you quickly enough.' 'And who can have told you about that business?' asked Yukinari, laughing.¹⁵² 'As a matter of fact, that is precisely what I was discussing with her. I was trying to persuade her not to leave me even if the Major Controller did see us.'

Yukinari is a most delightful man. To be sure, he does not make any particular effort to display his good points and simply lets people take him as he appears, so that in general he is less appreciated than he might be. But I, who have seen the deeper side of his nature, know what an unusual person he really is. I said this one day to the Empress, who was well aware of it herself. In the course of our conversations he often says, 'A woman yields to one who has taken pleasure in her; a knight dies for one who has shown him friendship.'¹⁵³ We used to say that our feelings for each other were like the willows on Tōtōmi Beach.¹⁵⁴

Yet the young women at Court heartily detest Yukinari and openly repeat the most disagreeable things about him. 'What an ugly man he is!' they say. 'Why can't he recite sutras and poems like other people? He really is most unpleasant.' Yukinari, for his part, never speaks to any of them.

'I could love a woman,' he said one day, 'even if her eyes were

be put to the question like that. Besides, you never told me what I should answer, but simply sent that silly bit of seaweed wrapped in paper. I suppose you did it by mistake.'

'What a strange mistake that would be!' I thought. 'Who would ever wrap up such an object and send it to someone?' I was really disgusted with Norimitsu for having so completely missed the point, and without a word I took a piece of paper that was lying under the inkstone and wrote the following poem:

Tell no man where she lives –
The diver in the water's depths –
Such must have been the meaning of her glance.²⁰⁸

I gave it to Norimitsu, but he pushed it back with his fan, saying, 'Ah, you have been good enough to write one of your poems for me. But I have no intention of reading it.' And he hurried out of the room.

Norimitsu and I had always been on close terms and tried to help each other, but now, without anything particular having happened, a coolness came between us. Shortly afterwards I received this note from him: 'I know that I may have put you out in some way, but please do not forget our pact. Even though we are apart, remember that I have been your elder brother.'

I have heard Norimitsu say, 'People who are fond of me should spare me their poems or I shall have to regard them as enemies. When you feel that the time has come to break with me, just send one of those things.' So it is possible that Norimitsu never actually read the following poem that I sent in reply to his note:

Smoothly runs the river of Yoshino
Between Mount Imo and Mount Se.*
Yet, should those mountains crumble,
The river too would vanish from our sight.²⁰⁹

In any case he never answered it. At about the same time he was awarded the head-dress of nobility and appointed Assistant Governor of Tōtōmi; and so we parted while still on bad terms.

* 'Younger Sister' and 'Older Brother'.

54. *Things That Give a Pathetic Impression*

The voice of someone who blows his nose while he is speaking.
The expression of a woman plucking her eyebrows.²¹⁰

55. *Then a Few Months after Our Visit*

Then a few months after our visit to the guard-house of the Left Guards I was staying at home when I received this message from the Empress: 'Come back quickly. I keep remembering that early morning when you went to the guard-house. How can you be so indifferent to it all? Surely such an experience must have made a deep impression on you.'

In my reply I assured Her Majesty of my profound respect; then, as a personal touch, I added the following: 'How could it fail to make an impression on me when even Your Majesty was so moved by the scene that she referred to us, her mere attendants, as "heavenly maidens hovering in the air"?'²¹¹ The messenger returned presently with these words from the Empress: 'I wonder why you should have said something to bring discredit on Nakatada, who was such a favourite of yours. In any case, leave everything and come back here this very evening. I shall resent it greatly if you don't.'

I sent the messenger back with this reply: 'If Your Majesty had simply said "slightly annoyed", I should consider it a terrible thing. Since you used the word "greatly", I shall return even at the risk of my life.' So saying, I went back to the Palace.

56. *Once When Her Majesty Was Residing*

Once when Her Majesty was residing in the Empress's Office, Perpetual Readings²¹² were held in the western part of the main hall. The usual paintings of the Buddha had been hung for the

occasion, and several priests were in attendance. On the second day of the readings the voice of a common-sounding woman reached us from the veranda. 'I expect there'll be some scraps from the altar offerings,' she said. 'How could there be any left-overs this early in the service?' replied one of the priests. I wondered who the woman might be and went on to the veranda to have a look. It turned out to be an old nun dressed in a filthy cotton trouser-skirt which was so short and narrow that it seemed more like a sort of tube than an article of clothing. Over this she wore something equally dirty which was presumably meant to be a robe but which came only about five inches below her sash. She really looked like a monkey.

'What do you want, woman?' I asked.

'Madam,' she replied in an affected tone, 'I am a disciple of the Buddha and I was hoping to receive the left-overs from his altar. But these priests are so stingy that they grudge the smallest gift.' She now spoke in a bright, elegant fashion and I was rather touched to see her so crushed by misfortune. Yet there was a gaudiness about her manner that annoyed me and I said, 'So you eat nothing but the Buddha's holy left-overs! How worthy of you!' Seeing my expression she said, 'Why do you suppose that's all I eat? It's only when I can't get anything else that I take left-overs.'

I put some fruit, flat rice cakes, and other things in a basket and gave it to her. She then became extremely familiar and began chatting away. Some of the younger ladies-in-waiting joined us on the veranda and plied her with all sorts of questions, such as 'Do you have a lover?' and 'Where do you live?', to which she replied with jokes and suggestive quips. When one of them asked her whether she could sing and dance, she burst out with

Who shall share my bed tonight?
Hitachi no Suke²¹³ – he's my man!
His skin is soft to touch.

This was followed by several other songs in a similar vein. Then she started rolling her head round and round, and sang,

The maple leaves of scarlet
That tint Otoko's manly peak
Proclaim that mountain far and wide.²¹⁴

Her behaviour was most unbecoming. The ladies-in-waiting laughed with disgust and said, 'Be off with you!', which I found very amusing. 'Let's give the woman something before we send her packing,' said one of them.

The Empress had heard all this and reprimanded us. 'Why have you made her behave in such an embarrassing way?' she asked. 'I couldn't bear to hear it and I had to stop up my ears. Here, give her this robe and send her away at once!'

The ladies took the robe and threw it at the woman, saying, 'Her Majesty has generously given you this present. Take off your filthy robe and put on this nice clean one.' The nun received it with a deep bow; then, draping it over her shoulders, she began to perform a dance of thanks.²¹⁵ She was really too repulsive, and we all went indoors.

Evidently this gift made her feel that she was now fully accepted in Her Majesty's household; thereafter she was always coming and going, and soon she had acquired the nickname of Hitachi no Suke. She still wore her same dirty robe. We wondered what she had done with the one the Empress gave her and we felt quite disgusted with the creature.

One day when Lady Ukon paid a call, Her Majesty told her about the nun. 'My ladies have taken it into their heads to befriend her,' she said. 'She's always coming to see us these days.' Then she asked Lady Kohyōe to give an imitation of the nun. Lady Ukon burst out laughing. 'How can I arrange to see her for myself?' she asked. 'You really must show her to me. Don't think I'll try to take her away. I realize she is Your Majesty's favourite.'

Later there came another nun – a cripple this time, but with a naturally elegant manner. She called to us from the veranda; when we went out, she begged for alms, in such an embarrassed way that we were truly sorry for her. Her Majesty ordered that she be given a robe and the nun prostrated herself on the ground.

Her movements were much the same as the other nun's, but there was nothing unpleasant about her. Just as she was leaving the veranda, weeping for joy, Hitachi no Suke happened to arrive and caught a glimpse of her. Thereafter Hitachi did not visit us again for a long time, and we soon forgot about her.

5

From the tenth day of the Twelfth Month it snowed very heavily. I and the other ladies-in-waiting gathered large quantities of snow and heaped it in lids; then we decided to build a real snow mountain²¹⁶ in the garden. Having summoned the servants, we told them it was on Her Majesty's orders, and so they all got to work. Men from the Office of Grounds, who had come to do some sweeping, also joined in, and soon the mountain was rising high above the ground. Next came some officials from the Office of the Empress's Household, who made suggestions and helped build an especially beautiful mountain. There were also a few Assistant Officials from the Emperor's Private Office and some more men from the Office of Grounds, so that soon we had about twenty people working away. In addition messages were sent to the servants off duty, saying that a special stipend would be given to anyone who helped on that day, but that those who did not appear for work could expect nothing. This brought the men rushing out, except for those who lived far away and could not be informed.

When the mountain was finished, officials from the Office of the Empress's Household were summoned and given rolls of silk tied up in sets of two. They threw the rolls on to the veranda, and each of the workmen came and took a set. Having bowed low, they thrust the silk into their robes before withdrawing. Some of the Court gentlemen changed from their formal over-robcs into hunting costume and remained in attendance at the Empress's Office.

'Well,' said Her Majesty, 'how long is that mountain likely to last?'

Everyone guessed that it would be ten days or a little more.

'And what do you think?' the Empress asked me.

'It will last till the fifteenth of the First Month,' I declared.

Even Her Majesty found this hard to believe, and the other women insisted that it would melt before the end of the year. I realized I had chosen too distant a date; the mountain would last until the first of the year at the outside, which was the latest day I should have given. Yet there was no taking back what I had said: though I knew the mountain was unlikely to survive till the fifteenth, I stuck to my original prediction.

Towards the twentieth it began raining. There was no sign that the snow was about to melt, but the mountain did shrink a little. 'Oh, Goddess of Mercy of Shirayama,'²¹⁷ I prayed frenziedly, 'do not let our mountain melt away!'

On the day we built the mountain Tadataka, the Secretary in the Ministry of Ceremonial, arrived with a message from the Emperor. We gave him a cushion and joined him for a talk. 'Today they're making snow mountains everywhere,' he told us. 'The Emperor has ordered his men to build one in the garden in front of his Palace, and they're also building them in the Eastern Palace and in the Koki and Kyōgoku Palaces.'²¹⁸ Hearing this, I wrote a poem and asked the woman standing beside me to recite it:

That mountain in our garden,
Which we had thought so rare!
Everywhere its snowy likeness . . .
And we can boast of nothing new.

Tadataka was impressed. 'I would not want to spoil the brilliant effect of your poem by making a poor reply,' he said, bowing repeatedly. 'The next time I find myself outside the blinds of some fashionable Court lady I shall repeat your lines.' And with that he took his leave.

I had heard that Tadataka was very fond of poetry, and his behaviour surprised me. When I told the Empress about it, she said, 'He obviously preferred not to reply at all unless he could produce something really good.'

Towards the end of the year the snow mountain seemed to have

become smaller, yet it was still very high. About noon one day, when I and some of the other women were sitting out on the veranda, Hitachi no Suke arrived. 'Why haven't we seen you for such a long time?' we asked her. 'Oh, nothing special,' she said. 'It's just that something rather sad happened to me.' 'And what may that be?' we asked. 'Well,' she replied, 'I couldn't help feeling that

Lucky indeed is she,
That nunnish diver of the briny depths,
Who is so laden down with gifts
That she can scarcely drag herself ashore.'²¹⁹

She drawled out her poem, and we all laughed contemptuously. Since no one was paying much attention, she made her way up to the snow mountain and walked round it before leaving. Later we sent Lady Ukon a message about the visit, and she replied, 'Why didn't you bring her here? It was really too bad to abandon her like that and make her go all the way to that great mountain of yours by herself.' This caused us to burst into laughter again.

New Year came without affecting the snow mountain in any way.

On the first day of the year it again started snowing heavily. I was happily thinking how the snow would gather on the mountain when Her Majesty said, 'This has come at the wrong time. Leave what was there before and brush away all the new snow.'

Very early on the following morning, as I was going from the Palace to my room, I saw a man who looked like a head retainer. He was on his way to the Empress's Office and was shivering with cold. On the sleeve of his night-watch costume, which was as green as a citron leaf, I noticed a piece of paper, also green, attached to a pine twig.²²⁰

'Who sent this?' I asked him.

'The High Priestess of Kamo,'²²¹ he replied.

Realizing at once that this must be something pleasant, I carried the letter to the Empress's room. Her Majesty was still

in bed, and I did my best to open her lattice-door myself,²²² using for this purpose a *go* board on which I stood as I tried to push up the heavy grating. The lattice was very heavy, but finally one side opened with a creaking sound that wakened the Empress. 'Why are you doing that?' she asked. 'I have a letter from the High Priestess,' I replied, 'which I had to deliver to Your Majesty as quickly as possible.' 'Well,' she said, getting up, 'it certainly is early for a letter.'

Looking inside, she discovered a pair of hare-sticks, each about five inches long. They had been placed end to end so that they looked like a single hare-wand; some paper had been wrapped round the head of the sticks, which were prettily decorated with sprigs of wild orange, club moss, and mountain sedge. But there seemed to be no written message. 'Can this really be all?' said the Empress. Searching more carefully, however, we found the following verse written on a bit of paper wrapped round the end of the stick:

I thought I heard the woodman's axe
Echoing through the hills.
But, oh, it was a gladder sound –
The cutting of the festive wands.²²³

As I watched the Empress writing her reply to this letter (which turned out to be the beginning of a regular correspondence between her and the High Priestess), I was full of admiration. Determined to make her letter as elegant as the one she had received, Her Majesty took the utmost pains to correct the wording until she considered it just right. The messenger was rewarded with an unlined costume of white material and another of dark red that looked like plum blossom.²²⁴ I enjoyed watching the man set off in the falling snow with the clothes over his shoulder. Unfortunately I never found out what Her Majesty had replied.

Meanwhile our snow mountain, dirty and unattractive though it had become, showed no sign of melting; and one would really have thought that it belonged to the northern land of Koshi.

I prayed that somehow it would survive until the fifteenth. I was convinced that I would win, but some people insisted that it would not outlast the seventh. We had all decided to wait and see what happened when suddenly on the third of the month the Empress was obliged to return to the Imperial Palace. This was a great disappointment, and at first I seriously thought that we would never know the outcome. 'Well,' said everyone (including Her Majesty), 'it was all very delightful. What a shame we couldn't see it to the end!'

I determined then that, if my original guess turned out to be correct, I would show Her Majesty the remaining snow whatever happened. I realized that this would require special steps, so I took advantage of the confusion of packing and moving to summon a gardener who lived in a hut near the wall of the Empress's Office. When he came to the veranda where I was sitting, I told him to take extremely good care of the mountain. 'Make sure it lasts until the fifteenth,' I said, 'and don't let any children climb up and scatter the snow. If you look after it really well and it lasts until the middle of the month, Her Majesty will give you a generous reward, and I too shall show you my gratitude.' So saying, I gave him some cakes and other food that I had got from the reserve that was always kept in the kitchen for poor people.

The gardener beamed. 'That will be quite simple, Madam,' he said, 'I shall certainly guard your mountain for you, though it may be difficult to stop the children from climbing. . . 'If they refuse to obey,' I said, 'tell them whom they are dealing with!'

I then accompanied Her Majesty back to the Palace and stayed there until the seventh. During this time I was so worried about the mountain that I was forever dispatching under-servants, bathroom servants, and housekeepers with instructions for the gardener. On the seventh I sent him some of the left-overs from the Festival of Young Herbs; when the servants returned, I heard them laughing at the reverent way in which the gardener had received the gifts.

After I had gone home on the seventh, I was still greatly con-

cerned with the mountain and early each morning I sent someone to look at it. On the tenth my messenger delighted me by saying that it would last for another five days or so. On the night of the thirteenth, however, it rained very hard, and I thought with distress that now my mountain must surely have melted. I stayed awake all night, lamenting that it could not possibly survive another day, let alone the necessary two. The people who heard me laughed and said I was mad. As soon as there was a sound of stirring in the house, I got up and tried to arouse one of the maids. The lazy wench would not budge. Thoroughly annoyed, I sent another servant, who was already awake, to inspect the mountain. 'Well, Madam,' she told me on her return, 'it is now about the size of a round straw cushion. The gardener has been looking after it very efficiently and has not let any children come near. It should last like this until tomorrow or even the next day. The gardener says that he is now confident of receiving his reward.'

I was overjoyed and decided that, with the arrival of the fifteenth, I should dash off a poem and send it to the Empress together with some of the snow in a basket.

Anxiously I awaited the following day, and before dawn I gave my maid a large chip-basket,²²⁵ telling her to fill the cover with snow from those parts of the mountain where it was still white. 'Use a rake,' I said, 'and throw away all the dirty snow.'

She was back almost at once with the cover of the chip-basket dangling, still empty, from her hand. 'It's gone,' she announced. I was dumbfounded. The splendid poem that I had composed with such effort, thinking that soon it would be on everyone's lips, now seemed foolish and useless. 'But how,' I asked dejectedly, 'can such a large heap of snow have melted overnight?'

'The gardener was wringing his hands,' the maid said excitedly. 'He told me that the snow was there until late last night and he was counting on his reward, but that now of course he would get nothing.'

Just then a messenger arrived with a note from the Empress

asking whether the snow had lasted. Mortifying as it was, I had to reply that none was left. 'Tell Her Majesty,' I said, 'that the snow, which the older women said would melt last month and in any case before New Year's Day, was still there yesterday at sunset. I don't think I did so badly. If it had actually lasted until today, my prediction would have been *too* accurate. I dare say that during the night someone removed the snow out of spite and flung it away.'

When I returned to the Palace on the twentieth, I discussed the matter with the Empress and told her how amazed I had been by the maid's prompt return and by her news. 'The cover was dangling in her hand,' I said, 'and she had put the box itself on her head like a hat. . . . I was planning to build a beautiful little snow mountain in the lid and to present it to Your Majesty with a fine poem written on white paper.'

The Empress burst out laughing and her ladies-in-waiting joined in. 'I am afraid I have earned a heavy load of sin for having spoiled everything when it meant so much to you,' she said. 'To tell the truth, on the night of the fourteenth I sent some servants to the mountain with orders to destroy it and throw away what was left. Strange that in your reply to my note you guessed exactly what happened.'

It appeared that, when the Empress's servants arrived at the mountain, the old gardener had come out, wringing his hands and begging them not to damage the snow. 'We are acting on Her Majesty's orders,' they had answered. 'And don't tell anyone, or we shall tear down your hut for you.' They then took all the snow and threw it over the wall at the south of the guard-office of the Left Division. According to the servants' report, the mountain was still quite high and the snow would certainly have lasted until the twentieth. 'In fact,' said the Empress, 'I am afraid your mountain might very well have stood there until it started snowing again next winter.' When His Majesty heard the story, he commented to his senior courtiers, 'Who would have thought of having such a strange contest?'

'Well,' said the Empress after she had told me all this, 'now

you can see that it is just the same as if you had actually won. So please let me hear your poem.'

The ladies-in-waiting joined her in asking for my poem, but I felt very unhappy and replied, 'After what I have just been told, why should I want to recite it?'

At that moment the Emperor walked into the room and addressed me. 'I have always regarded you as being like other people,' he said, 'but now I see what a remarkable woman you really are.'

This only made me unhappier about my mountain, and I felt I was going to burst into tears. 'Oh, how sad!' I exclaimed. 'What a cruel world we live in! I remember how happy I was when it snowed on New Year's Day and the mountain started getting higher, but then Your Majesty said it had come at the wrong time and gave orders that all the snow should be swept away.'

The Emperor laughed. 'The fact is,' he said, 'that she probably didn't want you to win.'

57. *Splendid Things*

Chinese brocade. A sword with a decorated scabbard. The grain of the wood in a Buddhist statue. Long flowering branches of beautifully coloured wistaria entwined about a pine tree.

Despite his low station a Chamberlain of the Sixth Rank is a splendid thing. To think that he is allowed yellowish-green robes of figured material and cloth that even young noblemen of the finest families are forbidden to wear! A mere Assistant or Subordinate Official in the Emperor's Private Office, who is the son of a commoner and who has gone completely unnoticed while serving under gentlemen of rank with official posts, becomes splendid beyond words after being appointed Chamberlain.

A Chamberlain of the Sixth Rank cuts a magnificent figure when he arrives with an Imperial mandate or when he brings the sweet chestnuts for the Great Council banquet.²²⁶ Observing

which Korechika recited the line made me open them wide. Their Majesties were both delighted, and complimented the Counsellor on his apt quotation. Such things are really very splendid.

At about midnight on the following evening, when the Emperor had retired to his bedchamber and I had just called for my servant, Korechika came up to me. 'Are you going to your room?' he said. 'Let me escort you.' Having hung my ceremonial over-skirt and my Chinese jacket on a screen, I allowed him to accompany me.

His Court cloak looked dazzlingly white in the bright moonlight. I noticed that his loose trousers were a bit too long and that he stepped on them as he walked. At one point he held my sleeve and said, 'Be careful not to trip.' Then, as he continued guiding me along the corridors, he recited the line, 'As the traveller journeys by the dying moon's faint light'.⁵⁵² I was overjoyed at the quotation – so much so, indeed, that Korechika laughingly remarked, 'You do let yourself get excited by such things, don't you?' Yes, I thought, but how can one help being impressed when someone recites poetry so beautifully?

168. *One Day I Was in the Apartment*

One day I was in the apartment of Her Highness, the Mistress of the Robes,⁵⁵³ together with Mama, the nurse of the Lord Bishop, when I noticed a man coming along the wooden balcony outside the room. He seemed to be on the verge of tears. 'A terrible thing has happened to me,' he said. 'I don't know where to appeal.' 'Well,' we asked, 'what is it?' 'I was obliged to leave home for a while,' he replied, 'and while I was absent my miserable house was burnt down. For the past several days I have had to live like a hermit-crab, squeezing myself into other people's houses.'⁵⁵⁴ The fire started in one of the hay-lofts belonging to the Imperial Stables and quickly spread to my home. There is only a fence between the two buildings, and one of the lads in the bed-

room just escaped being burnt alive. They didn't save a single object.'

We all burst out laughing at this, including the Mistress of the Robes; I took a sheet of paper and wrote,

If the vernal sun burns strozic enough
To sprout the young grass roots,
Even a place like Yodo Plain
Can ill survive its heat.⁵⁵⁵

'Kindly give him this,' I told Mama, throwing the paper to her. With loud laughter Mama handed the poem to the man. 'Madam has presented you with this,' she explained, 'because she is so sorry for you at having lost your house.'

'What does the record-slip⁵⁵⁶ say?' he asked. 'How much is she giving me?'

'Read it first,' said one of the ladies.

'But how can I, Madam?' he asked. 'Neither of my eyes is up to that.'

'Well then, ask someone to read it for you,' said the lady. 'We can't help you. The Empress has sent for us and we must go to the Palace directly. But with such a splendid document in your hands, you have nothing more to worry about.'

Roaring with laughter, we set off for the Palace. 'I wonder if he's shown it to anyone yet,' said one of my companions after a while. 'How furious he will be when he hears what it really is!'

When we saw Her Majesty, Mama told her what had happened, and there was a lot more laughter. The Empress herself joined in, saying, 'How can you all be so mad?'

169. *A Young Man Has Lost His Mother*⁵⁵⁷

A young man has lost his mother; the father loves him dearly but marries again, and the stepmother turns out to be a very disagreeable woman. The son is no longer allowed into the main