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Murasaki Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji* [Translated by Arthur Waley] (Simplified Edition by ChatGPT)

## Part 1

At the Court of an Emperor, long ago, there was a lady who was not of the highest rank, yet she was loved more than all the others. Many noble ladies served in the Palace, and each had once hoped that she herself would win the Emperor's deepest love. When they saw that this lady was chosen above them, their hearts filled with anger. They spoke of her in cold voices and looked at her with hard eyes. Even the women who had once been her friends began to avoid her. Though she was honored, her life was not easy.

The Emperor cared for her more each day. When she grew weak from the cruel words and small troubles around her, he did not turn away. Instead, he stayed by her side and gave her even greater kindness. People began to whisper that his love was too strong. Some said that in other lands such love had led to disaster. Yet no one dared harm her openly, because the Emperor's protection was like a wall around her.

Her father had once held office, but he had died. Her mother lived quietly and tried her best to raise her daughter with care. Without a strong man in the family, they often felt alone. Still, the lady was gentle and well taught. In time she gave birth to a son. The child was beautiful beyond words. When the Emperor first saw him, his heart overflowed with joy. He felt as if fate itself had joined him to this child.

There was already an older prince, the son of Lady Kokiden. That child was treated with full honor as the future heir. Yet many saw that the new baby was more lovely and bright. The Emperor could not hide his pride. He often kept the child near him. This caused Lady Kokiden to grow uneasy. She feared that her own son might lose his place.

The lady's rooms were in the Kiritsubo wing. Each time she walked through the halls to visit the Emperor, jealous eyes watched her. Some servants placed dirty things along her path so that her robes would be stained. Once a door was locked so that she wandered in fear, not knowing how to return. Day by day these small acts wore down her spirit. At last the Emperor moved her to another residence to protect her. Yet this only made others more bitter.

The young prince grew to be three years old. A great ceremony was held for him, almost as grand as that of the heir. Gifts flowed from the Treasury. Many thought this too much. Still, no one could dislike the child himself. His face was bright, and his manner was sweet. Even stern men softened when they saw him.

That summer the lady fell ill. She grew thin and pale. She asked many times to return to her mother's home, but the Emperor could not bear to let her go. He hoped she would grow strong again. At last her illness deepened, and her mother sent a tearful request that she be allowed to come home. The Emperor knew the end might be near. With great sorrow he agreed.

He went to her chamber before she left. She lay quiet and weak, her beauty still clear though her body was fading. He called her by tender names and wept openly. She tried to speak, but her voice was faint. When he said that they had once promised never to part, she whispered that she wished she could stay, yet she must go alone. Those were her last clear words to him.

She was carried away in a litter. The Emperor could not sleep that night. Messengers hurried back and forth. Soon after midnight they brought word that she had died. He lay still when he heard it, as if the world had stopped.

The little prince was sent to his grandmother's house. He did not understand death, yet he felt the deep sadness around him. When the funeral came, the mother of the dead lady wept so bitterly that those who heard her trembled. The ceremony

was grand, and a royal order raised the lady's rank after death. Some still complained, but others began to remember her kindness and grace.

Weeks of mourning followed. The Emperor shut himself away and wept often. Lady Kokiden said he was foolish to cling to memory. Yet his heart did not change. He longed especially to see his young son. When autumn came and the air turned cold, he sent a letter to the grandmother's house.

The house had grown wild and untended. Weeds filled the garden. The grandmother met the messenger with tears. She read the Emperor's words, though her eyes were dim. He asked that the boy be brought back to the Palace, so that he would not grow up in sadness. The grandmother felt both fear and hope. She did not wish to leave her quiet home, yet she knew the child belonged near his father.

At last the prince returned to the Palace. The Emperor held him close and found comfort in his beauty. He even thought for a moment of naming him heir. But he understood that such a step would cause great trouble. So he set aside the thought and chose another path for the boy's future.

Soon after, the grandmother herself died, worn down by grief. The prince, now old enough to understand loss, wept deeply. From that time on he lived always at Court. He began to study letters at the age of seven and showed rare talent. The Emperor took him often to visit Lady Kokiden and the other great ladies, asking them to be kind to him now that his mother was gone.

The child grew ever more beautiful. His skin shone softly in the light, and his eyes were clear. People began to call him "the Shining One." Even those who once felt anger toward his mother could not look upon him without wonder.

## Part 2

When the prince was older, the Emperor began to think carefully about his future. The boy was clever and quick in every lesson. He learned to read with ease, and when he heard music, he could follow it at once. His father watched him with pride but also with worry. If the child were made a prince of royal blood, he might

face jealousy and danger. If he were left without rank, he might drift without purpose. The Emperor wished to protect him from both harm and shame.

At that time some men from a distant land came to the capital. Among them was a man skilled in reading faces and signs of fate. Because of an old law, such men could not freely enter the Palace. So in secret the Emperor sent the boy to the place where the strangers stayed. The prince went under the care of a trusted officer, who said that the child was his own son.

The fortune reader looked long at the boy's face. He nodded again and again, as if he saw something bright and strange. At last he said that the child bore signs of greatness. He might rise to rule the land itself. Yet he also saw danger if the boy took the throne. Trouble and sorrow might follow. If he served instead as a great officer of state, his gifts would shine without bringing harm.

These words reached the Emperor. He thought deeply on them. He called native readers of fate as well and asked their judgment. They agreed that the boy's signs were strong and rare. In the end the Emperor chose to remove him from the line of princes and give him the name of the Minamoto clan. From then on he was known as Genji.

Though this decision was wise, it caused quiet talk among those close to power. The Minister of the Right, father of Lady Kokiden, felt uneasy. Yet nothing could be openly said. Genji continued his studies. He practiced writing, music, and poetry. In every art he showed grace. His beauty, already famous, seemed to grow with each passing season.

Still the Emperor's heart remained heavy. Many women were brought before him in hope that he might forget the lady he had lost. Some were known for beauty, others for skill. Yet he turned from them all. None were like her. He felt that even if another face pleased his eyes, his heart would not change.

At that time there was a young princess, daughter of a former Emperor. Her mother had cared for her with great love and raised her in quiet splendor. A lady of the household spoke of her beauty to the Emperor, saying that she alone resembled the lost one. The Emperor listened. Soon after, the princess's mother died, leaving the girl alone and sad.

The Emperor sent word that he would treat the young princess as one of his own daughters and invited her to the Palace. She came and was given rooms called Fujitsubo. When the Emperor saw her, he was struck by her likeness to the lady he had loved. Yet she was of higher rank, and the Court welcomed her with honor.

Genji, still young, often stayed near his father. He moved freely among the ladies of the Court. When he saw the princess Fujitsubo, he felt a strange pull in his heart. He had heard that she resembled his mother, and this thought drew him close. He wished to speak with her and to remain near her always. Though he was still a child, a quiet feeling took root within him.

One day the Emperor told Fujitsubo to be kind to the boy. He said that Genji was curious because she was said to resemble his mother. The princess treated him gently. To Genji, she seemed brighter than any other. While other women tried to gain his notice, she alone filled his thoughts.

As years passed, his beauty became the talk of the Court. People called him Hikaru Genji, Genji the Shining One. Fujitsubo too gained a name for her grace and was known as the Lady of Radiant Light. Lady Kokiden watched all this with sharp eyes. She did not forget her old anger. She saw how others praised Genji and how even her own children seemed less bright beside him.

When Genji reached the age of twelve, it was time for his coming-of-age ceremony. The Emperor ordered that it be splendid. Though Genji was no longer a prince of the royal line, the ceremony matched that of the heir. The halls were filled with light and color. High officers took part, and music echoed through the air.

On the day itself, Genji wore his long hair loose for the last time. The sponsor of the ceremony bound it and cut it according to custom. Those who watched felt a touch of sadness, for his child form was passing away. Yet when he put on the robes of a young man, he seemed even more beautiful.

After the rites were complete, he performed the formal dance of respect before the Emperor. His movements were smooth and calm. Many in the hall felt tears rise to their eyes. The Emperor too thought of the mother who was not there to see her son's glory. For a moment his grief returned, sharp and clear.

Soon after, a marriage was arranged for Genji. The Minister of the Left had a daughter, Princess Aoi, known for her high birth and beauty. She was older than Genji by several years. The Emperor agreed that such a match would strengthen Genji's standing and protect him in the future.

The wedding was held with great display. Genji seemed still young beside his bride. Some thought he looked delicate, like a figure painted on silk. Princess Aoi, proud and quiet, saw him as almost a child. Though the union was proper, warmth did not quickly grow between them.

Genji did not yet leave the Palace to live fully at his bride's house. The Emperor wished to keep him near. In truth, Genji's heart was not drawn to Aoi. He thought often instead of Fujitsubo. He knew such thoughts were wrong, yet he could not drive them away.

Because he was now a man, he could no longer wander freely among the women's rooms as he had in childhood. This change made him restless. Sometimes, when music sounded from afar, he would pause and listen, hoping to hear Fujitsubo's voice among the notes. These moments stirred feelings he could not name.

At times he visited Princess Aoi, and her father welcomed him with honor. Friends were gathered to amuse him with games and talk. Yet even in such lively company, Genji felt a quiet lack within his heart.

The rooms that had once belonged to his mother were given to him in the Palace. The servants who had cared for her now served him. Outside the capital, the house of his grandmother was repaired by order of the Emperor. The garden was renewed, the pond widened, and the trees arranged with care. It became once more a place of beauty. Yet Genji thought that without someone he truly loved beside him, even the loveliest place would feel empty.

Thus the Shining One entered his youth. His beauty and talent drew all eyes. Yet beneath the praise and honor, his heart was already moving toward paths that would bring both joy and sorrow.

Part 3

Though Genji was now grown and bound by rank and marriage, his life at Court did not settle into calm. His beauty and grace drew people toward him as light draws insects in summer. Many admired him openly. Others watched in silence, ready to speak ill should he stumble. Because he carried the name of the Minamoto and not that of a prince, he stood both inside and outside the highest circle. This gave him freedom, yet also danger.

He understood that the eyes of the world were upon him. A careless act might be told and retold until it became greater than truth. For this reason he kept his outward conduct measured. He did not rush into foolish affairs, nor did he boast of his charm. Still, he was young, and the stirrings of youth do not always obey caution.

During the long rains of early summer, the Court observed a strict fast. Ceremonies were few, and many officials remained indoors. The sky was dark day after day. Rain beat upon roofs and streamed from the eaves. In this quiet time Genji stayed within his chambers. Few visitors came, and the halls seemed hushed.

One evening, as the rain fell without pause, Genji sat beside a lamp, looking through papers and letters kept in a small desk. The light shone softly on his face and on the pale silk of his robe. His friend Tō no Chūjō was with him. The two had grown close since childhood and spoke freely together.

When Tō no Chūjō saw the letters, his curiosity rose at once. He asked to see them. Genji laughed and said that some could be shown, but others were not meant for another's eyes. This only made his friend more eager. He said that ordinary letters did not interest him. What he wished to see were those written in moments of anger or longing, letters sent at dusk or before dawn.

Genji, amused, allowed him to look through the drawer. Tō no Chūjō read a few and tried to guess who had written them. Sometimes he guessed well; often he was wrong. Genji, smiling, would gently lead him away from the truth. At last Genji gathered the letters back, saying that if his friend would show some of his own, then more might be shared.

Tō no Chūjō refused. He said he had come to a sad conclusion about women.

There was no woman who could truly be called perfect. Some wrote well and spoke quickly, yet thought only of themselves. Some were praised highly by their families, hidden away behind screens and said to be without fault. But when one met them in truth, disappointment followed.

He spoke with a tone half serious, half playful. Genji listened with interest. Soon two other men joined them: Hidari no Uma no Kami and Tō Shikibu no Jō. Both were known for their skill in talk and for their interest in love. The small gathering grew lively.

Tō no Chūjō divided women into three groups: those of high rank, those of middle rank, and those beneath notice. Women of high birth were praised too easily. Their faults were hidden. Those of middle rank were discussed freely, their strengths and weaknesses argued over. As for the lowest class, he dismissed them without thought.

Genji questioned him gently. Rank, he said, could change. Some of noble birth might fall into hardship. Others born in humble houses might rise. How then should they be judged?

Uma no Kami answered at length. He said that high birth alone did not guarantee worth. Nor did low birth mean shame. He spoke of daughters of provincial officers, who knew both comfort and trouble. He spoke of families of moderate rank, where girls were raised with care and often showed real talent.

The rain continued to fall. The lamp flickered. The men's voices blended with the sound of water. They spoke not only of beauty but of character. Uma no Kami said that a wife must be more than pleasing to the eye. She must bring calm to a household. A husband might see many things in the world that he wished to share with someone who would understand. If his wife showed no interest, his heart would feel alone.

He warned also against too much jealousy. A woman who made loud complaints at every small fear would drive love away. But one who showed quiet awareness, who hinted at her hurt without harsh words, might draw her husband back.

Tō no Chūjō agreed. Forbearance, he said, was the greatest virtue. A woman

who met wrong with gentleness would hold a man's heart more firmly than one who stormed and wept.

As they talked, Genji leaned against the lamp. He wore a simple robe of white silk, loosely tied. In the soft light he seemed almost unreal, as if shaped from the glow itself. The others looked at him and thought that even the perfect woman they described might not be worthy of such beauty.

Yet while they spoke boldly of love and judgment, Genji's thoughts were not fully with them. He felt the weight of his own hidden longing. The name of Fujitsubo did not pass his lips, but her image rose before him more than once. Compared to her, all arguments seemed thin.

The talk turned to examples and stories. Uma no Kami compared women to works of art. Some painters chose strange and wild subjects to amaze the eye. Others painted simple scenes with quiet skill. So too, he said, some women dazzled with bright charm but lacked depth. Others, less showy, might hold true worth.

The night grew late. Rain fell still. One by one the voices softened. Genji, tired from the day, drifted into sleep while the others continued their debate. His face, peaceful in rest, seemed free from care. Yet within him, seeds had already been planted that would soon grow into deeds both tender and dangerous.

Thus passed that long wet night, filled with talk of women and the human heart. The rain did not cease, and beyond the lamp's circle of light the dark halls of the Palace held their silence.

#### Part 4

When Genji woke, the rain had lessened, but the air still held the damp breath of the long wet days. The lamp had burned low. His friends were still speaking in softer tones, though their lively debate had turned to quieter reflection. For a moment Genji lay still, listening. He felt as though their words about women, virtue, jealousy, and hidden strength had settled into his mind like seeds waiting for light.

Uma no Kami was saying that true worth often lies where it is least praised. A woman too proud of her gifts may fall easily. One too eager to display her skill may lose the quiet balance that gives lasting charm. It is not loud beauty, he said, but steady warmth that makes a home safe.

Tō no Chūjō answered that such steady warmth is rare. Many begin with patience, but when tested, they fail. A woman may vow to forgive, yet when jealousy bites, her face changes, her voice grows sharp, and all peace is lost. To endure is harder than to speak.

Hidari no Uma no Kami nodded. He said that even men, who speak so boldly of patience, often lack it themselves. How then can they expect perfection in women? At this, laughter rose among them, though it was quiet laughter, for the Palace walls seemed to listen.

Genji sat up. His hair fell lightly over his shoulders. For a time he said nothing. Then he asked whether any of them had truly met a woman who held both grace and strength without fault. The men looked at one another. No clear answer came. Each had known moments of delight, yet none could name a woman who stood above all doubt.

The rain began again, though more gently. The sound seemed to close them within their circle of thought. Uma no Kami spoke of women who appear calm and patient but hide strong feeling beneath. Such women, he warned, must be treated with care. If pushed too far, they may leave suddenly, seeking refuge in distant hills or even taking vows as nuns. Men may think this devotion, yet often it is pride wounded beyond healing.

He told how some women leave poems behind when they depart, words filled with sorrow. Those who hear of it praise their depth of feeling. Yet such acts may cause only pain to all involved. A husband left in confusion suffers. The woman herself, once alone, may feel regret. Thus, he said, extremes of feeling often bring more harm than honor.

Tō no Chūjō agreed that balance is best. A wife who speaks gently when troubled, who hints at her hurt without loud anger, may draw a husband back more surely than one who cries and blames. Quiet strength, he said, binds hearts more

firmly than sharp words.

Genji listened carefully. Though still young, he understood that these words were not merely idle talk. He felt that life would test him soon enough. His beauty and rank might open many doors, but behind those doors waited hearts as complex as the rain-soaked night.

As the hour grew late, the men began to rise. The fast would end soon, and duties would return. Each wrapped his robe more tightly against the damp air. Before parting, Tō no Chūjō looked at Genji with a smile that held both affection and challenge. He said that though they had spoken boldly, true understanding comes only through experience.

Genji smiled in return. He did not boast, nor did he deny. He knew that his life, though watched and measured, would not remain untouched by passion. The image of Fujitsubo rose again in his mind, bright and forbidden. Compared with her quiet beauty, all the arguments of the night seemed small.

When his friends had gone, Genji remained alone for a short while. The rain tapped softly at the eaves. He thought of his marriage to Aoi, proper and strong in rank yet cool in feeling. He thought of the Palace, where each step must be taken with care. He thought of the path before him, uncertain and bright.

Though still young, he felt already that his heart would not rest within safe bounds. The lessons of the night had shown him that women are not easily judged. Behind screens and gentle words lie depths unseen. To touch those depths may bring joy or sorrow.

At last he rose and prepared for the day. The fast would soon end. The Court would again fill with color and sound. Duties, visits, music, and ceremony would claim his hours. Yet beneath all this, something had shifted within him.

The Shining One stepped once more into the wide halls of the Palace. Rain clouds still hung over the sky, but a faint light broke through in the east. So too in his heart there stirred a light, not yet fully formed, that would guide him into the tangled paths of love and fate.

Thus the long night of talk came to an end, leaving behind quiet thoughts that would shape the days to come.

## Part 5

In the days that followed, the rain at last came to an end. The sky cleared, and soft light lay over the roofs of the Palace. Yet the talk of that night did not fade. When Genji met Tō no Chūjō again, their words soon turned back to the same theme. It seemed that once the heart begins to weigh such matters, it cannot easily return to lighter things.

Uma no Kami, who had spoken so freely before, now said that he would give an example from his own youth. When he was younger and without care, he had known a woman of middle rank. She was not famed for beauty, nor did her name travel far. Yet she had a quiet manner and a calm face that drew him.

At first he had not thought much of her. Others spoke more loudly and shone more brightly. But when he visited her house, he found that she spoke with gentle sense. She did not boast of skill, nor did she shrink in false modesty. When he said foolish things, she smiled but did not flatter. When he spoke of serious matters, she listened with care.

For a time he felt at ease with her. Yet, as he admitted with some shame, he did not value her as he should have done. He was young and wished to test many doors. He began to visit other women and let his visits to her grow rare. She did not complain. She did not send sharp words. Instead, she wrote simple notes, clear and honest.

One day he went to her house and found it quiet. The gate stood closed. A servant told him that she had gone away to live with kin in the country. No blame had been spoken, no tears shown. She had left without noise. When he heard this, he felt a sudden emptiness.

He tried to laugh it off. Yet when he met other women, he found their talk thin. He began to think of the calm face he had left behind. At last he went to seek her in the country. The road was long, and his heart grew heavy with each step. When he found her, she received him with the same quiet grace. She did not speak of the past. This moved him more than anger would have done.

“It was then,” said Uma no Kami, “that I understood what I had lost. Loud anger may sting, but silent sorrow pierces deeper.” He sighed as he ended his tale.

Tō no Chūjō listened with keen interest. He said that such women are rare. Many would have shown open pain. To leave without reproach shows strong spirit. Hidari no Uma no Kami added that a man often learns the value of a heart only after he has treated it lightly.

Genji heard all this and felt a strange stirring within him. Though still young, he knew that he too might one day stand before such a test. He asked whether the woman had returned to the city. Uma no Kami answered that she had not. She had chosen a quiet life and seemed content.

“Then you lost her indeed,” said Tō no Chūjō softly.

The talk moved on. They began to speak of houses hidden behind trees, of women who live far from the bright center of Court. Such women are not often seen. Their names are not sung. Yet sometimes, by chance, a man may glimpse such a life and feel a sudden pull.

Genji’s eyes grew thoughtful. The idea of a hidden house, half lost among vines, stirred his fancy. He asked where such places might be found. Uma no Kami named a district not far from the city, where many houses of modest rank stood behind simple gates.

Tō no Chūjō laughed and said that Genji’s interest was clear. Yet he did not mock him harshly. Instead, he offered to guide him one evening, when the air was cool and the moon high. The thought of such a quiet visit seemed to please them all.

As days passed, this plan took shape. Genji did not act with open haste. He was careful, knowing how quickly rumor spreads. Yet in his heart a small flame of curiosity burned. He wished to see for himself whether such hidden grace truly lived behind humble walls.

One evening, when the sky was clear and the moon shone like pale silk, Genji set out with a small company. Tō no Chūjō rode beside him. They did not wear rich dress. Their robes were simple, their manner calm. They passed through quiet streets, where the sound of insects rose from gardens.

At last they came to a lane lined with trees. Behind one gate, partly covered by vine, a faint light could be seen. No loud voices came from within. Only the soft sound of a woman's speech reached their ears, gentle and low.

Genji felt his heart quicken. He did not know the face that matched that voice, yet something in its tone touched him. He paused beneath the shadow of the trees and listened. The words were simple, spoken to a servant, perhaps about some small task. Yet the sound held a quiet depth.

Tō no Chūjō whispered that this might be the place Uma no Kami had spoken of. Genji stepped nearer, careful not to make noise. Through a small gap in the fence he saw the edge of a sleeve and the faint shape of a figure within.

The house was not grand. Its walls were plain. Yet the garden, though small, was kept with care. The moonlight lay across the leaves. In that stillness, the hidden life within seemed richer than the bright halls of Court.

Genji stood a long moment. He did not yet know the name of the woman inside. He did not know her story. Yet he felt that the talk of that rainy night had led him here. Behind simple walls might dwell a heart of quiet strength.

At last he drew back. It would not do to press too near at once. He returned to his horse, his thoughts full and restless. Tō no Chūjō watched him with a knowing smile.

Thus began a new turn in the life of the Shining One. Not with noise or bold claim, but with a soft voice heard beneath the moon, and a gate half hidden by leaves.

## Part 6

The next day Genji could not easily turn his thoughts away from the house they had seen. The quiet garden, the plain walls, and above all the gentle voice that had drifted into the moonlight remained with him. Though he had passed many grand gates in his life, this modest one now held more power over his mind than the finest palace screen.

He asked Tō no Chūjō, in a tone that tried to seem careless, what he knew of

the people who lived there. His friend replied that the house belonged to a man who served as a provincial officer in distant lands. He was often away, leaving his family in the capital. The woman within was said to be of middle rank, not famed at Court, yet known among a small circle for her grace.

“She does not seek notice,” Tō no Chūjō said. “That may be why she draws it.”

Genji smiled but did not answer at once. He thought of Uma no Kami’s words: that true worth often lies where it is least praised. He felt a desire not only to see her face, but to test whether the quiet tone he had heard matched a heart of depth.

Yet he knew that he must move with care. He could not appear openly at such a gate without cause. Nor could he allow rumor to carry his name there too soon. So he resolved first to send a poem, written in a hand that would show both respect and subtle feeling.

That evening he chose fine paper, pale as early mist. His writing was light and flowing, neither too bold nor too shy. In his poem he spoke of the moon that shines even on hidden gardens, and of how a traveler might pause where a soft voice calls him, though he does not yet know the path within.

The letter was sent by a trusted servant, one skilled in quiet errands. Genji waited with a calm face, yet inwardly he felt the stir of youth. Would she answer? Would she refuse? A proud woman might ignore such a message. A foolish one might reply too eagerly. He hoped for neither.

The reply came the next night. The paper was simple, but chosen with care. The writing was steady, neither ornate nor careless. In her poem she spoke of a house small and unworthy of bright light, and of how the moon shines the same upon palace and humble roof. There was no sharpness in her words, yet no open welcome either.

When Genji read it, he felt a quiet joy. The tone was balanced. She had not flattered him. Nor had she turned away. He read the lines again and again, noting the calm strength within them.

In the days that followed, letters passed between them. Each poem was shaped with care. Their words moved lightly over nature and season, yet beneath them lay growing interest. Genji found himself eager for each reply. He felt that behind

her modest house lived a mind clear and steady.

At last he resolved to visit openly. It was arranged that he would come at night, when the streets were dim and most doors closed. He dressed without rich display. His robe was dark and plain, though its silk was fine. Tō no Chūjō did not accompany him this time. This step Genji would take alone.

The lane was quiet when he arrived. A servant admitted him with respect but without loud surprise. He was led through the small garden. The scent of night flowers lay in the air. Inside, lamps burned softly.

She sat behind a screen, as was proper. He could see only the outline of her figure and the pale curve of her sleeve. Her voice, when she spoke, was the same he had heard before—low, even, and clear.

Their first meeting was marked by restraint. Genji spoke with courtesy. He did not press too near. She answered with care, showing neither fear nor boldness. Though the house was simple, there was an air of order and thoughtfulness in every detail. Nothing was grand, yet nothing was careless.

As they talked, Genji felt a calm unlike the bright stir of Court life. Here there were no watching eyes, no rivalry. Only the sound of two voices meeting in quiet space. He understood then that beauty may dwell not only in shining halls but also in hidden rooms.

When he rose to leave, she did not cling, nor did she turn cold. She thanked him for his visit in simple words. Outside, the night air felt cool against his face. He mounted his horse slowly, his thoughts deep.

In the days after, he returned more than once. Each visit strengthened his regard. She did not seek to bind him with jealous speech. Nor did she show careless ease. Her manner held steady balance.

Yet Genji's life was not free. He still belonged to the Palace. He still bore a name watched by many. As his visits grew more frequent, servants began to whisper. Though he tried to move unseen, such things rarely remain hidden for long.

Tō no Chūjō soon guessed the truth. He did not mock, but he warned gently that even hidden gates may become known. Genji nodded. He knew that the path

he had chosen might lead to both sweetness and trouble.

Thus the quiet house behind the vine-covered gate became part of the Shining One's life. Not through loud passion, but through calm exchange and soft words beneath the moon. And though his heart still held other images—bright and forbidden—this new bond took root, steady and real, in the shadowed spaces of his youth.

## Part 7

As summer deepened, Genji's visits to the quiet house became more daring. At first he had gone rarely, with careful thought. Now his heart drew him there with stronger pull. Though he still kept a calm face at Court, his thoughts often strayed to that small garden and the woman who lived within it.

Her name, he learned, was Utsusemi. She was married to a man much older than herself, a provincial officer often away from the capital. Her life in the city was one of waiting. Though her rank was not high, her conduct was steady. She did not boast of her beauty, yet her manner held a grace that did not fade.

Genji understood that his visits were dangerous. She was bound by marriage. He was bound by rank. Yet the more he saw her quiet strength, the more he wished to test the depth of her heart.

One evening he arrived later than usual. The moon had not yet risen, and the garden lay in soft shadow. When he was admitted, he sensed a difference. Her voice, though still calm, carried a hint of tension. She spoke with care, yet her words seemed guarded.

At last she said what lay in her mind. She knew that his visits could not remain hidden forever. Servants talk. Neighbors watch. If rumor reached her husband's ears, her honor would be damaged beyond repair. She asked him gently to consider her position.

Genji listened. He felt both admiration and frustration. Many women would have welcomed his attention without thought of consequence. Utsusemi did not. She valued her name and her peace more than the glory of his favor.

He tried to persuade her. He spoke of the rarity of their meeting, of how fate brings certain souls together. He said that the heart cannot always obey the rules set by the world. His words were warm, yet not reckless.

She answered with quiet firmness. Though moved by his feeling, she could not forget her duty. She did not accuse him. She did not weep. Instead, she held to her place, as steady as a branch that bends but does not break.

That night Genji left with mixed thoughts. He admired her restraint, yet his desire grew stronger. He began to think that if she would not yield through words, perhaps fate would open another path.

Soon after, an unexpected chance came. During a festival night, the city was filled with music and light. Houses stood open to the breeze. In the small house where Utsusemi lived, servants were busy, and doors were left less guarded than usual.

Genji, moved by bold impulse, entered quietly with the help of a loyal attendant. The house was dim. Screens cast soft shadows. He knew the room where she usually rested.

When he stepped inside, he found not Utsusemi alone, but another young woman sleeping near her—a younger relative named Nokiba no Ogi. In the faint light, he could not clearly see their faces. Believing he approached Utsusemi, he moved closer.

Utsusemi, waking at the sound, understood at once what had happened. In a swift motion, she slipped away into the darkness, leaving behind her outer robe. Genji, surprised and half in confusion, found himself beside the younger girl instead.

The moment was strange and awkward. The younger woman, startled and shy, did not know how to act. Genji realized too late that he had mistaken one for the other. The air seemed heavy with silence.

At last he withdrew. In his hands remained the robe Utsusemi had cast off in her escape. It was light and softly scented. Holding it, he felt both shame and longing.

The next day he sent it back with a poem. In his verse he spoke of how even a

shell left behind upon the shore holds memory of the living creature that once dwelled within. His words carried regret and desire in equal measure.

Utsusemi replied briefly. She said that a cast shell is empty and cannot return to the sea. Her tone was cool but not cruel. She had chosen her path and would not turn from it.

Genji felt the sting of her refusal. Yet even in refusal she showed dignity. He could not resent her. Instead, he felt a deeper respect. She had not yielded to rank or charm. She had guarded her name.

In time, her husband returned to the capital. Her house grew more watchful. Genji knew that further visits would bring harm. Slowly, with reluctance, he let that path close.

Though their bond had not reached the fullness he once imagined, the memory of Utsusemi remained with him. She had shown him that not all hearts bend to desire. Some hold firm, even when tempted by shining light.

Thus another lesson entered the life of the Shining One. Beauty may attract, rank may persuade, but true strength lies in quiet resolve. And as Genji rode once more through the broad streets of the capital, the scent of that abandoned robe lingered faintly in his thoughts, like a dream not fully lived.

## Part 8

Though Genji no longer visited Utsusemi's house, her image did not leave him. At times, when he heard the rustle of silk or saw the pale edge of a sleeve beneath a screen, he would remember how she had slipped away in the dark, leaving only her robe behind. It was not anger that stirred within him, but a strange mix of loss and admiration. She had refused him without harshness. That refusal, more than welcome might have done, held his thoughts.

Yet life at Court did not pause for private longing. Ceremonies filled the days. Music echoed in the halls. Ladies moved behind painted screens. The Emperor still kept Genji near, trusting him and delighting in his presence. To the world, he shone as brightly as ever.

It was during this time that Genji heard of another woman whose name was spoken in low tones. She was called Yūgao, after the pale evening flower. Some said she was of no great rank. Others whispered that she had once been loved by a high-born man and then left in sorrow. Her life now was quiet, hidden in a modest dwelling in a distant quarter of the city.

The story reached Genji through casual talk, but it caught his ear at once. A woman who lived apart from fame, who carried past sorrow yet did not display it, stirred his interest. Perhaps, he thought, in such a life there lay a heart as steady as Utsusemi's, yet more open to warmth.

One evening, riding through the city, he passed a narrow lane where white blossoms climbed over a low fence. The flowers shone faintly in the dusk. He paused and asked a servant whose house it might be. The answer came softly: it was said that a lady lived there, quiet and seldom seen.

Genji felt a small thrill. The name Yūgao came to his mind at once, for the evening flower bloomed pale and fragile in the fading light. He sent a poem the next day, written in gentle tone, speaking of how the evening blossom opens when the day's heat has passed, offering its scent to those who linger near.

The reply, when it came, was modest. The writing was not bold, yet it carried feeling. She spoke of how flowers that bloom unseen may still wither in silence if no one pauses to notice them. There was sadness in her words, but also quiet dignity.

Their letters passed back and forth. Unlike Utsusemi, Yūgao did not guard herself with firm refusal. Yet she did not rush forward either. Her tone was thoughtful, touched by memory. Genji sensed that she had known both joy and hurt.

At last he arranged to visit her. Her house was small, set within a garden where evening flowers grew thick along the fence. When he entered, he found her seated behind a screen. Her figure was slender. Her voice was soft, with a trace of deep feeling that seemed born of past sorrow.

She spoke little at first. Genji, sensing her shyness, did not press her. He told light stories of the city, of music and moonlit nights. Gradually she answered with

ease. He saw that though her house was humble, her mind was not. There was grace in her speech and a quiet warmth in her manner.

As the night deepened, Genji felt himself drawn closer. Yūgao, unlike Utsusemi, did not turn away. Yet she seemed fragile, as if too strong a wind might break her. He resolved to treat her gently.

Their meetings grew more frequent. Yet Genji knew that her past was not simple. Whispers said she had once been loved by Tō no Chūjō himself, though neither man spoke of it openly. If this were true, fate had woven strange threads between them.

One night, wishing to escape the watchful eyes of the city, Genji proposed that they spend time in a distant house, away from noise and talk. Yūgao agreed, though a shadow of fear crossed her face. She trusted him, yet the unknown lay before her.

They traveled to an old, half-forgotten mansion at the edge of the city. The place was quiet, its halls wide and nearly empty. Moonlight poured through broken shutters. The air felt still and heavy.

At first the solitude seemed sweet. Far from Court and rumor, they could speak freely. Yūgao's face in the pale light appeared even more delicate than before. Genji felt both desire and a strange unease, as if the silence held hidden weight.

As the night grew late, a faint chill passed through the room. Yūgao shivered. She said she felt watched, though no one stood there. Genji tried to comfort her, speaking gently and holding her close.

Yet her fear did not fade. Her breath grew uneven. A strange shadow seemed to fall across her face. Before Genji could understand what was happening, her body grew still. Her warmth faded beneath his hands.

Panic seized him. He called her name, but she did not answer. Servants rushed in. Lamps were lit. Her face, once pale with life, now seemed touched by something beyond reach.

Word spread that a restless spirit had struck her down. In that lonely house, far from help, Yūgao had died in the night.

Genji sat stunned, his heart heavy with shock. He had sought quiet joy and

found only loss. The memory of her gentle letters, her soft speech, now pierced him deeply.

With great care, her body was taken away before dawn, hidden from open view. Genji returned to the city in silence. The bright halls of the Palace felt distant and cold.

Thus another shadow fell across the path of the Shining One. In seeking hidden beauty, he had touched fragile life, and it had slipped away like the evening flower that blooms only for a short hour before fading into night.

## Part 9

When dawn broke after that terrible night, Genji felt as though the light itself accused him. The old mansion stood silent behind him, its wide rooms empty once more. What had seemed a place of secret joy had become a house of fear. He rode back toward the capital with heavy heart, speaking little to the servants who followed.

Yūgao's body had been carried away before the city stirred. Her name would not be spoken loudly. In such matters, quiet was safer than truth. Yet within Genji, no silence could hide what had happened. He had brought her to that lonely place. He had promised her protection. Now she lay beyond all reach.

At first he could not even weep. Shock held him still. When he closed his eyes, he saw her face as it had been when first he entered her house—shy, thoughtful, touched by past sorrow. Then he saw her again as she had lain in the dim room, her breath fading. The two images would not join.

Back at the Palace, he moved as though in a dream. Those who saw him thought only that he looked pale from lack of sleep. None guessed the full weight upon his heart. Even Tō no Chūjō, though he sensed that something grave had occurred, did not yet know the truth.

Days passed. At last grief broke through. Alone in his chamber, Genji wept deeply. He wrote a poem to her memory, though she could no longer read it. In his lines he spoke of the evening flower that blooms unseen and fades before dawn,

leaving only scent behind.

He sent quiet offerings for prayers to be said in her name. Though her rank was not high, he would not let her pass without honor. In doing so, he felt both sorrow and guilt. Had he not drawn her from her safe home into danger? Had his own restless heart brought about her end?

Rumor began to stir in hidden corners. Some said that a spirit jealous of Genji's beauty had struck her down. Others whispered that the wandering ghost of a woman wronged long ago had taken revenge. Such tales grow easily in dark air. Genji did not know what to believe. He only knew that Yūgao was gone.

Tō no Chūjō came to him one evening, concerned. He saw that Genji's bright face had grown thin. After gentle questioning, he learned the truth. When he heard that Yūgao had died, he stood silent for a long time. At last he spoke of the past—of how he too had once known her, had cared for her in earlier days. His voice held regret.

The two men shared their sorrow. Neither blamed the other. Fate, they said, moves in ways beyond human sight. Yet both felt the sting of loss.

Genji withdrew from pleasure for a time. Music did not ease him. Even the sight of Fujitsubo, who still held his deepest longing, could not drive away the shadow. He began to see that beauty is fragile, and that his own desire, however gentle, might bring harm.

In quiet hours he remembered Utsusemi. She had slipped away and preserved her life and name. Yūgao had trusted him and followed. One lived, though distant. The other had faded like her flower.

Such thoughts did not make him colder. Instead, they deepened him. The Shining One, praised for grace and charm, now carried within him a knowledge of sorrow.

When autumn came again, the air felt sharp and clear. Leaves turned red along the hills. Genji stood one evening beneath a tree, watching them fall. He thought of how easily bright things change. The world continues, though hearts break.

Yet even in grief, life pressed forward. Duties called him. The Emperor still looked to him with trust. The ladies of the Court still whispered his name. And

within him, though dimmed by loss, the light of youth had not fully died.

Thus the path of the Shining One moved on—through beauty, through longing, through quiet houses and lonely mansions—each step leaving behind both memory and lesson.

## Part 10

Though sorrow weighed upon Genji, the world around him did not grow still. Court life moved with its usual rhythm. Ceremonies filled the calendar. Messengers came and went. Music rose from halls bright with color. To others, he remained the Shining One, graceful and composed. Only those who watched closely saw the deeper tone now settled in his eyes.

He found that grief did not drive away desire, but changed its shape. Where once he had sought light pleasure, he now searched for something steadier—something that might hold firm against loss. Yet the heart is not easily guided by reason.

During this time, his bond with Princess Fujitsubo grew stronger in secret. From childhood he had been drawn to her, first because she resembled his mother, then because her presence stirred feelings beyond simple memory. She remained gentle and reserved, her rank high, her conduct without fault. The Emperor still favored her deeply.

Genji knew the danger of even letting his thoughts rest too long upon her. She belonged to the Emperor. To approach her was to step toward shadow. Yet when he saw her from across a hall, or heard her voice in song, his resolve weakened.

At times he would linger near her chambers under harmless pretext, hoping for a brief exchange of words. Their talk remained proper, shaped by courtesy. Yet beneath the calm surface ran a quiet current neither could fully deny.

Fujitsubo herself felt the weight of this unspoken bond. She saw how Genji's face, so like his father's in youth, now held both beauty and depth. She remembered that she had once been told she resembled his mother. The thought troubled her. She kept her distance when she could, yet fate often placed them

near.

One evening, during a festival when music filled the air and the Palace was alive with movement, chance brought them together more closely than before. In the half-shadow behind a screen, words passed between them that carried more than surface meaning. It was not bold speech, yet neither was it empty.

From that night onward, their hearts were no longer entirely at peace.

Genji's visits grew more careful, more hidden. Servants loyal to him kept watch. Fujitsubo, though troubled, did not turn away. She too felt drawn into a bond that seemed at once wrong and fated.

The risk was great. If their closeness were known, scandal would shake the Court. The Emperor's trust would be broken. Yet in the quiet hours of night, when lamps burned low and the world slept, they met in secrecy.

Their union was brief, wrapped in fear and longing. No loud vows were spoken. No promise was made beyond the moment. Yet the depth of their feeling left mark upon both.

Soon after, Fujitsubo withdrew from easy sight. Her manner grew more distant. Those at Court thought only that she wished for calm. None guessed the storm within her.

When word came months later that she bore a child, joy filled the Palace. The Emperor was delighted. An heir, bright and noble, had been born. Celebration spread through the halls.

Genji alone stood apart, his heart shaken. He knew what others did not. The child, praised as the Emperor's son, carried his own blood. The weight of this truth pressed upon him like stone.

He dared not show emotion. He bowed and offered gifts as custom required. He watched the infant from afar. The child's face was soft, its features fine. Each glance filled him with both pride and fear.

Fujitsubo too bore her secret in silence. Her conduct remained flawless. No hint of guilt showed in her eyes. Yet within, she lived in constant watchfulness. The child must be raised as Emperor's son. Nothing must reveal the hidden bond.

The infant grew, bright and gentle. The Emperor's love for him was deep. None

suspected another truth. Only Genji, when he looked upon the boy, felt the strange pull of fatherhood denied.

This secret marked the turning of his youth. The Shining One, who had moved lightly through early passion, now carried a burden that could never be spoken.

In time, Fujitsubo chose to withdraw further from worldly life. Troubled by fear and longing, she took vows and became a nun, seeking peace in prayer. The Palace mourned her retreat, yet honored her choice.

For Genji, her departure was another wound. He had gained a son yet lost the woman who bound him to that child. He could not claim either openly.

Thus his path grew more complex. Love brought not simple joy, but layered sorrow. Yet even in secrecy and regret, his life did not cease to shine. He stood still as one favored by fate, yet within him lay currents that would shape his future in ways unseen.

So the days passed in the capital, bright on the surface, shadowed beneath. And Genji, no longer only a youth of charm, began to walk the deeper roads of the human heart.

## Part 11

After Fujitsubo took vows and withdrew from the world, the Palace felt changed. Though ceremonies continued and music still rose in the halls, there was a quiet space where her presence had once rested. The Emperor, saddened by her retreat, sought comfort in prayer and in watching over the young prince she had borne. That child, bright and calm, grew under careful eyes, unaware of the hidden truth that lay behind his birth.

Genji bore his secret alone. When he looked upon the boy, he felt both warmth and pain. He dared not show too much affection, lest it draw notice. Instead, he offered guidance from a distance, watching over the child's education as any loyal courtier might do. In this restraint he learned patience.

Meanwhile, his marriage to Princess Aoi remained cold. She was noble and dignified, raised in a house of power. She did not lack beauty, yet her pride stood

firm. She knew of Genji's wandering heart, though he did not flaunt it before her. Between them lay silence rather than anger. They shared rank and duty, but little warmth.

As seasons turned, talk began to stir around another woman who had long been part of Genji's life: the Lady Rokujō. She was of high birth, once married to a prince who had died young. Since that time she had lived in quiet dignity, her house marked by refinement and taste. She had known Genji from his youth, and their bond had once been strong.

Rokujō was proud, sensitive, and deeply attached. Unlike Utsusemi, she did not guard herself with firm refusal. Unlike Yūgao, she was not fragile. She possessed depth of feeling and keen awareness. Yet this same depth made her vulnerable to jealousy.

As Genji's attention turned toward others, Rokujō felt the change. She did not confront him openly. Instead, her sorrow grew inward. She saw the praise heaped upon Princess Aoi and heard whispers of other names. Though she tried to maintain calm dignity, her heart burned with wounded pride.

During a grand festival, when carriages lined the streets and crowds pressed to see the procession, a small incident deepened the strain. The carriages of Princess Aoi and Lady Rokujō met in narrow space. Servants of Aoi's house forced their way forward, pushing Rokujō's carriage aside. It was a public slight, though not intended by Aoi herself.

Rokujō felt the sting sharply. To be pushed aside before watching eyes wounded her more than private neglect. She returned home with silent fury. That night, her thoughts churned. She did not sleep.

Soon after, Princess Aoi fell ill. Strange weakness overtook her. Priests were called. Chants filled the air. It was said that a restless spirit had attached itself to her, striking her body in unseen ways. Fear spread quietly through the Palace.

Those skilled in reading signs whispered that the spirit might belong to Lady Rokujō. Her jealousy, unspoken yet fierce, had taken form beyond her will. Such tales were common in that age, where emotion and spirit were believed to move as one.

Genji stood beside Aoi's bed, troubled and uncertain. He could not dismiss the rumor. He knew the strength of Rokujō's feeling. He also knew her pride. Yet he did not wish to believe that she would cause harm.

The illness worsened. Aoi, who had once held herself cold and distant, now lay weak and pale. In her suffering she seemed younger, more human. Genji felt sudden tenderness for her. He remembered that she had entered marriage with him while he was still little more than a boy. Perhaps she too had known quiet sorrow.

In time, Aoi gave birth to a son. The child was strong and bright. Yet her own body did not recover. Within days, her life faded. She died quietly, leaving her infant behind.

Grief filled the Minister of the Left's house. The Emperor himself mourned the loss. Genji stood silent, struck by another turn of fate. Once again, love and rank had led him to sorrow.

As for Rokujō, she heard of Aoi's death with mixed feeling. Some said her spirit had indeed left her body and wandered. Others said it was only rumor born of fear. Yet she herself felt deep shame. Whether she had caused harm or not, she could not escape the thought that her jealousy had grown beyond control.

Soon after, she chose to leave the capital and serve as attendant to her daughter, who had been named Vestal Virgin at Ise. This was a position of sacred duty, far from the daily noise of Court. Rokujō departed with quiet dignity, her heart heavy but resolved.

Genji watched her leave. He felt the loss keenly. In her pride and passion she had matched him in strength. Now she too was gone from his daily life.

Thus one by one, the women who shaped his youth moved away—through death, through vow, through distance. Utsusemi guarded her quiet home. Yūgao had faded like a flower. Fujitsubo prayed behind convent walls. Aoi lay beyond reach. Rokujō traveled to sacred ground.

Genji stood at the center of shining halls, praised and admired. Yet around him lay the marks of sorrow.

And still his life did not end there. For even as old bonds faded, new paths opened. In distant corners of the capital, another young life waited—one who

would come to hold his heart more deeply than all before.

But that turning belonged to the days ahead.

## Part 12

After Aoi's death, Genji entered a long period of mourning. Outwardly he observed all proper rites. He wore dull robes and kept from public pleasure. The halls of the Minister of the Left's house were heavy with grief, for Aoi had been his only daughter. Though their marriage had not been warm, Genji did not forget that she had shared his early youth and borne him a son.

The child, Yūgiri, was strong and bright. When Genji looked at him, he felt a quiet duty awaken. This son must be raised with care. Whatever sorrow had marked his own life, he would not allow it to darken the boy's future.

Yet even as he fulfilled these duties, his mind wandered elsewhere. In the past, amid talk and festival, he had once seen a young girl at the house of Prince Hyōbukyō, brother of Fujitsubo. The child had caught his eye at once. She was very young then, no more than a little girl, yet her face held a clear light that stirred something deep within him.

He remembered how she had sat beside her nurse, shy but curious, her hair falling softly around her shoulders. She resembled Fujitsubo in gentle outline. That likeness had struck him sharply. At the time, he had smiled at his own fancy. Yet the image had remained in his mind.

After the storms of recent years, that memory returned with new strength. Perhaps, he thought, fate had shown him another path long ago. He inquired quietly about the girl. Her name was Murasaki. She was the daughter of Prince Hyōbukyō, born of a woman of lesser rank. Because of this, she did not live in high position within her father's house.

Genji learned that her mother had died, and that the child was being raised with modest care. Her beauty, though still young, had begun to show promise. Those who saw her spoke of her gentle nature.

A thought began to grow in him. He could not bring back Fujitsubo. He could

not undo past sorrow. But perhaps he might shape a future more in his control. If he took this child into his care, he could guide her growth, teach her arts and conduct, and protect her from the jealous winds of Court.

At first he resisted the idea. It seemed bold, even strange. Yet the more he considered it, the more it seemed a path set before him. He visited Prince Hyōbukyō under courteous pretext. In the course of their talk, he asked gently about the girl.

The prince, proud yet aware of his daughter's delicate position, spoke honestly. He wished for her safety and good future. Genji hinted that he might offer protection and education within his own house. Such an offer was not lightly refused.

Soon after, Genji visited the house again. He saw Murasaki once more. She had grown slightly since his first glimpse, yet she was still very young. When she looked at him, her eyes were wide with quiet wonder. She did not yet understand the place she might hold in his life.

Genji felt a strange mix of tenderness and resolve. He did not approach her with the passion he had shown others. Instead, he felt as though he stood before something fragile and full of promise.

Arrangements were made. Murasaki would come to live under Genji's protection. Some might have whispered at such action, yet he moved with care and dignity. To the world, it was an act of kindness and foresight.

When she entered his residence, the rooms were prepared with gentle thought. He chose attendants of calm spirit. He ordered that her education begin at once—music, poetry, reading, and the manners of noble women. He himself would oversee her growth.

Murasaki, though young, sensed that her life had changed. She missed familiar rooms and faces. At times she wept softly. Genji would comfort her, speaking kindly and offering small gifts. Slowly, trust grew between them.

Those who saw them together remarked on the gentle air of the household. Unlike the restless paths of his earlier years, this new bond held promise of quiet shaping rather than sudden flame.

Genji still moved within the wide world of Court. Duties called him. Festivals returned. Yet at the center of his private life now stood the young girl whose name would in time be spoken with deep affection.

Thus the Shining One, marked by sorrow and secret burden, turned toward a new chapter. No longer merely chasing hidden gates or evening flowers, he began to build something that might endure.

And in that quiet house, under careful watch and steady teaching, Murasaki grew—unaware that her life and his would soon become woven beyond separation.

### Part 13

As the seasons passed, Murasaki began to settle into her new life. At first she had been shy and uncertain, clinging to her nurse and looking about her with wide eyes. The rooms in Genji's residence were larger than any she had known. The women who attended her moved with quiet skill. Everything seemed ordered and calm.

Genji did not rush her growth. He understood that a flower forced open too soon loses its grace. He visited her often, not as a lover but as a guardian. He would sit beside her while she practiced writing, gently guiding her hand when the brush slipped. He listened as she learned to play the zither, praising effort more than skill.

In her presence he felt a peace unlike the restless pull of his earlier passions. Murasaki's mind was clear and eager. When she read poetry, her eyes shone with simple delight. She did not yet carry the weight of pride or jealousy. Her heart was open.

Yet there were moments when she grew quiet and thoughtful. She missed her old home, though she spoke of it rarely. Genji sensed this and arranged small comforts—familiar servants, toys from her childhood, flowers she had once liked.

Meanwhile, talk continued in the capital. Some wondered at Genji's decision to bring so young a girl into his household. Others praised his foresight. The Emperor, hearing of it, expressed approval. He trusted Genji's judgment and saw

no harm in the act.

Still, beneath public approval lay private thought. Genji knew that in time Murasaki would grow into womanhood. He had chosen not merely to protect her, but to shape her into the companion he had once sought in others and failed to find.

As years passed, her beauty unfolded gently. Her face gained clear outline. Her voice, once soft with childhood, deepened with grace. Those who saw her began to remark on her likeness to Fujitsubo, though softer, less shadowed.

Genji himself felt both pride and careful restraint. He did not wish her to sense too soon the deeper role she would play. Instead, he allowed affection to grow slowly, like spring light spreading across the hills.

In quiet evenings they would sit together, reading or listening to music. Sometimes he would tell her stories of Court, choosing gentle tales rather than darker truths. She listened with trust, her world centered upon his presence.

The Shining One, who had once moved swiftly from one passion to another, now found himself content to remain still. The storms of his youth had not vanished, but they had softened.

Yet the world beyond his walls continued to move. The young prince—his own son in secret—grew toward the throne. Political currents shifted. Rival houses watched one another closely. Genji stood always within these currents, bright and admired, yet carrying secrets that could shake the realm.

In this balance of private tenderness and public duty, his life took on new shape. He had known loss through Yūgao, guilt through Fujitsubo, pride and sorrow through Aoi and Rokujō. Now, in Murasaki's gentle presence, he began to glimpse a different kind of bond—one built not on sudden flame but on patient care.

Thus the path of the Shining One moved forward once more. From jealous halls and moonlit gardens to quiet rooms where a young girl traced careful lines of ink, his life gathered depth.

And as autumn leaves turned again upon the hills of the capital, Murasaki stood beside him, no longer merely a child under protection, but the center of a future that would shape both their destinies.

## Part 14

As Murasaki grew into her early youth, the change in her was gentle yet clear. The round softness of childhood gave way to a calm brightness. Her eyes, once wide with wonder, now held quiet thought. When she walked through the garden, her steps were light and measured. Those who saw her spoke softly of her grace.

Genji watched this change with deep feeling. He had guided her learning day by day. He had chosen her teachers, her attendants, the books she read and the music she practiced. Now he saw before him the fruit of careful years. She had become exactly what he had hoped—a woman of balance, with neither pride nor weakness.

Yet with her growth came new awareness. Murasaki began to understand that her place in Genji's household was not merely that of a ward. She sensed the depth of his regard. At times she would blush when his gaze lingered. At other times she would grow silent, unsure of her own feelings.

Genji did not press her suddenly. He remembered too well the sharp turns of his earlier life. Instead, he allowed affection to unfold as naturally as the seasons. He spoke to her with warmth, yet with patience. He wished her to choose him freely when the time came.

Outside their quiet circle, the world of Court remained bright and restless. The young prince—Genji's son in secret—was now openly declared heir. His beauty and intelligence won admiration. Genji, standing among the nobles, felt the strange pull of fatherly pride hidden behind a courtier's mask.

Some began to whisper that Genji's influence at Court was growing too strong. His beauty, talent, and closeness to the Emperor set him apart. Though none could openly fault him, envy moved beneath polite smiles.

Within his own household, harmony seemed complete. Murasaki's presence brought calm to the rooms. Servants moved quietly. Music sounded in the evenings, not loud and showy, but gentle and deep. Genji found that he no longer sought hidden houses or fleeting blossoms. He returned home willingly.

At last the day came when he spoke clearly of marriage. Murasaki listened with lowered eyes. She had long known this moment would come, yet hearing it spoken stirred her heart. She trusted him, yet the step from girlhood into womanhood is never small.

The ceremony was not loud or grand like those of high rank. It was held with dignity and quiet joy. Those closest to Genji understood the depth of the bond. To others, it seemed a fitting union, long prepared.

From that time forward, Murasaki became the true lady of his house. She guided servants with gentle firmness. She welcomed guests with grace. In her presence, even proud visitors felt at ease.

Genji's heart, long restless, found new anchoring. Though he would in time face further trials, this bond stood firm at the center of his life. In Murasaki he had found not only beauty, but steadiness—a companion shaped by patience and care.

And so the Shining One, who had once moved through passion like wind through leaves, now stood in a house warmed by steady light.

Yet life does not rest long in perfect balance. Beyond the calm rooms and ordered gardens, the currents of fate continued to move.

But for a time, beneath clear skies and among softly falling blossoms, Genji and Murasaki lived in harmony, their days unfolding with quiet grace.

## Part 15

For a time, the years seemed gentle. Genji's house was filled with calm order. Murasaki moved through its rooms like soft light at dawn. She had grown into womanhood without losing the clear heart of her youth. Those who served her spoke of her kindness. She did not command loudly. She guided with quiet strength.

Genji, now older and marked by many turns of fate, found in her presence a deep ease. When he returned from Court, weary from ceremony or burdened by thought, he would sit beside her and let the tension fall from him. She listened without pressing him for secrets. In this she was unlike others he had known. She

did not try to rule his heart by fear or jealousy.

Yet even in such peace, the world beyond did not grow still.

The young Crown Prince, Genji's own son though known as the Emperor's, continued to rise in honor. His wisdom and gentle nature won admiration. Genji felt pride but also danger. Each day that passed strengthened the weight of the secret he carried.

Meanwhile, political winds began to shift. The Minister of the Right, long powerful, watched Genji with careful eyes. Though no open charge could be made against him, envy often needs no cause beyond brilliance.

At Court, whispers turned slowly toward suspicion. Some said Genji's closeness to the Emperor was too strong. Others hinted that his beauty and charm might one day unbalance the order of rank. Genji heard these murmurs but gave no outward sign. He continued to serve with grace.

Within his own house, small shadows also began to gather. Though Murasaki held his deepest regard, Genji was not free from wandering thought. Old habits do not vanish at once. When he encountered other women at festivals or in music halls, his heart sometimes stirred, though less wildly than before.

Murasaki sensed such shifts, though she did not accuse. At times her face would grow quiet. She bore herself with dignity, yet her eyes would hold faint hurt. Genji, seeing this, felt remorse. He understood that true steadiness must be guarded, not tested.

One evening, as autumn wind moved through the garden, Murasaki spoke gently. She said that life is fragile, like leaves that fall though they seem firm. She did not name jealousy. She did not speak of fear. Yet her meaning was clear.

Genji listened in silence. He remembered the many women who had passed through his youth—Utsusemi, who had slipped away; Yūgao, who had died; Aoi, who had borne him a son and faded; Rokujō, who had departed in pride; Fujitsubo, who had withdrawn into prayer. Each had left mark upon him.

He took Murasaki's hand and promised to honor the peace they had built. In that moment he felt truly older—not in years, but in understanding.

Still, fate had not yet finished with him.

In time, the Emperor fell ill. The Palace grew tense. Courtiers moved with quiet worry. Genji remained close, offering loyal service. Yet beneath loyalty lay fear—for with the Emperor's passing, the balance of power would change.

When at last the Emperor died, sorrow filled the capital. The young Crown Prince ascended the throne. Though rightful in name, he carried within him the hidden blood of Genji. None spoke this truth aloud.

The new Emperor showed Genji favor, as any loyal subject might expect. Yet those who had long envied him now saw chance to strike. The Minister of the Right's faction gathered strength. Rumor sharpened into accusation.

Soon, through careful plotting, Genji found himself charged with misconduct—not open crime, but suspicion enough to wound. Though no direct proof was shown, the tide turned against him.

In order to calm unrest, it was decided that he would withdraw from the capital for a time. Officially, it was framed as quiet retreat. In truth, it was exile.

When the order reached him, Genji did not resist. He bowed and accepted. Pride would only deepen danger.

Murasaki wept when she heard. She begged to follow him. But the journey would be hard. The place of exile lay far from Court, by the sea at Suma, where wind and wave ruled.

Genji comforted her, though his own heart trembled. He said that separation would be brief. Yet he knew that exile changes a man.

On the day of departure, the capital lay under gray sky. Servants wept quietly. Murasaki stood pale but composed, her strength holding back tears.

Genji mounted his horse and looked once more upon the city of shining roofs and painted halls. He had known joy and sorrow there. He had loved and lost. Now he rode away, carrying memory and hope into uncertain days.

Thus the Shining One left the bright center of power and turned toward the lonely shore.

And the waves of Suma awaited him.

The road to Suma was long and lonely. As Genji rode farther from the capital, the familiar sounds of Court life faded behind him. The wide roads gave way to narrower paths. The air grew heavy with the scent of salt. Before him lay the sea—vast, restless, and gray beneath the sky.

The house prepared for him at Suma was simple. It stood near the shore, where wind blew strong and the cry of birds filled the air. No painted screens softened its walls. No rich carpets lay beneath his feet. Only bare rooms, plain mats, and the steady sound of waves.

At first the quiet pressed upon him like weight. In the capital, even sorrow had been wrapped in music and color. Here there was no distraction. The sea spoke endlessly, its voice rising and falling through day and night.

A few loyal attendants had followed him. They tried to create comfort from what little they had. Yet they too felt the change. They moved more slowly, spoke more softly. Even laughter seemed out of place.

In the early days of exile, Genji walked often along the shore. He would stand where waves met sand, watching the endless motion of water. The wind tugged at his sleeves. He thought of the capital—of Murasaki waiting within quiet rooms, of the young Emperor seated upon the throne, of the many lives still moving within those distant walls.

At night, when the moon rose over the sea, he felt a deep loneliness. He took up his flute and played softly. The sound carried over the water, thin yet clear. It seemed to him that the sea answered in its own low voice.

Letters passed between Suma and the capital. Murasaki wrote with steady hand, though her words carried hidden longing. She told him of daily matters, of the garden, of small events. She did not burden him with tears. Yet in each line he felt her quiet strength.

Genji replied with poems shaped by wind and salt air. He wrote of waves that never rest and of clouds that drift far from their home. Though separated, their bond did not weaken.

Still, exile is not gentle. Storms came to Suma with fierce force. Rain beat

against the roof. Wind roared through cracks in the walls. One night a great storm rose without warning. Thunder shook the sky. Waves crashed against the shore like wild beasts.

In that wild darkness, Genji felt fear not only for his life but for the meaning of his path. He wondered whether hidden guilt had brought him here—whether the secret of Fujitsubo's child, the sorrow of Yūgao, the jealousy of Rokujō, had woven this fate.

As lightning flashed, he dreamed a strange dream. In it he saw his late father, the former Emperor, standing calm and bright. The figure seemed to say that this exile was not the end but a turning. He would return, and his light would not fade.

When morning came, the storm had passed. The sea lay calmer, as if nothing had happened. Yet Genji felt changed. He no longer saw exile as mere punishment. It had become a trial through which he must pass.

Not long after, a messenger arrived from Akashi, a nearby region known for its refined households. A certain former governor, hearing of Genji's presence at Suma, expressed deep respect and invited him to visit. The governor's house, though distant from the capital, was known for culture and quiet elegance.

At first Genji hesitated. He did not wish to seem eager for distraction. Yet the steady isolation of Suma weighed heavily. At last he agreed to meet the governor.

When he traveled to Akashi, he found a house overlooking calm waters, sheltered from harsh wind. The former governor received him with humility and warmth. Within that house lived a young woman—the governor's daughter—raised with care though far from Court.

She had heard of Genji long before. To her, he was not only a noble man in exile, but a figure of legend. When she saw him, she was struck by both his beauty and the quiet sadness in his face.

In Akashi, life felt gentler than at Suma. Music sounded in the evenings. Poems were exchanged beneath clear sky. The daughter of the house, shy yet deeply moved, found her heart drawn toward him.

Genji, weary from isolation, felt comfort in her presence. She did not belong to the rival houses of the capital. She carried no history of jealousy or intrigue. Her

affection was simple and sincere.

Thus even in exile, fate placed another path before him.

On the shore between Suma and Akashi, beneath wide sky and shifting tide, the Shining One's life turned once more—away from loss and toward new beginning, though still shadowed by the trials he had yet to face.

## Part 17

The days in Akashi passed with quiet grace. The former governor treated Genji with deep respect, as though he were still at the height of favor. The house overlooked wide water that lay calmer than the rough shore of Suma. The air carried the scent of pine and salt, yet here the wind did not strike so harshly.

The governor's daughter, raised far from the capital, had grown in modest seclusion. She had been taught music and poetry with care. Though she had never walked the painted halls of Court, her manners were gentle and refined. When she first stood before Genji, her sleeves trembled slightly. She spoke little, yet her eyes revealed earnest feeling.

Genji sensed that her heart had long been prepared for him, even before she had seen his face. Her father, proud yet wise, had always believed that fate might bring to this distant shore a man worthy of her. Now he felt that belief fulfilled.

For Genji, weary from storm and loneliness, this welcome was like warm light after cold wind. He did not forget Murasaki. He did not forget the capital. Yet in this sheltered place he allowed himself to rest.

Evenings were filled with quiet music. The young woman would play softly upon her instrument, and Genji would answer with flute. Their melodies met across the room like gentle speech. Words were few, yet understanding grew.

Soon affection deepened into bond. The governor's daughter gave herself to him with simple trust. There was no rivalry here, no watching eyes from great houses. Only open sky and steady sea.

Yet exile cannot last forever.

Word came from the capital that winds of favor had shifted. The young Emperor,

guided by loyal counsel, now called Genji back. The charges against him had softened. Those who had plotted against him no longer held full power. His return was invited with honor.

When the message arrived, joy and sorrow rose together. Joy, for the road home lay open. Sorrow, for leaving Akashi meant parting from the quiet life that had sheltered him.

The governor's daughter heard the news in silence. She had known from the beginning that Genji belonged to a wider world. Yet the thought of his departure pierced her heart.

Before he left, it became known that she carried his child. This knowledge bound them in lasting thread. Genji felt both pride and concern. A daughter born far from Court, yet of his blood, would one day need place and protection.

He promised that when time was right, he would bring mother and child to the capital. He would not leave them forgotten in distant shore.

The day of departure came beneath clear sky. The sea lay calm, as though it too accepted the change. The governor bowed deeply. His daughter stood behind lowered screens, her tears hidden yet near.

Genji mounted his horse once more, turning toward the capital. His exile had tested him. It had shown him loneliness, storm, and quiet refuge. It had given him another child, another bond.

When at last he approached the city, the sight of its roofs and gates stirred old memory. Yet he returned not as the bright youth who had once moved lightly through pleasure. He returned as a man shaped by loss and trial.

Murasaki awaited him within his house. When they met again, her calm strength wrapped around him like gentle light. She had endured separation without complaint. Her welcome was not loud, but full of deep warmth.

Thus the Shining One came back from the shore, carrying within him the sound of waves and the lessons of wind. His path, though bright once more, would never again be simple.

For fate, having tested him in exile, now prepared further turns in the wide halls of the capital.

## Part 18

Genji's return to the capital was marked by quiet celebration. Though no loud display was made, those who had long admired him felt relief. His presence once more brightened the halls. The young Emperor showed him open favor, speaking with warmth and trust. Those who had once envied him now held their tongues, for the tide had turned.

Within his own house, joy was deeper. Murasaki received him not with dramatic tears, but with steady grace. She had waited through storm and rumor without losing faith. When they sat together again in the calm rooms of their residence, Genji felt that the long road from Suma had finally ended.

Yet life did not stand still. News soon arrived from Akashi: the daughter of the former governor had given birth to a girl. The child was healthy and fair. When Genji heard this, his heart stirred with pride. A daughter born beside the sea now belonged to his hidden circle.

Murasaki listened to this news in silence. Though she had long known of his bond at Akashi, the reality of a child brought new feeling. She did not accuse him. She did not turn cold. Instead, she asked gently about the girl. In this, her strength showed once more.

Genji understood her heart. He spoke honestly, explaining that the child must one day be brought to the capital and raised with care. A daughter of his blood could not remain forever in distant province.

Murasaki bowed her head slightly. She accepted what could not be changed. Yet within her calm face lay quiet sorrow. She herself had not borne him a child. The knowledge rested between them like soft shadow.

In time, arrangements were made. The young girl from Akashi was brought to the capital under careful escort. Her mother remained behind for a while, as it would not have been proper for her to enter Court life too quickly.

When the child first entered Genji's house, she was small and bright-eyed. Her hair was dark and soft. She did not yet know the meaning of rank or rivalry. To

her, the world was simply the room before her.

Murasaki received the child with kindness. Though her own heart carried pain, she did not let it show. She oversaw the girl's care with steady attention. In this act, she showed depth greater than jealousy.

Genji watched this scene with gratitude. He saw that the bond between himself and Murasaki had grown beyond the simple flame of youth. It now rested upon shared endurance.

Meanwhile, his own standing at Court rose higher. With the Emperor's trust, he was granted new honors. His residence expanded in beauty and space. Gardens were shaped with care. Pavilions were built where music and poetry could be shared.

Yet even as his outer life grew grander, his inner world remained complex. The child born in secret to Fujitsubo now sat upon the throne, wise and gentle. The daughter from Akashi played in his garden. His son Yūgiri grew into fine youth.

He stood at the center of many threads, each tied to different moments of love and loss.

One evening, as he walked beneath blossoming trees, he reflected upon the path that had led him here. From hidden houses and storm-torn shores to halls bright with music, his life had never followed straight line. Each turn had brought both joy and sorrow.

Murasaki joined him beneath the trees. The child from Akashi laughed nearby, chasing falling petals. The sound was light and clear.

Genji looked at Murasaki and felt deep gratitude. Without her steadiness, his life might have scattered like petals in wind.

Thus the Shining One stood once more at height of favor—surrounded by children, bound by secret, tempered by exile, and anchored by patient love.

Yet even in such fullness, he knew that no season lasts forever. For life, like blossoms, must one day fall.

And the story of his heart would continue to unfold in ways both bright and shadowed, as time moved forward through the ever-changing halls of the capital.

## Part 19

In the years that followed, Genji's power and honor grew greater than ever before. The Emperor, who alone knew the hidden truth of his birth, raised him to the highest rank. He was granted a new title and placed at the center of the realm. Those who had once whispered against him now bowed deeply.

A grand residence was built for him in the capital, larger and more beautiful than any he had known. Within its wide grounds stood several wings, each arranged with thought and care. Gardens were planted to reflect the changing seasons. Streams flowed gently through shaped banks. In spring, blossoms fell like pale rain. In autumn, red leaves glowed against the sky.

Murasaki took her place as chief lady of this great house. Though she had once been a shy child brought from another home, she now moved with quiet authority. She guided the women of the household and welcomed guests with calm grace. Her presence gave unity to the many parts of Genji's life.

The daughter from Akashi grew in beauty and promise. It was decided that she would be raised with highest care, for her birth, though from distant shore, carried noble blood. Plans were quietly formed for her future at Court.

Yūgiri, Genji's son by Aoi, also matured into fine young man. He showed talent in music and poetry, and his conduct pleased all who saw him. When Genji looked upon his children, he felt both pride and wonder at how far his life had turned.

Yet success brought its own strain. With greater power came greater responsibility. Rival houses watched carefully. Even those who praised him did so with guarded thought.

During this time, another young princess came into his life—Onna San no Miya, daughter of retired Emperor. She was very young, innocent, and raised in deep seclusion. Political ties led to her being given in marriage to Genji.

This new union unsettled the peace of his house. Murasaki, though outwardly composed, felt the sharp weight of it. She had shared years of growth and exile with him. Now another woman, younger and of high birth, entered as official wife.

Genji tried to balance these bonds. He did not wish to wound Murasaki, yet he

could not refuse the marriage without causing unrest. Onna San no Miya, for her part, was childlike and fragile. She did not understand the depth of feeling around her.

Tension, though not loud, spread quietly. Murasaki bore her sorrow with dignity, but her health began to weaken. Long years of hidden strain and quiet endurance took their toll.

Genji saw this and felt regret. He remembered her as the young girl he had taught to write beneath soft light. He remembered her waiting during exile. Now she seemed pale, her strength fading like late autumn leaves.

Though physicians were called and prayers offered, her body did not fully recover. She spoke gently of impermanence, of how even grand houses must one day empty.

Genji remained beside her, filled with grief at the thought of losing her. He understood too late that steady love, once wounded, cannot always be restored by promise.

Around them, the great residence still shone. Children laughed in its gardens. Music sounded from distant rooms. Yet in the heart of the house, quiet sorrow grew.

Thus, even at the height of power, the Shining One faced the truth that no rank can shield the heart from change.

And as another season turned in the capital, the petals that once fell in joy now seemed to fall in farewell.

## Part 20

Murasaki's illness deepened as the seasons moved on. At first it had seemed no more than passing weakness. She would rest for a few days and then rise again, pale but smiling. Yet as time passed, her strength did not return as before. She grew thin. Her voice, once soft and steady, now carried faint strain.

Genji remained close to her side. He set aside much of his public life, though he still fulfilled necessary duties. When he returned home, he went first to her

rooms. He would sit beside her and speak gently of small things—the garden, the children, the changing sky. He wished to hold her in the quiet circle they had built together.

Murasaki herself seemed calm. She did not speak of jealousy or blame. She did not reproach him for the new marriage that had unsettled her peace. Instead, she spoke often of impermanence. She said that life is like morning mist that fades when sun rises. Such words pierced Genji more deeply than anger would have done.

Onna San no Miya, still young and uncertain, felt the weight of this sorrow but did not fully grasp its depth. She tried to show respect, yet her presence alone reminded Murasaki of change she had not chosen.

The daughter from Akashi, now growing toward youth, came often to sit quietly near Murasaki's bed. The child loved her deeply, for Murasaki had guided her like true mother. Seeing them together, Genji felt both gratitude and pain.

One evening, as autumn wind stirred the garden, Murasaki asked to have the screens drawn back. She wished to see the moon. The pale light entered the room, resting upon her thin face. She looked at Genji and spoke softly.

She said that though sorrow had touched her life, she did not regret it. She had known love, even if it had not been free from shadow. She asked him to care well for the children and to guard his heart from careless wandering.

Genji could not answer at first. Tears, rarely shown in public, filled his eyes. He took her hand and pressed it gently. He promised that her memory would never fade from his life.

In the days that followed, her breath grew weaker. Priests were called to pray. Lamps burned through the night. Servants moved silently.

At last, beneath quiet sky, Murasaki's life slipped away. It was not sudden, but like a light slowly dimming. Her face, in its final stillness, seemed peaceful.

Grief fell heavily upon the great house. The rooms that had once been warmed by her presence now felt hollow. Genji walked through them as though lost. He had known loss before—Yūgao in lonely mansion, Aoi in childbirth—but this sorrow cut deeper. Murasaki had been shaped by his own hand, grown beside him,

endured exile and return. Her absence left space nothing could fill.

For long months he withdrew from pleasure. Music lay silent. He wore simple robes and spent hours in thought. He visited her grave and wrote poems of longing. The world praised him still, yet within he felt stripped of brightness.

Even the children sensed change. The daughter from Akashi wept openly. Yūgiri tried to show strength, though sorrow marked his face.

Time, however, does not pause even for deepest grief. The young Emperor ruled wisely. Political life continued. Onna San no Miya bore a child—a son whose birth would bring further complexity and future sorrow.

Genji, standing at height of power yet emptied within, began to see his own life as part of larger flow. Youth, beauty, passion, exile, triumph—all had passed through him like seasons.

Now, in later years, he turned his thoughts more often toward reflection than desire. The Shining One, once guided by restless heart, now walked more slowly, carrying memory like fading scent of blossoms long fallen.

And though his name would endure in halls of the capital, the bright light of his early days had softened into quiet glow, touched by love, loss, and the deep knowledge that nothing, however beautiful, remains unchanged.

## Part 21

After Murasaki's death, Genji no longer sought brightness in the way he once had. The great residence still stood in full beauty, its gardens shaped with care, its halls wide and shining. Yet to him, each room held echo. He would pass through corridors and remember her light step. He would hear music and recall the evenings when she had sat beside him in calm grace.

Onna San no Miya remained in the house, still young and uncertain. In time she gave birth to a son. The child was delicate, born under troubled signs. There were whispers about the boy's true father, for during Genji's absence another man—Kashiwagi, son of Tō no Chūjō—had come too near the princess. Though the truth was hidden, Genji sensed it.

The pain of this knowledge was sharp, yet he did not show anger. He had known secret bonds himself. He could not condemn another too harshly. Instead, he accepted the child and raised him within his house. The boy was named Kaoru.

Genji's heart, once fierce in desire, now held quieter understanding. He saw in Kaoru not betrayal alone, but the turning of fate. The world moves beyond the will of any single man.

Yūgiri, his eldest son, had grown into strong and thoughtful youth. He entered marriage and began to take place among the leading men of Court. The daughter from Akashi, carefully raised, was chosen to become consort to the Emperor. Through her, Genji's blood would continue within the line of rule.

Thus even as sorrow shadowed his private life, his house stood at center of power. Yet triumph no longer stirred him deeply. He had learned that power fades as surely as beauty.

In later years he turned often toward quiet reflection. He visited temples and listened to priests speak of impermanence. He thought of Utsusemi, whose firm refusal had preserved her name. He thought of Yūgao, whose fragile life had ended in fear. He thought of Aoi, proud and distant. He thought of Rokujō, whose jealousy had grown beyond her will. He thought most of Murasaki, shaped from childhood beside him.

Each memory carried both warmth and regret.

The seasons continued their steady turn. Blossoms opened and fell. Autumn wind moved through red leaves. Snow covered garden stones in winter. Genji walked more slowly now, his once dazzling youth softened into quiet dignity.

Those at Court still spoke of him with admiration. They remembered the shining prince of earlier days. Yet the man who now moved through the halls was deeper, marked by time.

One evening, as he sat alone watching the moon rise over the garden, he felt no sharp sorrow, no restless longing. Instead, he felt calm. Life had given him more than he could have imagined—love, children, exile, return, grief, honor. All of it had passed through him like light through moving cloud.

He understood at last that nothing remains fixed. Even the brightest life must

fade. Yet within fading lies meaning, for without change there can be no story.

The Shining One, once guided by passion and youth, now stood as figure shaped by all he had endured. Around him, the next generation—Yūgiri, the Emperor, Kaoru—began to carry forward the tale.

And so the years of Genji's life moved gently toward their close, not in loud storm, but in quiet understanding.

The blossoms fell, the moon rose, and the great house stood beneath changing sky—bearing witness to the passing of beauty and the deep truth that all things, however radiant, must one day become memory.

## Part 22

As Genji entered the later years of his life, the world around him seemed both familiar and distant. The great residence remained filled with movement. Children who had once run through its halls were now grown. Yūgiri carried himself with calm authority. The daughter from Akashi held honored place beside the Emperor. Even young Kaoru, though quiet and thoughtful, began to show signs of deep feeling and strange reserve.

Genji often watched these young lives with mixed thought. In them he saw continuation of his own story, yet also something beyond him. Their choices would not be his. Their joys and sorrows would follow paths he could not fully guide.

The capital itself had changed. New faces appeared at Court. Old rivals had faded. Those who once feared Genji's rise now spoke of him with respect that bordered on legend. His exile at Suma, once seen as fall from favor, had become part of noble tale.

Yet within his heart, memory moved more strongly than praise.

He would sit by the garden stream and recall the sound of waves at Suma. He would look at pale evening flowers and think of Yūgao. When autumn wind stirred red leaves, he remembered Murasaki's final wish to see the moon.

Even the distant figure of Fujitsubo, long withdrawn into prayer and now gone

from this world, remained with him in quiet corner of thought. The son born of their hidden bond ruled wisely. That secret, once heavy as stone, had softened into silent truth carried alone.

In these later days, Genji found less joy in outward display. Music still pleased him, but he preferred simple tones over bright flourish. Poetry came to him more slowly, yet with deeper feeling.

At times he wondered whether he should withdraw fully from worldly life, as others had done before him. The thought of taking vows and turning toward quiet devotion came and went like distant cloud. Yet something held him still within his house.

Perhaps it was the children. Perhaps it was memory. Perhaps it was the simple wish to remain witness as long as breath allowed.

One evening, as winter light faded early and the garden lay bare beneath pale sky, Genji walked alone along the covered path. The air was cold but still. No music sounded. No laughter broke the quiet.

He paused and looked back upon the residence he had shaped through so many years. It had seen love and jealousy, birth and death, exile and return. Within its walls had lived women whose names would never fade from his heart.

He felt neither sharp sorrow nor bright joy—only deep awareness of passing time.

The Shining One, whose beauty once seemed beyond measure, now carried lines of age upon his face. Yet in his eyes remained soft light, not of youth, but of understanding.

The moon rose slowly above the roof. Its light fell upon bare branches and silent stones. Genji stood watching, knowing that his own life, like the moon, would wane after fullness.

And so his story moved toward its quiet close—not with sudden end, but with gentle fading.

The halls would continue. The children would grow. The Emperor would rule. The next generation would love and suffer as he had done.

But for Genji himself, the bright arc of his life had traced its course across the

sky.

And beneath the calm light of evening, the Shining One stood as living memory of beauty, sorrow, and the passing of all things.

## Part 23

In the final stretch of his life, Genji's days grew quieter. Though he still held high rank and respect, he no longer sought to stand at the center of every gathering. When music sounded in distant halls, he listened from afar. When poetry was shared, he answered softly, without the bright flourish that had once drawn all eyes toward him.

Yūgiri now carried many duties of the house. He managed affairs with steady mind and deep respect for his father. At times he would seek Genji's counsel, sitting beside him in thoughtful talk. Genji, hearing his son's clear voice, felt both pride and calm relief. The burden of leadership was slowly passing to younger hands.

The daughter from Akashi, now firmly placed within the Emperor's household, continued to bring honor to her father's name. Through her, Genji's bloodline moved within the highest circle of rule. Yet this success did not stir pride in him as it might once have done. Instead, it seemed like one more wave in the wide sea of time.

Young Kaoru, quiet and reflective, often walked alone in the garden. There was something distant in the boy's eyes, as though he sensed truths not spoken. Genji sometimes wondered whether hidden bonds pass silently from one heart to another.

As winter deepened, Genji's health began to falter. It was not sudden illness, but gradual decline. He tired more easily. His steps slowed. Physicians came and went, offering gentle remedies, but age follows its own path.

One evening, feeling weakness upon him, he asked to be moved to a room overlooking the garden. The branches were bare, the sky pale with fading light. He lay resting upon cushions, his breath steady but shallow.

Servants moved quietly. Yūgiri remained near. Word was sent to those closest

to him.

In those last days, Genji spoke little of regret. He did not dwell on error or lost chance. Instead, he spoke of memory—of moonlit nights at Suma, of music in Akashi, of blossoms falling in spring.

He remembered Murasaki most of all. He asked that prayers continue for her spirit, as they had done each year. When he closed his eyes, it was her calm face that seemed nearest.

Those who attended him saw no fear in his manner. He had walked long road—through beauty, love, jealousy, exile, honor, and sorrow. Now he faced the final turning with quiet dignity.

On a soft morning, as pale light entered through parted screens, his breath grew faint. Yūgiri bowed low beside him. The room was still.

Without struggle, like a lamp gently extinguished at dawn, Genji's life came to its end.

The news spread through the capital with deep sadness. Though many had known him as figure of shining youth, they now mourned him as man shaped by long years.

The great residence fell silent. Gardens that had once echoed with music now held only wind in branches.

Thus ended the life of the Shining One.

Yet his story did not vanish. It lived on in the children he left behind, in the halls he built, and in the memories carried by those who had loved him.

Like blossoms that fall yet nourish soil for new growth, his life passed into story—bright, shadowed, and deeply human.

And beneath the ever-turning sky of the capital, time moved forward, carrying his name gently into memory.

## Part 24

After Genji's passing, the great residence did not lose all life at once. The halls still stood. The gardens still opened each spring. Yet those who walked there felt

clear change. The presence that had once bound every room together was gone.

Yūgiri took his father's place at the head of the house. He carried himself with steady grace, though grief remained near his heart. He did not seek to shine as Genji had done. Instead, he ruled his household with calm judgment. Those who served him felt both respect and quiet comfort.

Kaoru, still young yet already marked by deep thought, grew into manhood during this time. From childhood he had seemed different—gentler in manner, slower to speak, more inclined toward reflection than display. Some said he carried faint scent of incense about him always, as though the air itself followed him.

Kaoru did not know the truth of his birth. He believed himself son of Genji, and he honored that name with sincere devotion. Yet within him there often rose strange feeling of distance, as though he stood slightly apart from those around him.

At Court, another young man rose in charm and favor: Niou, grandson of the Emperor. Unlike Kaoru, Niou moved through life with bright ease. He laughed readily, spoke boldly, and drew admiration wherever he went. Where Kaoru hesitated, Niou advanced. Where Kaoru pondered, Niou acted.

The two men, though close in age, stood in contrast. Their bond was one of friendship mixed with quiet rivalry. Those who observed them saw in their difference reflection of earlier generation—one shaped by depth and sorrow, the other by brilliance and ease.

In time, their paths led them away from the center of the capital toward quieter region of Uji, where river flowed beneath mist and hills rose in gentle slope. There, in house set apart from Court's bright noise, lived daughters of a nobleman who had once withdrawn from public life.

The house at Uji stood near flowing water, shaded by tall trees. Its rooms were simple yet touched with refinement. Within lived two sisters, raised in modest seclusion. Their names were Oigimi and Nakanokimi.

When Kaoru first visited Uji, he felt strange pull toward its quiet air. The sound of river carried steady rhythm. The sisters, though not famed at Court, possessed

calm beauty shaped by isolation.

Kaoru, drawn by thoughtful nature, found himself moved deeply by Oigimi, the elder sister. She was reserved, gentle, and burdened by sense of responsibility. Having lost their father, she felt duty to guard her sister and preserve family name.

Niou, by contrast, was quickly captivated by Nakanokimi, whose manner was softer and more easily stirred. Where Kaoru moved slowly with care, Niou pursued with bright passion.

Thus the next chapter of story unfolded—not in the great halls once ruled by Genji, but beside quiet river at Uji.

Kaoru approached Oigimi with patience. He wrote poems filled with restrained longing. He spoke of shared solitude and quiet understanding. Yet Oigimi, though moved, feared burden of attachment. She worried that binding herself to Kaoru might harm her sister or disturb fragile peace of their house.

Niou did not hesitate so long. His visits grew bold. Nakanokimi, though at first shy, felt her heart drawn toward his warmth. Secret meetings took place beneath cover of night, much like those of earlier generation.

Kaoru sensed Niou's quicker steps and felt inner conflict. His nature pulled him toward depth and care, yet he feared losing Oigimi through his own hesitation.

The river at Uji flowed steadily, indifferent to human longing. Mist rose in early morning. Bells from distant temple echoed across water.

Oigimi's health, worn by anxiety and inner struggle, began to fail. She withdrew further, torn between desire and fear. Kaoru, seeing her weakness, felt growing sorrow. He had approached her with careful devotion, yet fate seemed again to slip beyond his grasp.

In this quiet place, far from shining halls of Genji's youth, love and loss began once more to weave their pattern.

And so the story, which had once followed the bright arc of the Shining One, now moved through gentler yet equally deep paths—carried forward by those who walked beneath the same ever-changing sky.

The quiet world of Uji grew heavy with feeling. Kaoru's visits became more frequent, yet each meeting with Oigimi left him both closer and farther away. She listened to his words with lowered eyes. Her voice was soft, but her heart seemed caught between longing and fear.

Oigimi loved her sister deeply. Since their father's death, she had taken upon herself the role of guardian. She feared that if she entered marriage and left the house, Nakanokimi would stand alone. She also feared the power of strong attachment. She had seen how women bound too tightly to love often suffered.

Kaoru, patient by nature, tried to reassure her. He promised that he would honor both sisters. He spoke of steady future, not sudden passion. Yet his careful manner, though sincere, sometimes seemed too slow for heart pressed by time.

Meanwhile Niou's visits to Nakanokimi grew bolder. His charm and youth brought warmth to the quiet house. Where Kaoru weighed each step, Niou moved with bright ease. Nakanokimi, touched by his lively presence, found herself drawn more quickly than she had expected.

Secret meetings took place at night, under sound of flowing river. Niou wrote poems filled with open longing. His words were not cautious. They burned with youthful flame.

Kaoru sensed change in the house. He could not accuse, yet he felt thread slipping from his hand. Oigimi, torn by conflict, withdrew further. Her body weakened under strain of inner struggle.

One cold season, her illness deepened. Physicians were called, but their efforts brought little change. Kaoru remained near, filled with regret. He wondered whether his own hesitation had cost him chance of happiness.

Oigimi, seeing his sorrow, spoke gently. She thanked him for his devotion. Yet she confessed that her heart could not bear weight of choice. She felt herself unfit for the world of bright halls and shifting bonds.

As snow fell lightly outside, Oigimi's breath grew faint. Kaoru held her hand, helpless before fate he could not guide. Like Yūgao in distant past, like Murasaki in later years, she slipped away quietly.

Her death struck Kaoru deeply. He felt not only grief but sense of unfinished bond. His love had been patient and restrained, yet it had not reached fulfillment.

Nakanokimi wept openly for her sister. Niou, though saddened, soon turned his attention more fully toward her. Their bond strengthened in shared loss.

Kaoru withdrew into reflection. He walked along the river at Uji, listening to water move over stone. He felt himself part of long chain of longing and loss that had marked his father's life before him.

In time, Nakanokimi and Niou's union was made firm. They left Uji for brighter life at Court. The quiet house grew emptier.

Yet the story did not end there.

In Uji remained another young woman—Ukifune, daughter born of different branch of family. She lived modestly, almost hidden. Kaoru encountered her by chance and saw in her faint echo of Oigimi's gentle form.

Drawn once more, he began to visit. Ukifune, shy and uncertain, felt pulled between Kaoru's deep devotion and Niou's bright charm, for Niou too soon noticed her.

Thus pattern repeated—care and flame, patience and haste, depth and display.

Ukifune, caught between two strong forces, felt herself torn. She feared bringing sorrow like that which had taken Oigimi. The pressure of divided affection weighed heavily upon her heart.

As river mist rose one evening, Ukifune faced despair. Believing no path free of pain lay before her, she cast herself into the flowing water.

Yet fate did not end her life there. She was found and saved, later choosing to take vows and withdraw from worldly bonds.

Kaoru, learning of her survival and retreat into religious life, felt final turning within his own heart. He saw clearly that desire, however gentle, often leads to suffering.

The river at Uji continued its steady flow, carrying fallen leaves and reflected moon alike.

And so the tale that began with the shining youth of Genji ended beside quiet waters, where love, longing, and renunciation shaped the lives of those who

followed him.

Beneath the same sky that had once shone over bright halls of the capital, the story came to rest—not in triumph, but in understanding of impermanence.

The river flowed on.

## Part 26

After Ukifune chose the path of vows and withdrew from the world, Kaoru felt a stillness settle over him. It was not peace, yet it was no longer sharp pain. He had followed love with care and restraint, yet each time it had slipped away—first through Oigimi's death, then through Ukifune's retreat. He began to see that longing itself may be part of the human path, not something to be fully satisfied.

Niou, on the other hand, continued to move through life with lighter step. His bond with Nakanokimi remained warm, though not without strain. Passion that burns bright also flickers. Yet Niou did not dwell on sorrow. His nature carried him forward.

The house at Uji, once filled with sisters' quiet voices, now stood in deeper silence. The river still flowed, reflecting sky and season. Those who passed by might not know what tears had fallen upon its banks.

Kaoru visited the temple where Ukifune now lived as nun. He did not seek to break her vows. He only wished to see from afar that she lived. When he glimpsed her through parted screen, dressed in plain robe, her face calm though touched by past sorrow, he felt both grief and release.

She had chosen a path beyond the web of rivalry and desire. In her renunciation lay strength he could not command.

Returning from Uji to the capital, Kaoru walked slowly. He felt weight of generations upon him—Genji's bright youth, Murasaki's patient love, the hidden truth of his own birth. He sensed that human life moves in cycles of longing, loss, and quiet acceptance.

In the capital, seasons turned as they always had. Blossoms opened in spring. Summer heat shimmered above rooftops. Autumn wind scattered red leaves.

Snow fell softly upon silent gardens.

Those who had known Genji now spoke of him as legend of past age. His residence, though still grand, carried air of memory. The young Emperor ruled with wisdom shaped partly by unseen bloodline. Yūgiri guided his own household. Children of next generation grew into their own stories.

Kaoru, more thoughtful than most, began to withdraw from bright display. He attended Court when duty required, but his heart leaned toward quiet reflection. He visited temples more often. He wrote poems not of flame but of fading light.

In one such poem, he spoke of river mist that hides distant shore. We see water moving before us, yet cannot grasp what lies beyond the bend. Life, he wrote, is like that river—flowing without pause, carrying each of us in turn.

Niou read this poem and smiled faintly. He did not share Kaoru's depth of solemn thought, yet he respected it.

Thus the tale that had begun with the Shining One's bright youth ended not in loud final act, but in gentle fading of longing into understanding.

The capital remained. The river at Uji flowed. The sea at Suma broke against shore. Houses rose and fell. Children were born and elders passed away.

Beauty shone, jealousy stirred, love bloomed, sorrow followed.

And through it all, time moved quietly forward.

So ends the story of Genji and those who followed him—woven of light and shadow, of passion and restraint, of exile and return, of blossom and fall.

Like the moon that waxes and wanes yet never disappears, the memory of their lives remains—softly shining in the ever-turning world.