

# The Tale of Genji



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF SHIKIBU MURASAKI

Raised by a respected scholar of poetry and Chinese classics, Murasaki Shikibu had an extremely unconventional upbringing. Though women at the time were forbidden from learning Chinese, Murasaki did—and proved an adept student. What's more, rather than remain with her mother and marry as a teen, Murasaki accompanied her father when he went to Echizen Province as a governor and didn't marry until 998 at age 25. She had one daughter before her husband's death two years later. Murasaki began writing *The Tale of Genji* around the time of her husband's death and continued to write chapters after she was sent to serve as a lady in waiting at the Empress Shōshi's court. There, she served until at least 1014 and possibly until 1025; the exact year of her death is unknown. During her time at court, she covertly taught the Empress Chinese writing, which, according to her diary entries and those of several female contemporaries, was considered extremely scandalous. Edward Seidensticker embarked upon translating Murasaki's work in the 1970s with the goal of condensing Arthur Waley's six-volume translation of *Genji*. An American, Seidensticker had learned Japanese during World War II and spent several decades after the war living in Japan. He's known for translating a number of seminal Japanese novels and his translations of modern Japanese works helped him earn the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1968. He died in 2007.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Heian period in Japan spanned from 794-1185 BCE and is considered the last division of classical Japanese history. It encompasses the height of the Japanese imperial court, which *Genji* describes in detail, and is also known for female authors' literary and poetic works. The Fujiwara clan held much of the power at court; most emperors' mothers were from the Fujiwara family and Murasaki Shikibu herself was a part of the family, as well as women in the novel such as Kokiden. Life at court was extremely far removed from the lives that lower-class Japanese people led. Adult women spent much of their lives hidden behind screens and blinds (though men could, in most cases, come behind screens as they saw fit) and wore layered robes with flowing sleeves. Their sleeves became a courting device, as it's often the first glimpse a man would get of a woman. Women's hair was also grown out as long as it could go. Individuals at court were expected to compose poetry for all manner of occasions and to communicate with each other. It was also considered rude to refer to people by name;

men were often referred to by rank, while women were known for colors they commonly wore or their relationships to men. This, coupled with the extremely complex grammatical structure of Heian period Japanese, means that the original text was nearly unreadable even just 100 years after it was written; people have been reading translations since the twelfth century.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

In addition to *The Tale of Genji*, Murasaki is also known for a volume of poetry (*Poetic Memoirs*) and copies of parts of her diary have also survived (*The Diary of Lady Murasaki*). In 1920, Kochi Doi and Annie Shepley Omori published a combined translation of Murasaki's diary and those of two other female poets in *Diaries of Court Ladies of Old Japan*. Though it's uncertain whether Murasaki was in direct contact with other contemporary writers, she disparages several female writers in her diary including Sei Shōnagon (*The Pillow Book*) and the poet Izumi Shikibu. Because of the focus on court intrigue, romance, and politics, *Genji* shares a number of broad similarities with books as varied as George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series, novels such as Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, and Shakespeare's political plays such as *Henry V* and *Richard III*. *The Tale of Genji* is commonly taught in Japanese schools in much the same way that *Beowulf* or Shakespeare plays are taught in schools in the west.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Tale of Genji
- **When Written:** 1000-1012 BCE
- **Where Written:** The Heian-kyō imperial court
- **When Published:** The original was published as 54 individual chapters as they were written. The English translation used in this LitChart was published in 1976.
- **Literary Period:** Classical Japanese (Heian)
- **Genre:** Tskuri-Monogatari (a Japanese genre that describes extended prose narratives that deal specifically with court intrigue and romance)
- **Setting:** Heian, Japan (now Kyoto), approximately 900-940 BCE
- **Climax:** Genji returns to court from exile
- **Antagonist:** Minister of the Right and Kokiden
- **Point of View:** Third person omniscient

### EXTRA CREDIT

**The Longest Hair.** Heian women were expected to grow their

hair out at least to the floor. One woman reportedly took this requirement to the extreme—her hair was seven meters long!

**But Who Is She?** Nobody knows who exactly Murasaki Shikibu was; the name she's known by now isn't her real name and instead, likely references her father and colors she commonly wore. This mystery has also led to questions of authorship, as some historians believe she only wrote some of the 54 total chapters in *Genji*. However, all of this is extremely difficult to prove one way or another given that the original text didn't survive and her readership often copied the original chapters to read, which may account for some of the syntax differences.



## PLOT SUMMARY

The Emperor's concubines are disgruntled to discover that he favors a woman known as the Lady of the Paulownia Court more than them. They find her presumptuous and torment her incessantly. This causes the lady to become very ill, though she soon gives birth to a baby boy: Genji. When the child is three, the Lady dies.

Genji is magnificent, even more so than his older half-brother Suzaku, the crown prince. This makes Suzaku's mother, Kokiden, very nervous. She complains so much that the Emperor decides to not name Genji a crown prince, making him a commoner instead. The Emperor, still grieving the Lady of the Paulownia Court, hears of a young woman named Fujitsubo who resembles his dead lover and summons her to court.

Fujitsubo is almost more perfect than the Paulownia Lady and because of the resemblance, Genji begins to fall in love with her. When Genji comes of age, his father arranges for him to marry the Minister of the Left's daughter, Aoi, instead of letting Suzaku marry her. This angers the Minister of the Right and Kokiden, though Genji is also unhappy in his marriage.

One evening Genji passes a house with white flowers on it, which he learns are called "evening faces." An intriguing young girl gives Genji's attendant a scented fan on which to place a flower. Later, Genji finds his interest piqued by the poem written on the fan. He begins corresponding with the Lady of the Evening Faces and spends little time with Aoi, which angers her. He also begins neglecting another lover, the Rokujō Lady. He eventually discovers that the Lady of the Evening Faces is a former lover of his brother-in-law, Tō no Chūjō. Genji begins visiting the lady in disguise and doesn't reveal to her who he is. In the fall, he decides to take her away to a deserted house for a night. Past midnight, Genji sees an apparition of a woman near his pillow and when he wakes, the Lady of the Evening Faces is dead.

In the spring, Genji begins suffering from malaria, so he goes to the mountains to see a renowned sage. Near the sage's cave is a house where a bishop lives with several women and children. In

the evening, Genji goes with his personal attendant Koremitsu to spy on the house. Inside, he sees a beautiful ten-year-old girl who resembles Fujitsubo named Murasaki. Genji begins to plan how he can take the child, but the bishop, who explains that Murasaki is Prince Hyōbu's daughter, won't allow Genji to have her. The nun, Murasaki's grandmother, won't allow it either. Genji unwillingly returns to the city and sees Aoi, but he spends most of his time thinking of Murasaki.

Fujitsubo becomes ill and leaves to spend time with her family. Genji takes the opportunity to visit her and forces Fujitsubo to have sex with him. Within three months, it's clear that she's pregnant. Fujitsubo is terrified of the Emperor discovering the paternity of her child. Genji worries too, but he's also caught up in fighting for custody of Murasaki. Eventually, Genji simply steals Murasaki and installs her in the palace. He gives Murasaki so many toys that she soon forgets she's been kidnapped.

Fujitsubo finally gives birth to Reizei in February. Later, when the child is moved to court, Genji is terrified to see that he looks just like him. He distracts himself by spending time with Murasaki and continues to neglect Aoi. Fujitsubo is named empress in the summer, which upsets Genji—he knows she'll be out of his reach now.

Genji attends several concerts and events in the spring. At one party, he discovers an open door and has sex with Oborozukiyo, one of Kokiden's sisters, though he doesn't realize this at the time. Not long after, the Minister of the Right throws a lavish party. Genji takes it upon himself to discover which of his daughters he slept with and finds Oborozukiyo.

Around this time, the Emperor hands the throne over to Suzaku, though he asks Genji to be Reizei's guardian. The Rokujō Lady finds that with the change in regime, Genji doesn't have much time for her. Because of this she decides to accompany her young daughter, Akikonomu, to her post as the high priestess of the Ise Shrine. The Rokujō Lady first decides to go to a parade but while she's there, Aoi and Aoi's footmen rudely pretend not to recognize her and then destroy her carriage.

Genji is angry when he finds about this later, but the Rokujō Lady is distraught. Aoi, who is pregnant, becomes very ill and is possessed by an evil spirit. Genji splits his time between his wife and the Rokujō Lady, who fears that her spirit is the one possessing Aoi. Aoi gives birth prematurely and remains very ill. Genji goes to her and the Rokujō Lady speaks to him through her body. Not long after, Aoi dies. Genji spends several weeks in seclusion and then bids his in-laws goodbye. The Minister of the Left is comforted, as he believes that Genji will have to come back to see his son by Aoi, Yūgiri.

After making his rounds at the palace, Genji decides that it's time to marry Murasaki. She feels betrayed, as she'd thought of Genji only as a father. Her ladies, however, are thrilled. Genji

dedicates himself to Murasaki and the Rokujō Lady becomes more and more despondent. He visits her once, but her mind is made up to go to Ise. She and Akikonomu leave in the summer.

In the fall, the Emperor's health takes a turn for the worse. He makes Suzaku promise to turn to Genji for advice and to care for Reizei and then dies suddenly. Fujitsubo has no interest in living at court with Kokiden now that she's all-powerful, so she returns home. Oborozukiyo rises in rank at the palace and continues to see Genji romantically. Genji tries to visit Fujitsubo and have sex with her again, but she fights him off. To punish her, Genji stops writing and ignores Reizei. Finally, Fujitsubo realizes she needs to make peace with Genji for the sake of their son.

Suzaku is aware that Genji is seeing Oborozukiyo, but he's unconcerned. The climate at court, however, is very hostile towards Genji and Fujitsubo. In December, to escape it, Fujitsubo announces that she's going to become a nun. The following fall, Oborozukiyo and Genji begin seeing each other nightly again. One night, a thunderstorm terrifies everyone, and in the morning, the Minister of the Right discovers Genji in bed with Oborozukiyo. He and Kokiden are both filled with rage.

Genji rekindles a relationship with two sisters, Reikeiden and the Lady of the Orange Blossoms, who had been close with his father. They're a lovely distraction from the scandal that erupts at court when news of Genji and Oborozukiyo gets out.

Genji visits his father's grave, sends a note to Reizei, and sends himself into exile in Suma. The entire time that Genji is gone, he considers bringing Murasaki with him. He keeps up correspondence with all the women in the city, including the Rokujō Lady. When Kokiden learns that Genji is still communicating with Suzaku, she puts a stop to the letters. Tō no Chūjō makes a short visit to Suma and one of Genji's attendants, Yoshikiyo, begins communicating with a former governor about the governor's daughter, the Akashi Lady.

Very suddenly in the spring, a storm blows up out of nowhere. It continues for days and when Genji learns that the city is also experiencing horrendous weather, he dedicates himself to prayer. In a dream, the Emperor comes to Genji and tells him to leave Suma. Hours later, a boat from the former governor arrives to tell Genji that he'd received signs from above to set sail in the storm. Genji asks if he can stay in Akashi with the former governor, and the governor agrees.

The Akashi coast is gorgeous and Genji is secretly interested in the Akashi Lady. Her father desperately wants her to begin a relationship with Genji and tempts him with tales of her musical talent. Genji and the lady begin to write to each other. Finally, the governor arranges for Genji to visit the lady's house. Genji forces himself on the lady and later, confesses his affair to Murasaki. He begins keeping journals and sketchbooks and continues to see the Akashi Lady. Suzaku has been ill since the storm and after the New Year, he decides to abdicate and call

Genji back to court. The Akashi Lady, now pregnant, is distraught.

Back in the city, Suzaku abdicates, Reizei becomes emperor, and Genji is made a minister. Genji starts to remodel a house for his "neglected favorites" and when he learns that the Akashi Lady gave birth to a daughter, he finds her an appropriate nurse. He sends several letters to his other lovers but doesn't see them much.

In the fall, Genji unknowingly travels to the Sumiyoshi shrine on the same day as the Akashi Lady, who arrives later. When she sees his elaborate offerings arranged everywhere, she feels inferior and leaves without seeing him. Akikonomu and the Rokujō Lady return to the city and soon, the Rokujō Lady becomes very ill. On her deathbed, she asks Genji to care for her daughter and not make her one of his lovers. Genji asks Fujitsubo about offering Akikonomu to Reizei as a possible bride, and she loves the idea, as the alternative is Prince Hyōbu's young daughter or Tō no Chūjō's daughter, the Kokiden girl. Suzaku is in love with Akikonomu and resents that Reizei should have her, however, and this creates a great deal of tension.

When it becomes clear that Prince Hyōbu won't have his way, a rivalry develops between the Kokiden girl and Akikonomu. Because Reizei loves art, he loves Akikonomu, who is a painter. Tō no Chūjō begins giving paintings to his daughter. At one point, Fujitsubo suggests an art critique contest. The women discuss the art and it seems a close call until Genji offers paintings from his time in Suma and Akashi. They're so beautiful that the whole room falls silent, and Akikonomu wins the contest. After this, Genji makes plans to withdraw from public affairs.



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Genji** – Genji is the protagonist of the novel and the Emperor's favorite son. However, because Genji's mother, the Lady of the Paulownia Court, is disliked by the Emperor's other concubines, the Emperor feels forced into making Genji a commoner. From the beginning, Genji is more perfect than any other children at court. He's adept at writing, singing, and playing the koto. As a young teen, Genji marries Aoi, who is four years older. The two never form a particularly strong bond, however, and Genji justifies his disappointment with her by focusing on all the ways in which Aoi continually brushes him off and is rude to him. In addition to Aoi, Genji maintains relationships with a number of other women throughout the novel. Though some of these follow more conventional trajectories, several of Genji's romances are extremely dysfunctional: after Genji's mother dies when he is a toddler, his father summons Fujitsubo because she looks like the Lady

of the Paulownia Court; Genji later falls in love with Fujitsubo, and when she's away from court because of an illness, he takes the opportunity to rape her. Not long after, Genji discovers a ten-year-old girl, Murasaki, who turns out to be Fujitsubo's niece. Because they also look very much alike, Genji kidnaps Murasaki and raises her to be his "perfect companion"—in other words, to look as much like his mother and as Fujitsubo as possible. As the novel progresses, Genji does come to an understanding that the women he has relationships with depend on him to help their status at court, which leads him to spend more time with some of his "neglected favorites." However, he still neglects many of his lovers, most notably the Rokujō Lady. When Genji's relationship with Oborozukiyo leads him to decide to go into exile, he spends much of his time away pining for Murasaki and painting the landscape. While in Akashi, the Akashi Lady bears his first daughter and third child. Eventually, Genji is allowed to return to court and through his children, goes on to become very powerful.

**Fujitsubo** – Fujitsubo is one of the Emperor's favorite lovers. She comes to court when Genji is seven or eight, having been summoned by the Emperor because she looks like the deceased Lady of the Paulownia Court. However, because she's even more beautiful and perfect than the Paulownia Lady, she doesn't suffer the abuse that her predecessor did. When Genji learns that Fujitsubo looks like his mother, he's very touched; yet as he grows up, he develops an unhealthy obsession with and attraction to her. The Emperor doesn't discourage this when Genji is younger, which leads Genji to pursue the relationship years later. When Fujitsubo goes home ill at one point, Genji rapes her. She becomes pregnant with Reizei, Genji's child, though she allows the Emperor to believe that the baby is his. This causes Fujitsubo a great deal of stress, as she fears that her power and position could be taken away at any minute were he to find out about Reizei's paternity. She also worries about Kokiden's wrath, especially when the Emperor names Fujitsubo empress not long before his death. In the aftermath of her rape, it's also somewhat unclear whether or not Fujitsubo does indeed nurse secret affection for Genji, as she often finds herself caught between trying to keep him as far away from her as possible and letting him know in small ways that she does have feelings for him. At one point, however, Genji makes Fujitsubo very ill by attempting to rape her a second time. After this, when Reizei is a small child, Fujitsubo makes the decision to remove herself by court life and from Genji's advances by becoming a nun. This proves an effective way to keep herself safe, and she and Genji are able to agree to maintain respectful contact for Reizei's sake. When Reizei takes the throne, Fujitsubo is unable to be treated as a real empress or a regent, but she's given the honors of a retired empress. Genji also gives her many of his paintings from his time in exile.

**The Rokujō Lady** – The Rokujō Lady is one of Genji's first

lovers, though she doesn't appear herself until midway through the novel. She had been a consort of the emperor before the Emperor and is therefore a number of years older than Genji (though this is never specified in this translation). Though Genji sees the Rokujō Lady with relative frequency, he's often neglectful of her. This makes the Rokujō Lady feel extremely jealous. Her jealousy is so great that her spirit actually leaves her body and kills two of Genji's other lovers: the Lady of the Evening Faces and Aoi, Genji's wife. Though the Rokujō Lady recognizes her jealousy, she does feel bad and ashamed of what her jealousy is capable of doing. The lady is also very concerned about what might happen if the truth of the ladies' deaths gets out; her primary concern is her reputation, which she believes would be irreparably damaged. (The narrator, however, insists that this isn't true.) To escape all of this, the Rokujō Lady decides to accompany her daughter Akikonomu to the Ise shrine, where the latter will act as high priestess. This is unprecedented, but the Rokujō Lady believes it's the only way to escape Genji and preserve her reputation. She returns from the shrine near the end of the novel when Reizei becomes emperor, though she promptly becomes ill and dies. On her deathbed, she asks for Genji to care for Akikonomu but specifies that she doesn't want him to take her daughter as a lover. This shows that the Rokujō Lady understands that becoming involved with Genji brings major risks with it, and she'd like to save her daughter from suffering at Genji's hands as she did.

**Murasaki** – Murasaki is Fujitsubo's niece. Because she looks so much like Fujitsubo, Genji falls immediately in love with her when he first meets her at age ten, and he decides he must raise her to be his perfect lover. As a child, Murasaki is described as being very immature for her age; her caregivers, the nun and her nurse, Shōnagon, believe that she's especially vulnerable after losing her mother. Murasaki initially finds Genji handsome and interesting, though she's scared and wary when he kidnaps her and takes her to the palace. She soon adjusts and becomes very close to Genji. He teaches her to write and to play music and spends as much time as he can with her. Before too long, she begins to get jealous when he spends time elsewhere. Several years later when Aoi dies, Genji observes his time of grieving and then "makes Murasaki a wife," eating the customary wedding sweets with her and raping her. He's perplexed and intrigued when she feels betrayed—she trusted him to act as her father and had no idea that he wanted a sexual relationship with her. Despite this sense of betrayal, Murasaki does seem to recognize that her wellbeing depends on keeping Genji happy. She remains his favorite lover through the end of the novel and she appears to feel genuine affection for him. Her jealous streak does continue, however, especially when she learns of the Akashi Lady and Genji's daughter with her. However, she's most upset that Genji had a lover with whom to amuse himself in exile, while she spent the years he was away in tears.

**Kokiden** – Kokiden is one of the Emperor's favorite lovers--she's possibly his wife, though it's not specified—and she's also one of Genji's most powerful adversaries. Despite the amount of power she holds for much of the novel, she's extremely insecure. As a result, Kokiden works very hard to make her adversaries' lives difficult, as when she's instrumental in driving the Lady of the Paulownia Court away. Though she is forced to accept that Genji is a beautiful and charming child, this also doesn't stop her from attempting to take him down every chance she gets. She successfully navigates her son, Suzaku, to the emperorship early in his life and chooses to not follow the Emperor into retirement. It's unclear what kind of a relationship Kokiden and the Emperor even had to begin with, as she often mocks him when he is sad or upset, especially following the Lady of the Paulownia Court's death. With Suzaku as emperor, Kokiden and her father, the Minister of the Right, effectively rule in his stead. When Kokiden learns that Genji is sneaking around and having sex with one of her younger sisters, Kokiden is instrumental in making it seem as though going into exile is Genji's only option. She also does her best to isolate Genji from anyone at court and specifically, to keep Suzaku from maintaining friendly contact with Genji. Finally, after several years, Suzaku stands up to his mother and calls Genji back to court. Kokiden becomes ill and slowly loses power, and she never fully recovers.

**Suzaku** – Suzaku is Genji's half-brother; his mother is Kokiden and they share a father, the Emperor. Suzaku is a few years older than Genji and not as well loved, though this doesn't impact the brothers' relationship: throughout their lives, they maintain a relatively close friendship. However, when Suzaku takes the throne at a very young age, he proves himself to be an ineffective ruler. Kokiden and his grandfather, the Minister of the Right, make it nearly impossible for Suzaku to do what he wants to do. They also make it so Suzaku can't follow through on his father's wishes, including that he adopt Reizei and listen to Genji's advice. He allows Genji to be sent into exile after Genji is discovered with Oborozukiyo, with whom Suzaku is also romantically involved. Suzaku and Genji write to each other during this time until Kokiden stops their correspondence. After a year or so, the Emperor visits Suzaku in a dream, reprimands him for not listening to Genji, and Suzaku contracts a painful eye condition. Within several months, Suzaku makes the decision to call Genji back from exile. Though the brothers' relationship remains relatively strong for a short period of time, it soon sours when Genji takes the young woman Akikonomu under his wing. Suzaku has been in love with Akikonomu since she was a young girl, and he resents Genji's decision to present her to Reizei rather than allow Suzaku to have her. When Akikonomu finally turns Suzaku down herself, Suzaku shifts his support to the Kokiden girl in the final art contest.

**Reizei** – Reizei is Genji and Fujitsubo's son, though he's

conceived through secret rape and therefore grows up believing that the Emperor is his father. Though the novel never notes that Reizei is told outright that Genji is his biological father, the way that Reizei talks and writes suggests that he is eventually made aware of this fact. Reizei is, like Genji, a beautiful baby and child, and he's skilled like his father in music and language. This is a major source of anxiety for Fujitsubo, as she fears that the resemblance will out the secret of Reizei's paternity. The Emperor is so taken with Reizei, he names him crown prince when he's still an infant and never appears to suspect that Reizei isn't his child. When Suzaku takes the throne and the Emperor dies, the conflict between Fujitsubo and Genji comes to a head and Genji begins to ignore Reizei as a way to punish Fujitsubo. However, he soon abandons this route, and the two agree to make peace for their child's sake. At age eleven, Reizei comes of age and becomes emperor. His grandfather, the Minister of the Left, acts as his regent. Reizei is a great art lover and so the two ladies competing for his hand, the Kokiden girl and Akikonomu, do whatever they can in order to have the most and the best art. Akikonomu has a special advantage, as she's a painter. She's also several years older than Reizei. When she wins the competition and presumably goes on to marry Reizei, the adults hope that her maturity will help her guide Reizei and solidify his position.

**The Emperor** – The Emperor is Genji's father and is the first emperor of the novel. It's unclear how old he is. The Emperor is a man who is more than willing to give himself over to emotion and love, as evidenced by his relationship with Genji's mother, the Lady of the Paulownia Court. He doesn't care that she doesn't have powerful relatives; he loves her anyway and wants to name Genji crown prince. However, after her death, the Emperor does decide to follow court customs and make decisions to keep other powerful women, namely Kokiden, happy: he names her son, Suzaku, crown prince, and decides to make Genji a commoner. The Emperor spends a great deal of time tutoring Genji and makes sure that all of his ceremonies are carried out with more pomp and circumstance than those of any of his other children. Though Genji is the Emperor's favorite and is often able to get away with all manner of shenanigans, however, the Emperor does take Genji to task for not pleasing his in-laws and for making women angry with him. This shows that the Emperor truly acts as a voice of reason for young Genji. Later, after the Emperor's sudden death, the Emperor is so upset with the way things are going at court that his spirit returns to the world to tell Genji to return to court and to tell Suzaku (now emperor himself) to bring Genji back.

**Minister of the Left** – The Minister of the Left is Aoi's father and Genji's father-in-law. He's described as being a kind, generous, and at times, more of a doddering old man than the powerful political figure he appears to be. He's also one of the Emperor's greatest allies, which is the primary reason the former chooses to marry Aoi to Genji instead of the Minister of

the Right's son, Suzaku. When Genji is still young the Minister of the Left takes it upon himself to arrange outings to pique Genji's interest and make sure he has reasons to visit his mansion in Sanjō, but he's generally unsuccessful. Despite the fact that Genji and Aoi are very unhappy in their marriage—and that Genji neglects her and the Minister of the Left as a result—the minister remains pleased with Genji as a son-in-law and when he is unhappy with Genji, he chooses not to voice this. When Aoi dies within days of giving birth to Genji's son Yugiri, the minister takes heart that Genji will surely continue to visit Sanjō for the sake of his son. He continues to support Genji through Genji's exile. When Genji returns and Reizei takes the throne, the Minister of the Left agrees to come out of retirement to act as a regent for the eleven-year-old ruler.

**Minister of the Right** – The Minister of the Right is one of the most powerful men at court, just one step below the Emperor in rank. Described as being extremely vindictive, he shares his daughter Kokiden's hunger for power. However, he's slightly more willing to be persuaded to do the right thing than Kokiden is. Early on, for instance, he allows one of his daughters to marry the Minister of the Left's son Tō no Chūjō, which helps to smooth things over for a while between the two. However, when his grandson Suzaku takes the throne, the Minister of the Right bands together with Kokiden to rule in Suzaku's stead. He keeps Suzaku from promoting Genji or anyone in the Minister of the Left's household. When he later discovers Genji in bed with his daughter Oborozukiyo, the Minister of the Right goes straight to Kokiden with incriminating evidence and the two conspire to send Genji into exile. Though they're successful, the minister dies when Genji is away and after his death, Genji and his allies are able to retake the throne and return to power.

**Oborozukiyo** – Oborozukiyo is one of Kokiden's younger sisters. Genji meets her after a party one night; he discovers her door open, rapes her, and tells her that it's useless to fight him as he always gets his way. She maintains a degree of power by initially keeping her name from Genji; he refers to her in the novel as “the lady of the misty moon” because of the imagery on a fan she gives him. At a party several weeks later, however, the two reconnect and Genji learns who she really is. The two conduct a relationship off and on, though it doesn't turn into a problem until Kokiden raises Oborozukiyo's rank and brings her to court for Suzaku, who is by this point emperor. After this, the Minister of the Right discovers Oborozukiyo and Genji in bed together, and this leads to Genji's exile. Though Oborozukiyo and Genji exchange notes throughout the exile, it's implied that she doesn't allow their sexual relationship to resume when he returns. However, she does remain fixated on Genji; Suzaku comments on this and reminds her that if she's to have a child with Genji, the baby would be a commoner and therefore, would give Oborozukiyo herself less political capital.

**Akikonomu** – Akikonomu is the Rokujō Lady's daughter; it's

never stated who her father is. When she's still a child, she's appointed to be the high priestess of the Ise shrine, a huge honor. Suzaku, as emperor, lets her go, despite the fact that he's in love with her. Genji is also interested in her, though he remains unable to pursue her throughout the novel. Akikonomu is thrilled to be able to take her mother with her to Ise, as such a thing is unprecedented. She and her mother return later in the novel and within weeks, the Rokujō Lady dies. However, on her deathbed, she asks that Genji take care of Akikonomu. Genji respects the Rokujō Lady's wishes to not take Akikonomu as a lover and instead, pretends he doesn't know that Suzaku loves her and offers her to Reizei. Because Akikonomu is a painter, she easily wins Reizei's heart and presumably, his hand as well.

**Aoi** – Aoi is Genji's wife and the only daughter of the Minister of the Left. She's several years older than Genji, which is one of the main reasons that the two never really get along. Genji doesn't help matters by never visiting, while Aoi is rude, dismissive, and disrespectful of Genji's time. Genji also notes that he sees Aoi as eternally older and more mature and refined than he is; in short, she's able to make him feel like a child because she's so haughty towards him. She also resents him for keeping so many other lovers, especially Murasaki. Aoi becomes pregnant after several years, though her pregnancy is unhappy and difficult: many believe that she's also possessed by malign spirits during her pregnancy. Later, the reader learns that the “malign spirit” is actually that of the Rokujō Lady, who is jealous that Genji is spending more time with his wife than with her. Just before Aoi gives birth, the Rokujō lady actually speaks to Genji through Aoi's body. Days after Aoi has Yugiri, she dies suddenly.

**Akashi Lady** – The Akashi Lady is a young woman who lives in Akashi with her mother and father, the former governor. Though the former governor has high hopes for his daughter's future, the Akashi Lady herself is far more realistic about her prospects: she's happy when she's able to simply lay eyes on Genji and she's uninterested in pushing him to become involved with her, as she doesn't feel worthy enough. She's not described as being particularly beautiful, though she is kind, sensitive, and a skilled koto player. The former governor bullies her into corresponding with Genji and the two do begin a romance. Not long before Genji is called out of exile, she becomes pregnant with Genji's only daughter. Her daughter is born in the early spring, and Genji promises to bring the Akashi Lady and his wife to the city. However, Genji never follows through on this. Though the Akashi Lady is hurt, it's also implied that she never truly trusted him to follow through on this in the first place.

**Lady of the Evening Faces** – The Lady of the Evening Faces is a mysterious woman whom Genji begins a romance with in the beginning of the novel. She's relatively young, very small, and does her best to obscure her true identity from Genji. Genji

likes her because she's yielding and childlike. In the fall, he takes her to an abandoned villa to continue spending time together. The Lady is very afraid. That night, the spirit of the Rokujō Lady kills the Lady of the Evening Faces. Because the Lady has no family that Genji knows of, Koremitsu takes her body to a small temple in the mountains to keep the story from getting out. Later, her maid, Ukon, tells Genji that the Lady of the Evening Faces used to be Tō no Chūjō's lover and even gave birth to his daughter. She had moved to the house where Genji met her to hide from Tō no Chūjō's family and was only nineteen when she died.

**The Former Governor** – The former governor is the Akashi Lady's father. He desperately wants his daughter to marry someone important in the city and instructs her to throw herself into the sea if he can't make this happen for her. He invites Genji to come stay with him in Akashi after a supernaturally strong storm ravages the coast and the city. During the storm, the former governor sets a boat out to find Genji, as someone came to him in a dream and told him to do so. The former governor does whatever he can to make Genji comfortable and lives a life that's only slightly less grand than Genji's life at court had been. Though he pushes the Akashi Lady towards Genji and is successful in getting them to start a relationship, he's somewhat unsure what to do after the relationship begins. He appears to believe Genji when Genji promises to bring the Akashi Lady and the baby to court.

**Prince Hyōbu** – Prince Hyōbu is Fujitsubo's brother and Murasaki's father. He desperately wants to be a part of court life and makes this happen first by sending Fujitsubo to court, despite their mother's insistence that she not go. Later, when Genji discovers that Prince Hyōbu is Murasaki's father, he learns that Hyōbu's other lovers would be very upset to have Murasaki around after her mother dies. Though Hyōbu is sad when Murasaki disappears, he makes no real effort to find her and when he presumably discovers years later that Genji had taken her, his lack of a reaction suggests he wasn't all that upset. Prince Hyōbu's desire for power leads him to try to cozy up with Kokiden and the Minister of the Right during Suzaku's rule, which Genji uses to turn Hyōbu into a villain when Reizei is emperor. To punish Hyōbu, Genji keeps him from bringing his daughter to court as a possible wife for Reizei.

**Tō no Chūjō** – Tō no Chūjō is Genji's brother in law. The two are very good friends, though they're also rivals. In their youth, their rivalry is based on women, specifically Naishi. Tō no Chūjō also struggles next to Genji, as Genji is often described as being far more perfect and a more accomplished dancer, singer, and poet. As mature adults, the two engage in the art competition between the palace women, as Tō no Chūjō wants his daughter, the Kokiden girl, to marry Reizei, while Genji wants Akikonomu to marry him. Throughout the novel, Tō no Chūjō is the man who most often spends time with Genji to reminisce about the past and play music. He even visits Genji while Genji is in exile.

**Shōnagon** – Shōnagon is Murasaki's nurse. Even as the nun and the bishop turn Genji away from pursuing Murasaki, Shōnagon shows herself to be far more willing to entertain Genji's interest in her young charge. When Genji decides to kidnap Murasaki, Shōnagon goes with her, reasoning that it's more important to remain loyal to Murasaki than it is to be loyal to Prince Hyōbu. Shōnagon spends much of her time worrying that Genji isn't truly serious about wanting to make Murasaki a wife someday, and she's thrilled when she discovers that Genji followed through, despite Murasaki's crushing sense of betrayal.

**The Bishop** – The bishop lives on the mountain near the sage and asks Genji to call on him when he realizes Genji is in the neighborhood. Though the bishop shows Genji a great deal of hospitality, he also is very firm in telling Genji that he absolutely cannot have control of Murasaki. However, after the nun dies, the bishop is either unable or unwilling to continue to protect Murasaki, though he remains in contact with Genji to keep up on Murasaki's whereabouts.

**Omyōbu** – Omyōbu is Fujitsubo's serving lady. The two are initially very close, but Omyōbu goes against Fujitsubo's wishes to arrange meetings between Fujitsubo and Genji. This results in Genji raping Fujitsubo and Fujitsubo becoming pregnant with Reizei. When Omyōbu remains sympathetic to Genji despite her lady's crushing anxiety about the whole thing, Fujitsubo begins to treat Omyōbu coldly. Later, Omyōbu feels responsible for the fact that Fujitsubo, Reizei, and Genji don't live quiet and happy lives.

**The Kokiden Girl** – The Kokiden girl is Tō no Chūjō's daughter with his wife, who is one of the Minister of the Right's daughters. She's about Reizei's age and as such is one of the several young women who become possible wives for him. Tō no Chūjō provides her with a number of copy paintings when his daughter's rivalry with Akikonomu for Reizei's affection begins to ramp up. However, the Kokiden girl's faction cannot bring forward art that's good enough to compete with Genji's paintings and drawings from his time in Suma and Akashi.

**Lady of the Orange Blossoms** – The Lady of the Orange Blossoms is Reikeiden's younger sister. Both used to be consorts of the Emperor, but everyone forgot them after the Emperor died. Genji begins visiting them and begins sexual relationships with both, and he notes several times that he's the only man who visits either woman. Later, he groups the Lady of the Orange Blossoms with his other “neglected favorites” and decides to move her into a remodeled mansion with other former lovers.

**Koremitsu** – Koremitsu is one of Genji's personal attendants, whom he often sends on missions to find information on Genji's various lovers or to carry messages when Genji is trying to woo women. Koremitsu finds much of this annoying. He does accompany Genji into exile and is instrumental in helping Genji

gather the information necessary to kidnap Murasaki.

**Naishi** – Naishi is an old woman who was one of the Emperor's lovers. At age sixty, she's described as experienced and refined, but also not afraid to ask for what she wants. As she and Genji woo each other and have sex, this causes Genji to come to think of her as being gaudy and tasteless. She also has a short-lived relationship with Tō no Chūjō.

**Princess Omiya** – Princess Omiya is Aoi's mother. She appears very little before Aoi's death and after her daughter dies, she spends most of her time grieving in bed. Princess Omiya and Genji exchange notes often when he comes to visit, and they always talk about the fact that they continue to grieve for Aoi.

**Princess Asagao** – Princess Asagao is one of Genji's cousins whom he corresponds with off and on. He's also somewhat romantically interested in her, though she cuts off contact with him after Suzaku becomes emperor. Genji is unable to ever woo her effectively, as she takes a priestess position that takes her far away from Genji's reach.

**Reikeiden** – Reikeiden used to be one of the Emperor's consorts, but her popularity plummets after the Emperor dies. Genji begins to visit her and her sister, the Lady of the Orange Blossoms. Reikeiden and Genji often reminisce about old times and their sexual relationship isn't as apparent or active as is Genji's with her sister.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**The Nun** – The nun is Murasaki's grandmother and is also a relative of the bishop. She cares for Murasaki and attempts to stop Genji from taking custody of her, but her death prevents her from being successful in keeping Genji away. Genji finds the nun somewhat imposing and scary.

**The Nurse** – The nurse is a young woman who, prior to Genji hiring her as a nurse for the Akashi Lady's daughter, had a child with someone who wasn't trustworthy. Genji is sexually attracted to her and while the nurse reciprocates, she does as she's told and goes to Akashi.

**Lady of the Paulownia Court** – The Lady of the Paulownia Court is Genji's mother. She's extremely beautiful and is the Emperor's favorite lover, but because she doesn't have any powerful female relatives, the other ladies at court torment her. Their jealousy makes her ill and she dies when Genji is three as a result.

**The Paulownia Lady's Mother** – The Paulownia Lady's Mother is Genji's grandmother. She expresses skepticism that the Emperor can actually protect Genji at court, given that the other ladies at court tormented her daughter, the Lady of the Paulownia Court, so much that she died.

**Yugiri** – Yugiri is Genji's son with Aoi. Because Aoi dies days after Yugiri's birth, Genji and the Minister of the Left think of Yugiri as a memento to remember Aoi by. He's a happy and

active young child, and Genji visits often to attend to his education.

**Yoshikiyo** – Yoshikiyo is one of Genji's attendants, and is also possibly in love with the Akashi Lady. He's instrumental in orchestrating Genji's move from Suma to Akashi and later, is jealous when he learns that the Akashi Lady is pregnant with Genji's baby.

**Ukon** – Ukon is the serving lady of the Lady of the Evening Faces. She attempts to stand up to Genji at various points but is unable to do so. After the Lady of the Evening Faces dies, Genji brings Ukon to the palace against her will.

**Lady of the Locust Shell** – The Lady of the Locust Shell is the governor of Iyo's wife. Though she and Genji have a short-lived romantic relationship, she eventually refuses to see him.

**Koremitsu's Mother** – Koremitsu's mother was one of Genji's childhood nurses. She implies that she loves Genji more than she loves her own children when Genji visits her in her old age.

**The Korean Emissary** -- The Korean Emissary visits Japan when Genji is a small child. Genji is already so obviously perfect that the emissary notes that Genji should be the father of the nation.

**Myōbu** – Myōbu is one of the Emperor's female messengers. She carries notes for him to the Paulownia Lady's mother.

**Prince Hotaru** – Prince Hotaru is one of Genji's brothers. At the end of the novel, Genji asks him to act as umpire in the art critique contest.

**The Sage** – The sage is a renowned healer who lives on a mountain outside of Kyoto. He cures Genji of malaria.

**The Governor of Iyo** – The governor of Iyo is an older man whose wife and daughter are lovers of Genji's.

**The Gosechi Dancer** The Gosechi Dancer is one of Genji's lovers while he's away in exile, though she never appears in person in the text. Genji effectively ends their relationship when he returns to the city.

## TERMS

**Koto** – A koto is a type of stringed instrument that has either seven or thirteen strings. The thirteen-string version is based off of a Chinese instrument called a zheng. Kotos are flat and sit either on the ground or on a table, and the strings are made of either silk or metal. In Genji's time, the instrument was popular primarily among the wealthy, as kotos are expensive to manufacture.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes

occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



## HEIAN COURT CULTURE

*The Tale of Genji* follows the titular character from the year before his birth to what most scholars believe is some point in his forties, a period thought

to be set in the early to mid tenth century. This era in Japan, known as the Heian period due to the capital city's move to Heian-kyō (now Kyoto), was generally a time of great cultural production in terms of poetry, music, and literature. There were also a number of customs and norms that guided court life in the Heian period—all of which help or trap Genji in turn, depending on how he feels about a given situation. In particular, *Genji* explores how the Heian period's reliance on poetry and writing conventions, the customs of court life, and the importance given to the role of the city itself help Genji decide how and why to act. The tale ultimately shows that Genji and others were working within a complex system that both helped and hindered their personal activities.

From the beginning, the novel suggests that what court culture dictates as right or correct is oftentimes in direct opposition to what individuals want to see happen. This happens even before Genji's birth: his mother, the Lady of the Paulownia Court, is the Emperor's favorite concubine, but because none of the other ladies at court like her, the Emperor feels unable to name Genji (who immediately becomes the Emperor's favorite son) crown prince upon his birth. Instead, he makes Genji a commoner and gives him important roles at the court in that capacity, as this course of action keeps other powerful individuals (namely, his wife Kokiden and her father, the Minister of the Right) happy. This shows that the Emperor's court is very much focused on keeping up appearances, something from which even the Emperor himself, ostensibly the most powerful person at court, isn't exempt.

Because the politics surrounding Genji's birth illustrate that no one, no matter how powerful, can always get their way at court, it's no surprise that Genji too is trapped by the norms of this society, much to his constant consternation. This leads Genji to conduct many of his romantic affairs in secret, as it's vital that he maintain his image as an important figure who practices proper conduct. Even though having sexual relationships with multiple women is expected of him, Genji often makes unwise decisions regarding the particular women he becomes involved with, which means he then must figure out appropriate ways to mitigate the damage.

One of the most politically egregious of Genji's sexual affairs is with Oborozukiyo, one of Kokiden's (who is, by then, a queen regent) younger sisters. When the Minister of the Right discovers the two in bed together, both he and Kokiden are extremely angry. To right the situation, Genji feels he has no

choice but to exile himself to Suma, a provincial town on the coast. When the subject of Genji's exile comes up, it's important to keep in mind that court life revolves around courtiers remaining in the city and being part of daily court functions, celebrations, and communications. The provinces, on the other hand, symbolize a life that's seen as disgustingly rustic and far removed from high society, so much so that being appointed a governor of a province is actually seen as a slight. Genji's choice to exile himself to Suma, then, illustrates one of the few ways someone can attempt to atone for making a fool of oneself at court. It's also important to keep in mind, however, that Genji is a beloved figure at court by everyone but the Minister of the Right and Kokiden, who effectively run the show at that time. Because of this, when Genji's brother (and Kokiden's son) Suzaku becomes emperor himself, he asks Genji to return early and resume his duties.

It's clear that even more important than keeping up appearances is actually maintaining strong relationships with those at court. This, in turn, is done primarily through writing and the exchange of poetry, which reinforces the role of text as something that can make or break one's reputation: Genji's poems are compelling enough to help him return to the capital, while in other cases, such as that of the Rokujō Lady, her decisive and forward poetry causes Genji to cast her aside and end their sexual relationship, thereby removing her from a position of power at court.

By maintaining these close relationships and using them to his advantage, Genji is able to rise to the highest position possible under the final emperor of the story, the Reizei Emperor. Taken together, this event and the constant focus on court intrigue paints a detailed picture of Heian court life and court culture for a modern reader.



## WOMEN, SEX, AND POWER

As a novel overwhelmingly concerned with Genji's numerous romantic pursuits, the relationship between men and women and the respective role

that each sex is supposed to play in Heian court culture is extremely important. Specifically, *The Tale of Genji* illustrates how women are disadvantaged and disempowered by the laws and customs of the world they live in, while also suggesting that by either subverting those customs or very carefully cultivating the affections of powerful men, women can find a modicum of control over their own lives.

Throughout most of the first half of the novel, women are shown in most cases to be at the mercy of the whims and desires of the men around them. This is especially true when it comes to sex and sexual relationships—and in particular, the ways in which it's considered appropriate for men and women to interact with each other. All of the women in *Genji* are expected to keep themselves hidden from men other than their fathers and husbands. They do this by conducting their lives

from behind screens or curtains and communicating with men primarily via written poetry passed back and forth with the help of messengers.

Despite the existence of the screens, however, women were actually not afforded much privacy and the screens did little to protect them from men's gazes. Men, especially Genji, consistently peek behind screens to catch glimpses of women they're attracted to, and the screens provide hidden places in which men can begin sexual relationships with women, often initiated through rape. Further, because the women are supposed to be hidden and often bear the blame for men's actions, the women that Genji forces to have sex with him often feel unable to call for help—doing so would damage Genji's reputation as well as their own, making giving into Genji's demands the lesser of the two evils. This overwhelmingly suggests that women live their lives constantly vulnerable to the often-unwanted advances of the men around them and are equally unable to escape the ensuing sexual relationships for fear of retaliation.

As distasteful and forceful as many of these relationships' beginnings are, the novel does suggest that having sexual relationships with the *right* men (regardless of the details of the relationship's origins) is actually a very effective way for women to become extremely powerful. This holds true in particular for Kokiden, the Emperor's wife. Through their sexual relationship, Kokiden is able to navigate herself into a position of immense power when her son with the Emperor, Suzaku, becomes emperor himself. So influential is Kokiden that she becomes largely for sending Genji into exile. The same thing plays out later in the case of Fujitsubo (one of the Emperor's favorite lovers) and her son, Reizei. Though Reizei is actually Genji's biological child, Fujitsubo and Genji keep this information secret from the Emperor. Because of this, Fujitsubo is able to maintain her powerful position and catapult her son to the emperorship at a very early age. This illustrates how a woman's sexual past can actually protect her from what would otherwise have the power to irreparably damage her reputation, assuming she can keep specific damning information (such as Reizei's paternity) out of the rumor mill.

In the case of the Akashi Lady, a young woman of humble (that is, country) birth, her sexual relationship with Genji is similarly implied to have the power to elevate her to the status of a court lady. After she gives birth to Genji's only daughter, who was foretold to one day be empress, Genji promises to bring her and the baby to court. This is a previously unheard-of promise and one that would solidify the Akashi Lady's standing as someone important and reasonably powerful, despite the disadvantage of being born and raised outside the city.

Of course, Genji never follows through with his promise in the novel, underscoring that even as women obtain power, they're still dependent on their relationships with men to gain and then hold onto that power. This suggests that even as women do

ascend to these powerful places in Heian society, they're only able to do by working within a system inherently stacked against them and by using the abuses they suffer to their advantages whenever possible.

However tenuous this power may have been at the time, it's also worth noting that in the long run, the Heian women ultimately came out on top: Murasaki Shikibu herself worked within the system she describes, and her work and that of other female writers has far outlasted and been significantly more influential than any literary works by their male contemporaries.



## THE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP

As *The Tale of Genji* follows multiple generations both within and outside of Genji's immediate family, the novel necessarily becomes acutely concerned with the relationships between parents and children. By exploring the ways in which children are allowed to form—or are kept from forming—relationships with their parents, as well as the innumerable instances in which Genji upends conventions guiding parent-child relationships, the novel ultimately suggests that parents are immensely powerful guiding forces in their children's lives. At the same time, it similarly illustrates how children have the power to help the adults in their lives simply by existing in the first place.

The cultural norms guiding the Heian courtiers dictate that children are extremely valuable for a number of reasons. In the cases of young Murasaki and Genji's son Yugiri, both children are described as "mementos" of their parents or other family members. Indeed, Genji is interested in ten-year-old Murasaki because she looks like her aunt Fujitsubo, whom Genji is in love with, while Genji's wife Aoi dies after giving birth to Yugiri. In this way, children provide a tangible way for their parents or guardians to remember lost loved ones or denied romances, which in turn makes the children themselves all the more valuable. Murasaki, for example, eventually grows up to be Genji's favorite lover and in doing so, is afforded a great deal of power. In other cases, children become the way by which women especially are able to gain political power or favor. Kokiden's power expands dramatically after her son, Suzaku, takes the throne, despite the fact that Suzaku himself is described as being a relatively ineffective and even sickly emperor. In other words, the merits—or lack thereof—of a given child often matter less than a parent's ability to use their child as a bargaining chip or as an in to take power for themselves.

The consequences, in turn, of losing out on a parent-child relationship are explored most fully through Genji himself, who loses his mother, the Lady of the Paulownia Court, when he's about three years old. When Genji is seven or eight, the Emperor brings a young Fujitsubo to court as a companion because she closely resembles his dead lover. Genji is allowed

behind Fujitsubo's curtains and screens as a boy and, because of his constant contact with her and her resemblance to his dead mother, he soon falls in love with her. Genji then spends a great deal of time attempting to secretly woo Fujitsubo (with only one "success," in which he rapes her and she becomes pregnant with his son Reizei); after later discovering ten-year-old Murasaki, Fujitsubo's niece, he spends even more time "training" Murasaki to grow up to be his ideal companion—that is, to be in every way possible, a memento of his mother and of Fujitsubo.

Genji's fixation on recreating an image of his mother suggests the intensity of the bond between children and their parents—though it's also important to note that Genji is well aware that what he's doing with both Fujitsubo and Murasaki is questionable, to say the least, and wouldn't go over well with those at court were it to get out. This is why all of his overtures to Fujitsubo happen in secret, and also why he keeps young Murasaki hidden from other ladies for several years until she moves into the role of his favorite lover; he knows they'd be upset to learn he brought a child to court for this purpose. Taken together, this suggests that the loss of one's mother is something that a child must try (and inevitably fail) to make up for throughout their life—in Genji's case, through objectively unhealthy means.

In short, while children hold the keys to their parents' happiness and successes in life, a parent's presence in a child's life also fundamentally influences how that child grows up to conceptualize sex, romance, and their relationships to their own offspring later. In this way, the instances in which Genji shows his own children that he cares for them and is willing to support their ascensions through the court ranks—all of which also helps him—reinforces the novel's assertion that the relationships between parents and children are mutually beneficial and can lead to great successes for all parties, even when those relationships are unconventional or even unhealthy.



### NATURE, POETRY, AND BEAUTY

Despite the courtiers' belief that life cannot be properly lived away from the city (and therefore, away from court life itself), the natural world still holds an extremely powerful place within Heian court culture. The natural world is considered to be endlessly beautiful and inspiring, and, as such, all the characters try constantly to emulate it. They do this by writing poetry using imagery pulled from nature or, in the case of court women, dressing in layered robes of different colors that when combined referenced seasonal events, such as **cherry blossoms** in the spring or grass poking through snow. With this, *The Tale of Genji* situates nature as something that is, at times, even *more* powerful than the court culture in which the characters live—the natural world is, in many ways, what makes the culture what it is in the first

place.

For the characters in *Genji*, the changing seasons overwhelmingly dictate their moods, customs, and oftentimes, when plot points happen within the narrative. As Genji goes about his romantic endeavors and engages in court escapades, this often means that for him and others, autumn is a melancholy time of reflection (and not incidentally is often when he's sad about unsuccessful romances), while spring is a time of renewed vigor and rebirth (and is, notably, the time of year when he first meets Murasaki). This shows how the seasons influence events on even a structural level within the text. In turn, this provides evidence for the power of nature to dictate more than just the characters' lives—this reverence for nature was a part of the world in which Murasaki Shikibu inhabited as well, and as such fundamentally influenced the way in which she crafted her narrative.

The way the characters use poetry also reinforces the power of nature in a way that goes beyond pure admiration. While plenty of their poems comment on the beauty of the natural world, this also allows the writers to use nature to speak for them and amplify different meanings. Little girls, for example, are referred to as "young grasses," while distraught lovers note their "sleeves dripping with sea water," or tears.

Further, natural imagery and the veiled meanings a poet conveys through it aren't the only things available for admiration and decoding in the case of written poetry. An individual's handwriting was, at that time, thought to signify nobility or good breeding, and Genji constantly remarks on the fine writing of his female companions—so much so that often a woman's handwriting has the power to either elevate Genji's opinion of her or cause him to justify neglecting her because of a poorly-written poem. In the same vein, the paper that one chooses to write a poem on, and the trappings with which it's then ferried to its recipient, also add to the effect. Genji often chooses moodier or subdued papers in sad times, while he chooses brightly colored and perfumed papers when he's wooing women. To complete the effect, he also sometimes sends his poems with branches or flowers that signify particular emotions, adding even more meaning to his poem and suggesting nature as a language unto itself.

It's also important to note that Genji is spoken of as being an exceptionally handsome and affecting person, something that's heightened even more by his proximity to the natural world. As Genji's journey takes him outside the city and into nature more often, his beauty regularly moves his companions to tears, particularly when it's placed in relation to the beauty of the natural world. In this way, the novel is able to signify Genji's personal exceptionalism by conflating his beauty with that of nature.

his is most apparent when Genji is exiled in Suma and Akashi, something that is considered capable of ending one's hopes of ever being important at court again. However, in Genji's case,

he manages to remain hopeful that he will be able to return to court in part because he devotes himself to studying, writing about, and painting the natural world, thereby accepting its power over his life. After Genji's return to court, his paintings from his time in exile move fellow courtiers to tears and help his team win an art contest that bestows a degree of political power upon the winner. Essentially, the novel suggests that when one interacts with the natural world in the proper ways as dictated by Heian beliefs and customs—that is, by writing poems, admiring nature, and accepting its power over humans—nature can, in return, bestow greatness and power upon those who admire and use it.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



### CHERRY BLOSSOMS

When Genji journeys to the mountain to see a renowned sage, he's thrilled to get to see the mountain cherry blossoms—they bloom later than those in the city and, according to all who see them, are far more beautiful. While Genji is on the mountain, the bishop speaks of the blossoms, which according to legend bloom once every three thousand years, as a symbol for Genji himself: like those mythical cherry blossoms, someone as perfect and as regal as Genji doesn't happen all that often. From then on, the novel often conflates Genji himself with the cherry blossoms or utilizes the blossoms at times of rebirth and renewal for Genji, just as the blooming cherry blossoms signal the arrival of spring and a new year.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *The Tale of Genji* published in 1976.

### The Paulownia Court Quotes

☞ In a certain reign there was a lady not of the first rank whom the emperor loved more than any of the others. The grand ladies with high ambitions thought her a presumptuous upstart, and lesser ladies were still more resentful.

**Related Characters:** Suzaku, Genji, The Emperor, Kokiden, Lady of the Paulownia Court

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 3

### Explanation and Analysis

The narrator begins her tale by offering a glimpse into the intense female rivalry that guides court culture, particularly when those rivalries develop over attention from men. The lady in question here is the Lady of the Paulownia Court, Genji's mother.

By opening the novel with this insight into the role that female rivalry plays in this world, the narrator is able to tell the reader from the very beginning that this is something that's extremely important and something to watch out for going forward. Further, by describing how every single lady in the Emperor's court harbors ill will towards the Lady of the Paulownia Court, it makes it clear that this tendency towards jealousy is something that's extremely widespread; it's not unique to a few particularly insecure, vindictive, or powerful women. Rather, jealousy guides how all the women in the novel move through their world and make decisions.

☞ Once more there was malicious talk; but the prince himself, as he grew up, was so superior of mien and disposition that few could find it in themselves to dislike him.

**Related Characters:** Lady of the Paulownia Court, The Emperor, Genji

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 6

### Explanation and Analysis

As Genji grows up and spends more time at court among his father's peers, everyone begins to understand that even though his mother may have been thought of as a "presumptuous upstart," Genji himself is somehow exceptional beyond belief. This sets it up very early that Genji is somehow exempt from familial ties that, for anyone else, would hinder him and make him less likeable. Essentially, Genji's exceptionalism helps him act alone and not have to rely quite so much on his powerful relatives to do well in life. However, it's also worth keeping in mind that the Emperor does choose to not name Genji crown prince, mostly because he fears that Genji wouldn't be able to hold the position due to not having powerful female relatives. This suggests that while Genji is absolutely exceptional and different from everyone else, he still has to work within the

system of Heian court culture and isn't entirely exempt from those norms.

☛ Because she was of such high birth (it may have been that people were imagining things) she seemed even more graceful and delicate than the other. No one could despise her for her inferior rank, and the emperor need not feel shy about showing his love for her.

**Related Characters:** Suzaku, Kokiden, The Emperor, Lady of the Paulownia Court, Fujitsubo, Genji

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 6

### Explanation and Analysis

When the Emperor brings Fujitsubo to court to replace the Lady of the Paulownia Court, she is so perfect (and, most importantly, more perfect than the Lady of the Paulownia Court) that others find themselves unable to hate her. This begins to show that Fujitsubo and Genji are, in some ways, very similar: both are exceptional and manage to escape the abuse that the Lady of the Paulownia court suffered, simply because they're somehow better than she was. However, this also begins to show that Fujitsubo is going to take over and become the Emperor's favorite concubine, thereby threatening Kokiden's role as the regent for the current crown prince, Suzaku. Because of this, the novel in some ways suggests that Fujitsubo is more prone than Genji to abuse simply because she's female, and female culture at court is rooted firmly in jealousy and rivalry between lovers.

## Evening Faces Quotes

☛ Fond of the child she has reared, a nurse tends to look upon him as a paragon even if he is a half-wit. How much prouder was the old woman, who somehow gained stature, who thought of herself as eminent in her own right for having been permitted to serve him.

**Related Characters:** Koremitsu's Mother, Genji

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 31

### Explanation and Analysis

As a young man, Genji goes to visit Koremitsu's mother, who

was one of his nurses when he was a child. That Genji is able to make Koremitsu's mother feel happier in her old age reinforces Genji's exceptional nature (Koremitsu's mother doesn't remark that her own children make her feel this way).

The fact that Genji can make Koremitsu's mother feel more important just because she served Genji at one point also shows from an early point in the novel that it's not just biological parents who act in parental roles; nurses, grandparents, and adoptive guardians can function in much the same way. Further and more importantly, the fact that Koremitsu's mother feels better about herself and more important because of her relationship to Genji shows that within the logic of the novel, one of the primary reasons to have children or have a relationship with children is because at some point in the future, they'll provide a parent capital of some sort. In other situations, children allow their parents to take political power or escape negative situations.

☛ She was of an extraordinarily gentle and quiet nature. Though there was a certain vagueness about her, and indeed an almost childlike quality, it was clear that she knew something about men. She did not appear to be of very good family. What was there about her, he asked himself over and over again, that so drew him to her?

**Related Characters:** Lady of the Evening Faces, Genji

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 41

### Explanation and Analysis

As Genji's relationship with the Lady of the Evening Faces progresses, he finds her to his liking in all ways except for her poor family connections. The fact that this is what Genji fixates on reinforces just how important it is for those at court, women especially, to cultivate and maintain strong relationships with powerful people. Were the Lady of the Evening Faces to tell Genji her name and take their relationship into a more public sphere, there would be a number of positive things she'd get by associating with him—possibly, even enough prestige to make up for not having powerful relatives herself, especially if she became pregnant with his child.

The way that Genji thinks about the Lady of the Evening Faces shows too that Genji doesn't always think of himself

as being in control of his emotions. He sees them as things that run away with him and that women are, to a degree, able to manipulate without consulting him first. This is the first hint that Genji has a habit of asking women to do emotional labor for him, rather than accepting responsibility for his own whims and desires and doing the work to either remedy the whims that are less socially acceptable or not engaging in them in the first place.

☝ The priests did not know who he was. They sensed something remarkable, however, and felt their eyes mist over.

**Related Characters:** Koremitsu, Lady of the Evening Faces, Genji

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 58

### Explanation and Analysis

When Genji begs Koremitsu to take him to see the Lady of the Evening Faces' body one last time, he goes in disguise. In spite of this, the priests there are still able to see that Genji is "remarkable." This again shows that Genji's exceptionalism is something that's very obvious even to an outside, uninformed observer and is therefore something that comes from someplace separate from Genji's parentage. This becomes yet more apparent later in the novel when Genji appears to have some control over the natural world and is able to converse with gods and spirits because of his exceptionalism. The fact that Genji moves the priests to tears also begins to strengthen the cultural connection between beauty and tears—individuals in the novel often will cry when faced with something extremely beautiful, and this is testament to the power that beauty holds culturally.

☝ The weak ones do have a power over us. The clear, forceful ones I can do without. I am weak and indecisive by nature myself, and a woman who is quiet and withdrawn and follows the wishes of a man even to the point of letting herself be used has much the greater appeal. A man can shape and mold her as he wishes, and becomes fonder of her all the while.

**Related Characters:** Genji (speaker), The Rokujō Lady, Aoi, Murasaki, Ukon, Lady of the Evening Faces

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 62-63

### Explanation and Analysis

Several weeks after the Lady of the Evening Faces dies, Genji and Ukon discuss the lady's life and her disposition. Genji notes that he loves women like her who are quiet and moldable. This suggests that Genji enjoys relationships most when he has a high degree of control over his lover. For him, it's less attractive when women advocate for themselves or stand up for what they want, as both Aoi and the Rokujō Lady do later. This also, however, sets the stage for Genji's discovery of Murasaki. Because Genji discovers her as a child and is successful in kidnapping her, he's able to truly mold her to be his perfect lover—and as a result, she does indeed become his favorite lover of all. This shows that Genji's penchant for weak, pliable women is actually something unhealthy, as he's willing to deploy this for his own gain to take advantage of attractive children.

### Lavender Quotes

☝ "It would be nice, I sometimes think, if you could be a little more wifely. I have been very ill, and I am hurt, but not really surprised, that you have not inquired after my health."

"Like the pain, perhaps, of awaiting a visitor who does not come?"

**Related Characters:** Aoi, Genji (speaker), Minister of the Left

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 83

### Explanation and Analysis

When Genji grudgingly agrees to visit Aoi after spending time away from the city, he suggests she could be "more wifely" and she replies that he could spend more time with her. When compared with some of Genji's other lovers who are his favorites, such as Murasaki, it's clear that Aoi's choice to consistently call Genji out on his neglect is one of the reasons he doesn't visit. While it's certainly understandable why Aoi would choose to do this, it's also worth keeping in mind that she's able to do this because she already has a number of powerful relatives, such as her father, the Minister of the Left, and doesn't necessarily need Genji in order to gain or maintain power. Essentially, she's

able to call him out because she doesn't rely on him to be her sole support when it comes to her reputation at court.

☝ She did not seek to hide her distress, and her efforts to turn him away delighted him even as they put him to shame. There was no one else quite like her. In that fact was his undoing: he would be less a prey to longing if he could find in her even a trace of the ordinary.

**Related Characters:** The Emperor, Omyōbu, Fujitsubo, Genji

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 86

### Explanation and Analysis

When Fujitsubo goes home sick, Genji makes up an excuse to visit her and rapes her. Fujitsubo's distress comes from the fact that she's been well aware since Genji's childhood that he's wanted to have sex with her, something that she understands could seriously damage her reputation were she to choose to go along with his wishes. She recognizes that while the Emperor is still alive, he's still the most powerful man at court and not even a relationship with Genji could save her from the rumor mill or from being cast out.

The way in which the narrator phrases this again takes power and responsibility away from Genji, as it suggests that he simply cannot control himself around a woman who is so uniquely beautiful. This implicitly casts the rape as being her fault, not Genji's, and reinforces again that women have very little power to dictate their lives, especially their sexual lives, in this world.

☝ The hand was very immature indeed, and yet it had strength, and character. It was very much like her grandmother's. A touch of the modern and it would not be at all unacceptable.

**Related Characters:** The Nun, Murasaki, Genji

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 104

### Explanation and Analysis

Not long after Genji kidnaps Murasaki, they begin calligraphy lessons and Genji marvels at Murasaki's childish handwriting. First of all, this assessment of her handwriting situates handwriting and poetry as elements that are extremely important to Heian court culture. In order to be a proper lady, Murasaki will have to learn how to write properly and compose poems that will help her keep Genji's attentions. Similarly, the fact that Genji has these thoughts about Murasaki's handwriting suggests that his love for her isn't exactly unconditional. This implies that if her handwriting had been truly terrible, he may actually have liked her less. This is supported by instances throughout the novel when a lady's poorly composed poem or questionable handwriting makes Genji rethink if he actually wants to be involved with her or not—and he usually settles on the latter.

☝ Murasaki was the perfect companion, a toy for him to play with. He could not have been so free and uninhibited with a daughter of his own. There are restraints upon paternal intimacy.

**Related Characters:** Ukon, Murasaki, Genji

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 106

### Explanation and Analysis

The narrator describes how Murasaki and Genji become very close as time goes on and specifically, how he conceptualizes the fact that she is one day going to become his lover. That Genji is even capable of recognizing that his relationship with Murasaki is different than it would be if she were his biological child suggests that Genji is absolutely aware that what he's doing isn't normal, healthy, or within the realm of a conventional parent-child relationship. In other words, he's well aware that he's violating cultural norms of how parents interact with their children and guide them towards adulthood; he just doesn't care and instead, finds it delightful and exciting. This also shows how Murasaki's yielding nature makes her even more susceptible to this manipulation and abuse, as this language very much mirrors the way that Genji described the kind of women he likes to Ukon.

## An Autumn Excursion Quotes

☝ To no Chujo was a handsome youth who carried himself well, but beside Genji he was like a nondescript mountain shrub beside a blossoming cherry.

**Related Characters:** Tō no Chūjō, Genji

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 107

### Explanation and Analysis

When Genji and Tō no Chūjō dance "Waves of the Blue Ocean" at the excursion to the Suzaku Palace, everyone in attendance is in agreement that Genji's performance far outshines Tō no Chūjō's. When the narrator begins to compare Genji to cherry blossoms, she begins to show that Genji himself is a symbol of life, rebirth, and renewal, something that Tō no Chūjō is simply not exceptional enough to take on. Further, by using this nature imagery to describe Genji and Tō no Chūjō, the narrator is also able to reinforce the importance of the natural world to both Heian culture and Japanese culture in general. It provides endless material with which to make these connections and allows someone who uses the language to create all sorts of meanings, depending on the natural elements one chooses to invoke.

☝ Fujitsubo was tormented by feelings of guilt and apprehension. Surely everyone who saw the child would guess the awful truth and damn her for it. People were always happy to seek out the smallest and most trivial of misdeeds.

**Related Characters:** The Emperor, Reizei, Fujitsubo, Genji

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 117

### Explanation and Analysis

After Reizei is born and looks shockingly like Genji, Fujitsubo spends most of her time worrying that someone is going to question whether Genji is the child's biological father. This shows how Fujitsubo is very much caught between the possibility of good things that could come because of her association to Reizei and bad things that could happen because of Reizei's paternity. Should the

secret remain secret, Fujitsubo would likely be able to use Reizei's perfection to grab a great deal of power for herself, given how closely he resembles his father and how perfect Genji is. However, if anyone discovers that Reizei isn't actually the Emperor's son, Fujitsubo would certainly be punished for it, despite the fact that Genji raped her to conceive Reizei in the first place.

☝ Naishi, though much discommoded, did not protest with great vehemence. There are those who do not dislike wrong rumors if they are about the right men.

**Related Characters:** The Emperor, Naishi, Genji

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 127

### Explanation and Analysis

When the Emperor discovers Genji and Naishi flirting, he believes that Genji and Naishi are actually having sex and Naishi doesn't correct him in this assumption. The fact that she does so because she believes that the rumors will help her illustrates that women's power comes entirely from the men they associate with. This further shows first how powerful Genji is; Naishi is clearly very tuned into how court life works, and it's reasonable to assume that she wouldn't allow this to stand if Genji weren't so influential and important. It's also worth keeping in mind that Genji never appears to suffer much except a bruised ego for the time he spends with Naishi, while she exits the story for the most part after Genji rejects her. This shows that while the rumors may certainly help women gain power, women also suffer way more than men do when those rumors backfire.

☝ In the Seventh Month, Fujitsubo was made empress [...] Making plans for his abdication, the emperor wanted to name Fujitsubo's son crown prince. The child had no strong backing, however [...] The emperor therefore wanted Fujitsubo in an unassailable position from which to promote her son's career.

**Related Characters:** Suzaku, The Emperor, Reizei, Fujitsubo, Genji

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 132

**Explanation and Analysis**

As the Emperor prepares to hand the crown over to Suzaku, he seeks to make Reizei's position as crown prince as secure as possible by making Fujitsubo an empress. This begins to demonstrate just how much political calculus goes into a person's position at court. Someone like the Emperor has the power to simply make Fujitsubo empress just because he wants to, and this indicates the ease with which he gets his way at court and can ensure that the successors he chooses will do well. Those who don't have the power to simply make their relatives a higher rank, however, have a much harder time working the system to their advantage. The fact that the Emperor feels the need to make Fujitsubo empress in particular shows that when it comes to these political calculations, women can in some ways hold a great deal of importance; it will be because of her new position that Reizei does well, not because of the Emperor or Genji.

**The Festival of the Cherry Blossoms Quotes**

☝ "It will do you no good. I am always allowed my way. Just be quiet, if you will, please." [...] Though of course upset, she evidently did not wish him to think her wanting in good manners.

**Related Characters:** Genji (speaker), Oborozukiyo

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 138

**Explanation and Analysis**

When Genji sneaks into Oborozukiyo's rooms and rapes her after a party, she at first attempts to yell for help. Genji, however, assures her that nobody will come to her. Genji's words in particular speak to just how entitled he is when it comes to women's hearts and bodies; he's never been successfully told "no" before, and he sees no reason why he should start to listen to women now. This reinforces the idea that he overwhelmingly views women as existing solely to please him, as Oborozukiyo does go on to do. When Oborozukiyo gives in to his advances because she wants Genji to think that she has good manners, it shows too that even if their relationship begins because he rapes her, it's still in her best interest to try to please him: he will be able to make her far more powerful if he finds her interesting enough and their relationship continues, and he also has the power to slander her reputation and ruin her chances of forming relationships with other men.

**Heartvine Quotes**

☝☝ Genji felt like a child thief. The role amused him and the affection he now felt for the girl seemed to reduce his earlier affection to the tiniest mote. A man's heart is a very strange amalgam indeed!

**Related Characters:** Fujitsubo, Aoi, Murasaki, Genji

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 182

**Explanation and Analysis**

As Genji prepares to marry Murasaki following Aoi's death, he delights in describing himself as a child thief. The fact that he finds this disturbing role so delightful shows that while he understands how the father-daughter relationship would function in normal circumstances, the loss of his mother as a child, his love for Fujitsubo, and Murasaki's resemblance to Fujitsubo has led him to view the relationship through an extremely warped lens. Notably, he feels this way about Murasaki because, being a child, she's especially malleable and he's able to truly make her into his ideal lover, something that he's unable to do with more mature women. This shows finally that what Genji truly wants in a relationship is power and control; he's entirely uninterested in women who push back at him and make life difficult.

☝☝ Though avoiding display, he took great pains with her initiation ceremonies. She found the solicitude, though remarkable, very distasteful. She had trusted him, she had quite entwined herself about him. It had been inexcusably careless of her.

**Related Characters:** Murasaki, Genji

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 184

**Explanation and Analysis**

This describes Murasaki's feelings about having sex with Genji for the first time, an experience that's probably more aptly categorized as rape given her thoughts on the matter. Her sense of betrayal shows that Genji truly abused the trusting parent-child relationship he developed with her over the years that she was in his care, and that makes this shift in their relationship even more difficult for her to

stomach. However, note that Murasaki blames her sense of betrayal mostly on herself—she believes that she was careless, not necessarily that Genji is in the wrong for abusing his role as a parent figure. This can be read as a symptom of a romantic and sexual culture in which women are made responsible both for turning away men's advances and keeping them happy. It warps Murasaki's thinking into allowing her to believe that she's the one in the wrong, even though she was taken advantage of by someone with much more power and status than she had.

☝ Memories had dimmed over the years, but now the astonishing resemblance did a little dispel his gloom. The dignity that quite put one to shame also reminded him of Murasaki. He could hardly think of them as two persons, and yet, perhaps because Fujitsubo had been so much in his thoughts over the years, there did after all seem to be a difference.

**Related Characters:** The Emperor, Lady of the Paulownia Court, Genji, Murasaki, Fujitsubo

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 204

### Explanation and Analysis

When Genji attempts to rape Fujitsubo a second time not long after the Emperor's death, he's shocked and in awe to see just how similar Fujitsubo and Murasaki are. This observation helps to explain why Genji has become so obsessed with Murasaki in the first place, even though she's a child: he has a hard time separating her and Fujitsubo and reminding himself that they're two individual people. In turn, Fujitsubo's resemblance to Genji's mother, the Lady of the Paulownia Court, ties all of this dysfunction back to the fact that Genji lost his mother as a toddler and was therefore deprived of a normal, healthy relationship with a mother figure. This shows that there are extreme consequences for losing one's mother like this, as Genji is fundamentally unable to appropriately interact with either Fujitsubo or Murasaki for the entirety of the novel.

☝ "Though I leave behind a world I cannot endure, My heart remains with him, still of that world. And will be muddied by it."

**Related Characters:** Akikonomu, The Rokujō Lady, Reizei,

Genji, Fujitsubo

**Page Number:** 219

### Explanation and Analysis

After Fujitsubo announces her plans to become a nun and cuts her hair, she offers this poem to Genji insisting that her heart will remain with her son Reizei, even as she leaves behind the world of courtiers for the world of religion. This shows that the bond between parent and child is extremely strong and, notably, is capable of crossing over from the religious world to the mortal world. This also holds true in the case of the Rokujō Lady and her daughter Akikonomu, who is appointed high priestess of the Ise shrine and is able to take her mother with her. In both cases, the women's connections to their children are something that they can leverage in combination with religion to find a way to extricate themselves from a downhill relationship with Genji.

## The Sacred Tree Quotes

☝ She was quite aware of Kokiden's feelings and knew that a world at the service of the other lady would be difficult to live in.

**Related Characters:** The Emperor, Suzaku, Minister of the Right, Kokiden, Fujitsubo

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 197

### Explanation and Analysis

Following the Emperor's death, Fujitsubo recognizes that while Suzaku is technically the one in charge, Kokiden and her father, the Minister of the Right, will be the ones actually running the government. The fact that Fujitsubo is scared of Kokiden in particular shows that the female jealousy and rivalry is truly what makes life difficult for the women of the novel, as women use their relative power only to take out their frustrations on other women, not on men. This also illustrates how dependent women like Fujitsubo are on the men they're having sex with to keep them safe and popular at court, as Fujitsubo only has to fear Kokiden because the Emperor is no longer there to protect her himself.

## Suma Quotes

☹☹ They lived precarious lives, completely dependent on Genji. So lonely indeed was their mansion that he could imagine the desolation awaiting it once he himself was gone...

**Related Characters:** The Emperor, Lady of the Orange Blossoms, Reikeiden, Genji

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 245

### Explanation and Analysis

Before leaving for exile in Suma, Genji makes one final visit to Reikeiden and the Lady of the Orange Blossoms, who were lovers of the Emperor and were forgotten after his death. The recognition that the ladies are entirely dependent on Genji's affections reinforces that for women in the novel, male affection and attention are the only currencies they really have access to in any great supply. Because these women have no children, their relationships with Genji are the only way they're able to remain connected to court life and continue to exist as ladies of the court rather than political outcasts.

## Akashi Quotes

☹☹ He thought that he could hardly be expected to visit her. She had her own ideas. She knew that rustic maidens should come running at a word from a city gentleman who happened to be briefly in the vicinity. No, she did not belong to his world, and she would only be inviting grief if she pretended that she did.

**Related Characters:** Lady of the Evening Faces, Murasaki, The Former Governor, Akashi Lady, Genji

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 299

### Explanation and Analysis

As the former governor attempts to orchestrate a relationship between his daughter and Genji, both the Akashi Lady and Genji feel unable to actually voice their attraction to each other due to their respective stations in life. For Genji, he recognizes that the Akashi Lady is too forward for his liking, given that he prefers women like Murasaki and the Lady of the Evening Faces who are more childlike and malleable. On the other hand, the Akashi Lady understands that being too forward with Genji would look

just as bad as the reticence she's showing him at this point, as then she'd look even more provincial than she already does—something that's also a mark against her, given how important the city is to court life. It's notable too that even as she recognizes at this early point that getting involved with Genji is a bad idea, she goes on to do just that. This shows that despite the fact that she clearly doesn't want to, he's too powerful to turn down and though he has the potential to bring heartbreak, he also has the power to make her life much better and easier.

## Channel Buoys Quotes

☹☹ Though she saw little of him, the lady was completely dependent on him; but she was not of the modern sort, given to outpourings of resentment. He knew that she would not make him uncomfortable. Long neglected, her house now wore a weirdly ruinous aspect.

**Related Characters:** Lady of the Evening Faces, Murasaki, Genji, Lady of the Orange Blossoms

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 327

### Explanation and Analysis

After Genji returns from exile, he neglects the Lady of the Orange Blossoms for the most part. Again, when the narrator notes that the Lady of the Orange Blossoms is completely dependent on Genji, it reminds the reader that women in the novel must compete for male attention and affection in order to get ahead in life if they don't already have children that can be used to gain power or prestige. The note that the Lady of the Orange Blossoms "won't make him uncomfortable" suggests that she's much like Murasaki or the Lady of the Evening Faces in that she's unwilling to stand up for herself in the face of Genji's neglect, which in turn makes it easier for Genji to neglect her. Finally, the mention that the house is "weirdly ruinous" shows how the natural world infiltrates the human-made world and helps give human events more meaning; the Lady of the Orange Blossoms exists in a similarly neglected state that her house does, with no real hope of doing any better by the end of the novel.

☹☹ Her soft voice, trailing off into silence, was very pleasing. He sighed, almost wishing it were not the case that each of his ladies had something to recommend her. It made for a most complicated life.

**Related Characters:** Genji, Lady of the Orange Blossoms

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 328

### Explanation and Analysis

During Genji's final visit with the Lady of the Orange Blossoms, Genji laments that all of his lovers have good qualities that keep him coming back for more, despite recognizing that having so many women makes his life difficult. Again, this allows Genji to think of his relationship to his lovers as something where he has little agency or responsibility, as he frames this as being the ladies' fault for attracting him to them in the first place. While this

particular passage is relatively mundane, this idea does balloon at various points throughout the novel and gives Genji the justification he desires for more serious neglect or blame towards his lovers. In doing this, the novel is able to reassert the difficult space that the novel's women find themselves in: while they do have the power to use letters and their bodies to attract the men around them—which can be a good thing for them—they're also liable to be punished for doing what they're supposed to do when the men in question no longer want to see them romantically. Then, the men are able to shift responsibility to the women more easily and make it their fault for not being able to continue the relationship.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## THE PAULOWNIA COURT

The Emperor's high-ranking ladies are upset when they discover that he favors a woman known as the Lady of the Paulownia Court more than any of them. They find the Paulownia Lady a "presumptuous upstart" and because of their abuse, the lady becomes ill. Not thinking about the consequences, the Emperor remains infatuated with her. His court discusses that they just watched this same kind of misguided infatuation destroy a Chinese emperor, but the Emperor pays no heed. Fortunately, the lady survives.

The Lady of the Paulownia Court soon has a son (Genji) who is a magnificent infant. The Emperor brings Genji to court the first chance he gets, and it's clear that the baby is superior to the Emperor's older son, Suzaku. This makes Kokiden, Suzaku's mother, nervous, as she fears that her son won't be named crown prince now that the Emperor has another son he likes better. Kokiden voices her complaints loudly and often, and the Emperor can't ignore her.

Though the Lady of the Paulownia Court remains the Emperor's favorite, other women torment her constantly. This is made worse by the fact that her chambers are the farthest away from the Emperor's, which means that the other ladies see them visiting each other every time they do so. After several ladies lock her in a gallery one evening, the Emperor moves her to the chambers closest to his, though this does little to stop the abuse.

When Genji turns three, the Emperor makes sure that the ceremony that gives Genji his first pair of pants is extremely elaborate. Though this angers people, many find that Genji is so perfect it's impossible to hate him. That summer, the Lady of the Paulownia Court asks to go home due to illness. The Emperor refuses until she's extremely ill, and after the two exchange parting poems, the lady slips off. The Emperor promptly sends a messenger to the lady's home and the messenger returns the next day with news that the lady died. In tears, the Emperor locks himself away, especially sad that there's no precedent that would allow him to keep Genji with him.

*That the narrative begins with these accounts of extremely toxic female rivalry makes it clear that female jealousy is something extremely powerful (given how sick it makes the Paulownia Lady) and, importantly, that this jealousy happens because women fight for men's attention. This suggests that male attention equals social currency.*



*The fact that Genji is so perfect from the outset suggests that one's own popularity with the court doesn't necessarily have any bearing on one's children. Because Genji is perfect despite his comparatively humble origins, this implies that he's perfect because of something else not connected directly to his parents.*



*Here, keep in mind that the other ladies are clearly willing to flirt with angering the Emperor in order to torment his favorite lover. This shows that in terms of female relationships in the novel, it's far more important for women to put other women down in a way that will allow them to make gains than it is to do anything else.*



*It's worth keeping in mind that at this time in Japanese history, men and women kept separate households (even if they were married) and women raised any children; this is why the Emperor can't keep Genji. When those who would like to hate Genji find that he's too perfect to do so, this foreshadows that he's going to be able to get away with all manner of shenanigans later; he's too perfect to face real consequences in most cases.*



The Paulownia Lady's mother is distraught as she begins to arrange the funeral. To attempt to make her feel better, the Emperor raises the Lady of the Paulownia Court's rank posthumously, which some people still resent. Kokiden spends the next several months mocking the Emperor's grief, which colors everything he does. Even when he's with Suzaku, he dwells on Genji. He sends the best nurses and serving women to Genji and one chilly autumn evening, he remembers how he and his love had played the koto for each other. He sends a messenger woman named Myōbu to the Paulownia Lady's mother's home.

When Myōbu reaches the house, she's shocked to see that it's covered in weeds. The Paulownia Lady's mother is barely able to greet Myōbu, who explains that the Emperor lives as though he's in a nightmare. He asks that she come to court with Genji so that the child doesn't have to live in "this house of tears," and suggests that they both think of Genji as a memento of his mother, the Paulownia Lady. Gathering herself, the lady's mother refuses the invitation for herself but says that Genji should go to live with his father.

As Myōbu gets up to leave, the Paulownia Lady's mother explains that the Lady of the Paulownia Court's father had desperately wanted the lady to go to court, even though she didn't have appropriate support. Myōbu explains that the Emperor believes their relationship may have been fated to be brief, and he's almost constantly in tears still. Myōbu leaves the house, gazes at the moon and the autumn grasses, and then composes a poem for the lady's mother about her grief. The lady's mother replies, using similar imagery, and sends a set of robes and hair combs for the Emperor.

Myōbu finds the Emperor waiting up for her in a beautiful garden. She tells him about her time with the Paulownia Lady's mother and passes him her letter and the mementos. The Emperor finds the lady's mother's poem a little odd, especially since it implies that the Emperor cannot protect Genji. He again loses himself in sorrow and thoughts of the dead Lady of the Paulownia Court. He sits outside for hours, composing sad poems, and finally goes to his chambers early in the morning. He refuses to eat for much of the next day. In private, Kokiden mocks the Emperor.

*The fact that Kokiden feels comfortable speaking so horribly about the Lady of the Paulownia Court even after her death, when the lady has no power, does two things. First, it suggests that Kokiden still sees Genji as a major threat and, second, it indicates that Kokiden feels assured of getting to keep her powerful position at court, no matter what happens. In turn, this shows that she has the Emperor's affections without question.*



*The state of one's landscaping becomes a motif that signifies either sadness or neglect or happiness and wealth. This shows how the natural world is very connected with the world of the humans that live in it, as it's possible to read human emotions in the state of the surrounding nature. Thinking of Genji as a memento of his mother opens up the possibility that he will have to struggle much like she did at court.*



*The Paulownia Lady's mother's discussion of her husband wanting their daughter to go to court begins to show that one's reputation isn't built only on the actions of the individual in question. Instead, one must have connections, relationships, and support at court in order to have a successful career there. This also shows that even being the Emperor's favorite isn't enough to succeed.*



*Grandparents play a very important role in the novel and often show themselves to be more protective of their grandchildren than the children's own parents. The Paulownia Lady's mother here finds that because she was on the outside of court life, she actually has more power to go against the Emperor's wishes. This suggests that there's some degree of power to be had by removing oneself from the system.*



After a time, Genji returns to live at the palace. In the spring, when it's time for the Emperor to name a crown prince, he desperately wants to name Genji but fears that the child would be destroyed like his mother was. He thus names Suzaku crown prince but continues to grieve for the next several years. Genji also grieves as he grows, though he continues to show that he's absolutely an exceptional child. Even Kokiden likes him. He learns the classics and to play the flute and the koto, and his musical talent is shocking.

When an embassy arrives from Korea, the Emperor disguises Genji as the son of the grand moderator and sends him to visit them. The Korean emissary is so taken with Genji that he quietly says that the child should be "father to the nation." The emissary's remarks about Genji leak, raising the suspicions of the Minister of the Right, Kokiden's father. He becomes very suspicious, though he soon discovers he has no need to be. The Emperor, recognizing that Genji's status as a crown prince would be extremely precarious without a powerful mother, decides to make him a commoner, where he could more easily have power. He also encourages Genji in his studies.

As the years pass, the Emperor struggles to forget the Lady of the Paulownia Court. He begins to summon women, but none of them resemble his dead love. Finally, he hears word of a young princess named Fujitsubo, who, according to another lady at court, closely resembles the Paulownia Lady. The Emperor summons her, but Fujitsubo's mother declines, fearing that Fujitsubo will suffer the same fate as the Paulownia Lady. When Fujitsubo's mother dies suddenly, however, her brother, Prince Hyōbu, agrees to send Fujitsubo. Her beauty and childlike shyness make the Emperor nearly forget his former love, and since she's almost more perfect than the Paulownia Lady, none of the other women resent her.

Because Genji sees the Emperor so often, it's difficult for Fujitsubo to keep herself hidden from him. He doesn't remember his mother, the Paulownia Lady, and so is very moved when he learns that Fujitsubo resembles her. He wants to be with her all the time. Kokiden is very upset about all of this. Genji is far more handsome than her own son, Suzaku, and this earns him the nickname "the shining one," while Fujitsubo becomes known as "the lady of the radiant sun."

*The Emperor's mental gymnastics here makes it clear that nobody, no matter how powerful, is exempt from court politics. Nobody can make decisions based only on what they want; there are other important people who must be appeased. The fact that the Emperor needs primarily to appease Kokiden is one way the novel shows that in some cases, women actually have a surprising amount of power.*



*Again, the Korean emissary's reaction to Genji tells the reader that regardless of Genji's status at court and the fact that others don't like him, there's something about him that's different and exceptional. Keep the emissary's words in mind going forward; Genji's children later rise to very high ranks. This tells the reader that utterances like this should be taken seriously, as they often foreshadow all manner of events.*



*Again, the way that Fujitsubo's mother argues successfully against sending her daughter to court makes it clear that women do have some degree of power, though their wishes can easily be overridden as soon as the women are no longer there to vocalize them. Fujitsubo begins to take on a similar role as Genji when the narrator mentions her perfection making her impossible to hate. This suggests that, like Genji, there's something innately exceptional about her that transcends court politics.*



*Women are expected to keep themselves hidden from men other than their husbands and fathers at this point in time (and presumably, their sons as well). The Emperor's blessing that allows Genji to see Fujitsubo indicates that he believes there's something very important about having some sort of connection between son and "mother."*



When Genji turns twelve, he goes through the initiation ceremonies to become an adult. The Emperor again makes sure that the festivities are equal to or better than those that Suzaku enjoyed. Though the Emperor is distraught when Genji's hair is cut in the adult fashion, Genji is so beautiful in adult dress that he nearly cries for joy. Soon, the Emperor and the Minister of the Left decide that the Minister's only daughter, Aoi, should be given to Genji rather than to Suzaku as a wife. This will give Genji the powerful female relatives he lacks. The Minister and the Emperor exchange gifts and Genji goes home with the Minister to observe the marriage ceremonies. Aoi, who is several years older, isn't thrilled with her young husband.

The Minister of the Right feels put out about all of this, but he offers the hand of his favorite daughter to one of the Minister of the Left's sons to help smooth things over. Genji spends most of his time with the Emperor and not much with Aoi in Sanjō, mostly because Genji is desperately in love with Fujitsubo. However, now that he's an adult, he's no longer allowed behind her curtains. He resents this rule, though he and Fujitsubo play music for each other through the curtains some evenings. The Minister of the Left is unconcerned with Genji's constant absence and takes it upon himself to arrange diversions sure to capture his interest.

## EVENING FACES

One evening, when Genji is coming home from a visit at Rokujō, he stops to see his old nurse, Koremitsu's mother. Genji finds the old woman's gate locked, so he waits in the street. He notices a house behind Koremitsu's mother's that appears to be full of intriguingly tall women. Genji also notices some beautiful white flowers climbing the wall and asks an attendant to pick one of the "evening faces" for him. As the attendant enters the gate, a young girl comes out of the house, hands the attendant a scented fan, and tells him to put the flower on it. Koremitsu comes outside, passes the fan to Genji, and explains that his mother lost the key to her gate.

Genji enters Koremitsu's mother's home, where she has two other children and their spouses visiting. The old woman greets Genji, explains that she wouldn't mind dying except for that she wouldn't be able to see him again, and then collapses crying. Genji comforts her and tells her that she needs to live so she can see him develop his career. Her children are ashamed of her emotionality, but Genji is touched. He apologizes for not being able to visit due to restrictions on his activities. His kindness brings her children to tears.

*The political calculus that goes into deciding that Genji should marry Aoi shows that women do, in some ways, have a great deal of power, even in the eyes of men. However, it's also worth keeping in mind that Aoi doesn't necessarily have power all by herself; her power is linked to her father and to her father's positive relationship with the Emperor. It's also interesting that Aoi's opinions about having to marry Genji are voiced. This could be a symptom of a female author who witnessed these kinds of arrangements; however, the fact that Aoi has to marry Genji anyway suggests her opinions matter very little.*



*Though the narrator doesn't elaborate on who's getting married here, this marriage is between Tō no Chūjō, Aoi's brother, and an unnamed daughter of the Minister of the Right. This marriage reinforces that marriage in general is seen more as a political tool than as something undertaken for reasons of love or affection, especially given that the narrator doesn't name the bride and groom—in other words, they as individuals don't matter; the political result matters.*



*Genji's interest in the natural world again shows that this world mimics or adds more meaning to the human events of the novel; the mystery of the "evening faces" flower and the fan that the girl gives the attendant heightens the mystery of the women in the house and specifically, the Lady of the Evening Faces (whom Genji soon begins an affair with).*



*The narrator shows how very important Genji is here by having Koremitsu's mother appear to care more about him than her own children; this shows that he's powerful enough to bend and twist parent-child bonds. When Genji is able to bring her children to tears, it again forces the reader to accept that Genji is exceptional and above all others.*



After Genji leaves, he examines the fan that holds the flower. He's intrigued by the poem on the fan, which is written in a cursive that implies "breeding and taste." He asks Koremitsu about the residents of the house. Though Koremitsu is annoyed, he asks around and discovers that an honorary vice-governor owns the house, and the woman is likely a sister of the vice-governor's wife. Genji thinks the woman could possibly be vulgar, but he's intrigued nonetheless. He disguises his handwriting and sends her a poem, asking her to come out and see who he is. The Lady of the Evening Faces had thought Genji was someone else but is nevertheless excited to receive his special poem. The messenger leaves, however, before the lady and her attendants can come up with an appropriate reply.

Though Genji is sad, he stops thinking about the Lady of the Evening Faces as soon as he reaches the house of the Rokujō Lady. In the morning, though, he passes by the house of the Lady of the Evening Faces again, burning with curiosity. Several days later, Koremitsu tells Genji that he figured out that a few months ago, someone came to live in the house mysteriously and without revealing her identity. He caught a glimpse of the lady and tells Genji that she's very beautiful. Genji instructs Koremitsu to investigate further and busies himself with problems he's having with two of his other lovers, the Governor of Iyo's daughter and his wife, the Lady of the Locust Shell.

The Governor of Iyo returns to the city and immediately visits Genji. Though Genji tries to maintain his composure, he feels bad for the governor. He's upset to learn that the governor wants to find his daughter a husband and take the Lady of the Locust Shell away, so he attempts to quietly arrange a meeting with them. The Lady of the Locust Shell refuses, though her daughter receives him happily. Genji spends little time with Aoi, which angers her, and after pushing through the Rokujō Lady's resistance, he stops seeing her so often. The lady herself is somewhat distraught and often waits up for him. She fears that others will discover their affair and gossip about their age difference.

One morning, as the Rokujō Lady hastily sends Genji away, he asks her serving lady to sit with him for a moment to admire the flowers on the veranda. In verse, he asks her why he feels compelled to return when he's also "seeking fresher blooms." She replies that regardless of his reasons, he seems to have little time for the "blossoms" at the Rokujō Lady's house.

*Genji's description of the writing on the fan offers the reader's first hint that one's handwriting can convey all manner of hidden meanings and add more intrigue to situations like this. The possibility that the woman is vulgar likely comes from her willingness to exchange fans with Genji in the first place, which implies that women can be punished for engaging in the very systems that men want them to—in other words, though Genji absolutely wants to have sex with her, she's thought of as being vulgar than for also expressing interest in that.*



*Remember that at this point in time it was rude to refer to someone by name—individuals were known by their role (as in the case of the Emperor) or where they lived, which is how the Rokujō Lady is named. Genji's desire to figure out the name of the Lady of the Evening Faces suggests that there's some power to be had by knowing someone's given name, whether or not one intends to ever use it.*



*Pay particular attention to how Genji's relationship with the Rokujō Lady is described: he "pushes through her resistance" (meaning that he likely rapes her), leaves her out cold, and yet she still wants to continue seeing Genji. This shows that regardless of how a sexual relationship begins, it's often in women's best interest to continue these relationships with men in order to help their own reputations and reap the benefits of having the attention of a powerful man.*



*The Rokujō Lady's serving lady delicately reprimands Genji for not appropriately spending time with the Lady here; this suggests that women can absolutely voice their concerns, though sometimes, they must do so through intermediaries.*



Koremitsu is unable to identify the Lady of the Evening Faces, though he does discover that she has some sort of connection to Tō no Chūjō, Genji's brother-in-law. Genji wonders if the lady is one of his former lovers. Koremitsu arranges for Genji to stop in at the lady's house the next time he visits Koremitsu's mother. For the visit, Genji disguises himself as a lower-class person and goes on foot, taking only Koremitsu and a page with him. After the visit, the lady attempts to have Genji followed to figure out who he is, but she's unsuccessful.

Genji decides he must continue seeing the Lady of the Evening Faces. He becomes almost obsessed with her, which surprises him—even though she's pleasantly childlike and quiet, her family isn't very good. He continues to disguise himself, which both scares her and makes her suspect that Genji is actually Koremitsu. Genji spends his days fretting about what he'll do if she decides to move without telling him, and he considers moving her himself so that he can see her more easily. As their relationship progresses, Genji thinks often about whether she is indeed Tō no Chūjō's former lover but doesn't question her.

In the fall, Genji wakes in the house of the Lady of the Evening Faces to the voices of common people. The women of her house are extremely embarrassed by Genji hearing this, though the lady herself isn't as perturbed. Simultaneously entranced by and annoyed with the noise, Genji admires his lover, who is wearing a cloak of lavender, and suggests that they go away to enjoy the rest of the night. The lady protests and doesn't want to go, so Genji simply lifts her into the carriage and takes her to a nearby villa with Ukon, her maid.

The villa is in disrepair, but Genji tries to speak of it as though it's all a grand adventure. The Lady of the Evening Faces is afraid. Ukon watches the caretaker energetically prepare the villa, which makes her suspect that her lady's lover might be Genji. Finally, around daybreak, the couple is shown to the prepared room. Genji dismisses the caretaker's suggestion to find women to serve them, as he doesn't want to be discovered. He tells the lady that he's going to show her a love that's dependable as that of river loons.

*It's telling here that Genji is able to figure out some things about the Lady of the Evening Faces while the lady herself is wholly unsuccessful in finding out anything about Genji. This is one way that the narrator is able to make it clear that even if the lady might benefit from associating with Genji, Genji still has the most power of the two and will come out on top regardless.*



*Genji's thoughts about the Lady of the Evening Faces' family reminds the reader that one's connections are even more important than how much fun someone is to be with, given that he finds his attraction to her surprising in light of her poor family background. Also note that Genji describes her as "childlike;" this shows that Genji very much likes women that he's able to control like children, as they allow him to feel powerful.*



*The lives of court officials like Genji are extremely far removed from the lives of real people like those Genji hears here. This is reinforced throughout the novel, as Genji often describes common folk in terms more fitting for animals than people. When Genji lifts the lady and takes her away, it shows that he's secure in his power and knows he can get away with this.*



*The fact that the villa is in disrepair tells the reader that there's something seriously wrong here, especially given that he later describes the grounds as being poorly maintained. Indeed, this scene forebodes the Lady's impending death. Genji's allusion to the river loons shows again how important the role of nature is.*



Genji wakes up around noon and looks around the grounds, which are neglected and overgrown. He and the Lady of the Evening Faces exchange poems telling each other they're beautiful, and Genji attempts to get the lady to tell him her real name. She refuses, but they continue to talk all day. Koremitsu discovers them but leaves them alone as the day goes on. In the evening, the lady becomes scared of the dark and the shadows, so Genji lies with her and has the caretaker bring lights. He thinks about the panic that must be gripping the palace with his absence and how upset the Rokujō Lady must be that he didn't visit last night. Compared to the Rokujō lady, who is jealous and demanding, Genji finds the Lady of the Evening Faces delightfully easy to be with.

Past midnight, Genji falls asleep and sees a beautiful woman suddenly appear by his pillow. The woman reprimands Genji for not visiting her and for spending time with a lady who is so poorly positioned in society. He wakes up to discover that the lights have gone out, and feels as though an evil being is in the room. He wakes Ukon and attempts to send her to fetch a light, but she's too afraid. He and Ukon notice the Lady of the Evening Faces bathed in sweat and trembling, so Genji sends a guard to find fire.

When Genji returns to the room, he takes the Lady of the Evening Faces in his arms but discovers that she's dead. A man arrives with a torch, and Genji moves screens to hide her body. As Genji motions the man to come forward, he fleetingly sees the woman from his dream by the lady's pillow. Genji asks the torchbearer to go find Koremitsu and a holy man. In the following silent hours, Genji listens to the wind and a strange birdcall. He wonders if Ukon is going to die of grief. Finally, when he hears a rooster crow, Genji feels as though he's being punished for a "guilty love" and he'll be known forever as a fool.

Koremitsu finally arrives and Genji explains what happened. Koremitsu almost cries but composes himself and insists that what happened must be kept secret. He decides that they should send the body of the Lady of the Evening Faces to a temple on the mountain. At daylight, Koremitsu wraps up the body and puts it in the carriage, forbidding Genji from accompanying it to the temple. Genji barely makes it back to the palace and sits alone in his chambers, feeling as though he should've gone with the lady's body and wondering if he's going to die.

*Notice that Genji refers to the Rokujō Lady as jealous and demanding; this suggests that the Rokujō Lady may have more power than Genji or the narrator has given her credit for up to this point, as the novel has already made it very clear that female jealousy is one of the most powerful things within the logic of the novel. The banter between the Lady of the Evening Faces and Genji shows that for Genji, this is all just a fun jaunt. The lady's fear, however, shows that this is far more terrifying for her and she's aware that she has little power in this relationship.*



*This apparition that reprimands Genji for not visiting makes it clear once again that female jealousy is so powerful, it can even cross over into the divine or spiritual realm to wreak havoc in the real world. The apparition's note specifically that the Lady of the Evening Faces is poorly positioned suggests that she's someone on the outs at court and therefore, isn't powerful.*



*Here, the apparition appearing next to the body of the Lady of the Evening Faces suggests that female jealousy even has the power to kill other women. Again, this implies that it's not in women's best interests to work together to improve their situations; rather, they must fight each other for men's affections as that's the only way for them to become powerful in Heian culture. The wind and the birdcall mimic and expand upon Genji's feelings of sadness and fear, again showing how the natural world mirrors real life.*



*Koremitsu's suggestion to send the body to the mountain is a way for him to avoid detection and keep this story from getting out. This shows that according to those making decisions, preserving Genji's reputation is far more important to them than trying to find the Lady of the Evening Faces' family or any of her friends who would want to deal with the funeral themselves.*



The only person Genji allows to visit him is Tō no Chūjō. Genji lies that he went to his old nurse's deathbed and then became sick. Tō no Chūjō tells Genji he doesn't believe it, and Genji says that he experienced an "unexpected defilement." This means that Genji is unable to receive visitors, though he receives Koremitsu immediately when he arrives later. He explains that the Lady of the Evening Faces is definitely dead and will have her funeral tomorrow, while Ukon is alive but distraught. He promises to keep what happened a secret and comforts Genji.

Genji insists that he must see the Lady of the Evening Faces one more time. Against his better judgment, Koremitsu takes Genji on horseback. The moon lights their way to the desolate temple, and upon arriving Genji takes the lady's hand and cries uncontrollably. The priests don't know who he is, but they sense he's someone remarkable and find themselves moved to tears. Genji attempts to convince Ukon to come back to the palace with him, but she refuses. On the ride home, Genji is so overcome with grief he falls off and is unable to get back on. Koremitsu prays and finally, Genji is able to complete the journey.

Genji spends the next three days sick in bed. The Emperor orders continuous prayers in various shrines and temples and fears that Genji might not live long. After a few days, Genji summons Ukon to the palace, and he and Koremitsu get her settled in. After twenty days, Genji's period of cleansing from his defilement is up and he's feeling better, so he returns to court. He's back to his old self by the end of the next month, though he still cries for seemingly no reason.

Some evenings, Genji summons Ukon to talk. He asks her once why the Lady of the Evening Faces insisted on keeping her name a secret, and Ukon explains that the lady figured out who Genji was and felt that he was belittling her by not sharing his name. Genji insists he couldn't tell her his name or the Emperor would find out and reprimand him for seeing her. Eventually, Ukon shares that the lady was indeed Tō no Chūjō's lover, but she ran away after his family scared her. She gave birth to his daughter, and Genji asks to have the girl brought to court. As Genji and Ukon admire the evening sky, Genji admits that he loves quiet, withdrawn, and obedient women, and Ukon cries that the lady was just that. Genji softly recites a poem about the lady's death.

*When Genji changes his story to say that he experienced "defilement"—likely a reference to some sort of spiritual debasement—it shows that he's very tuned into court life and knows how to get people to leave him alone. However, when he later receives Koremitsu, it shows that Genji is possibly not particularly concerned with keeping up appearances entirely, seeing as it wouldn't be proper for him to receive anyone after defilement.*



*Again, Genji's ability to move the priests to tears tells the reader that he's someone very special who exists outside the realm of other normal people. The fact that he appears to feel grief so strongly does show that as unhealthy as his relationships with women may be, he does still form emotional attachments to them. Essentially, he does on some level see them as more than mere playthings.*



*The novel very much implies that the Emperor is ordering prayers because he believes Genji has suffered defilement and is ill because of it. This shows that Genji can, at the very least, fool his father into buying his excuses that don't do much for his peers who are more aware of the way he interacts with women.*



*Here, Genji essentially tells Ukon that he respects his relationship with his father far more than he respects any of his other relationships. It's also worth noting that though Genji asks that the lady's daughter come to court, she's never mentioned again—suggesting that however apparent his grief, his ultimate views on women may still be primarily as inconsequential playthings.*



## LAVENDER

Genji starts to suffer from repeated malaria attacks in the spring. None of the religious services help at all, but he hears about a sage in the northern hills who is an accomplished healer. Because the sage refuses to come to Genji, Genji decides to go to him. He takes only a few attendants and on the way they all admire the mountain **cherry blossoms**, which bloom later than those in the city. Though Genji doesn't reveal his identity, the sage knows immediately that Genji is very important. He prepares medicines and performs incantations as Genji looks down a path to a house that's nicer than those around it.

The sage explains that a bishop lives there. Genji believes he's not dressed well enough to call on the bishop, so he insists that his presence be kept a secret. The sage also mentions that the bishop has a woman living with him, though her identity and relationship to him are a mystery. Genji sends his attendants to investigate and they return with news that there are several women of varying ages and children living there as well.

Genji suffers another malaria attack, so the sage tells him he needs to think of other things. His attendants follow him up the mountain to admire the landscape and tell him stories of mountains and the Akashi coast, where a former governor lives with his wife and daughter. The daughter (the Akashi Lady) is, according to the attendants, pretty and pleasant and her father apparently has grand plans for her. They joke about Genji's affinity for interesting women and he quite enjoys the diversion.

The sage asks that Genji stay the night as he believes Genji has been possessed by a hostile power. That evening, Genji and Koremitsu go back down to the bishop's house. They stand at the fence and watch a nun struggling to read, flanked on either side by beautiful young women. Children run through and Genji takes notice of one crying girl who he can tell will be a great beauty when she grows up. The girl (Murasaki) sobs that one of her playmates let her baby sparrows loose. Her nurse, Shōnagon, comforts her, but the nun insists it's a sin to cage a bird. As Genji watches, he realizes that the young girl resembles Fujitsubo. He nearly cries.

*When people like the sage and the priests at the temple in the last chapter can tell that Genji is important and special without even knowing who he is, it again shows that there's something about him that signifies his exceptionalism. When the narration makes a note of the cherry blossoms, it suggests that Genji is experiencing a period of rebirth after the death of the Lady of the Evening Faces: the blossoms are a symbol of spring and of new life.*



*Genji's insistence that he's not dressed well enough to see the bishop begins to paint a picture of what proper courtly behavior looks like and, more specifically, it shows that what one wears is extremely important. In turn, this also offers a clue as to how low-level the sage is, as Genji's dress is presumably fine to be around him.*



*The way that Genji's attendants joke with him about this woman (who is the Akashi Lady) suggests that it's no secret that Genji has relationships with a number of women at one time and is always looking to add to his string of lovers. This also offers the possibility that his attempts to hide his lovers aren't particularly successful.*



*Though the novel never says in so many words, the nun acts as Murasaki's grandmother. Murasaki's escaped baby sparrows act as a symbol for her, as Genji quickly decides he needs to take the child for his own; this symbolism and the fact that he goes on to do just that shows that Genji isn't particularly interested in reading signs like this when they have to do with women he wants.*



The nun calls Murasaki to her and wonders what will happen to the girl, as she's immature for her age. The girl's mother apparently died, and the nun and Shōnagon exchange poems hoping that the "tender grasses" will be properly nurtured. The bishop interrupts and tells the women that Genji is around. The nun lowers the blinds. Genji is thrilled with his discovery of Murasaki. He begins to make plans to somehow take the child to the palace.

That night, as Genji sleeps, a messenger comes for Koremitsu and begs him to have Genji visit the bishop's house. The bishop himself also comes to ask Genji to visit and finally, Genji agrees. He finds the simple house and garden very charming. The bishop talks at length about his spiritual wellbeing. Finally, Genji seizes his chance to ask about Murasaki. He learns that the bishop is her uncle and her father is Prince Hyōbu, which explains her resemblance to Fujitsubo—Prince Hyōbu is Fujitsubo's brother. Genji admits it's a strange and forward request but asks to take responsibility for Murasaki. He notes that his motives aren't improper. The bishop insists that Murasaki is too young, says the matter must be taken up with the nun, and frostily excuses himself to pray.

Feeling unwell, Genji watches a spring shower pass overhead and listens to the bishop's intonations. He can hear the women in the house's inner rooms and behind screens. He pushes aside a panel a few inches and rustles his fan, which arouses the curiosity of two women. He asks them to pass a poem onto the nun about being enchanted by "the fresh young grasses." They obey, and the nun finds his note shocking. She believes that Genji thinks Murasaki is much older than ten and responds with a poem rebuking him. They pass several more poems and finally, the nun agrees to speak to Genji in person.

Genji finds the nun intimidating but says that he feels a kinship with Murasaki, having lost his own mother very young, and that he wishes to adopt her. The nun assures him that she's too young and uneducated. Though Genji argues, the nun finds the whole thing outrageous. At dawn, Genji sends a poem to the bishop revealing how upset he is that the bishop won't hand over Murasaki, but the bishop's poem in reply says that he and his house are happy and firm in their decision. In the morning, Genji receives a summons from the Emperor and eats breakfast with the bishop. He promises in parting to send his friends up the mountain to see the mountain **cherry blossoms**. He, the sage, and the bishop exchange parting gifts.

*Remember that characters earlier have worried about how women will fare in life without powerful female relatives; this plays out here with Murasaki, and shows that even women who aren't yet at court must worry about how they appear to the outside world in terms of connections and relationships.*



*From what the reader knows of Genji thus far, it's fairly clear that Genji is lying and his motives for wanting Murasaki are absolutely improper. Again, this continues to show that Genji is suffering major damage from the loss of his mother and is attempting to fill her place with women who look like her, even if that connection is no longer the one in the forefront of his mind (he's more interested in the fact that she looks like Fujitsubo).*



*The spring shower here symbolizes Genji's sadness that he cannot have Murasaki outright; again, this shows how the natural world can be used as a metaphor to help the characters make sense of their emotions and given situations. This is the same thing they're doing when they exchange poems about the "fresh young grasses"—which refer to Murasaki and allow Genji to talk about her in a way that's more appropriate for court culture.*



*The nun's argument that Murasaki is too uneducated for Genji begins to offer insight into how, exactly, ladies do need to be trained if they wish to go to court; this suggests that the ability to write and behave like a proper lady are extremely important. This also suggests that if Genji is able to bring Murasaki to court, she may be treated much like the Lady of the Paulownia Court was because of her lack of education and the fact that she wasn't raised from infancy to excel at palace life.*



The bishop and the nun discuss Genji's proposal and decide that if he's still interested in five years, they can consider it then. They exchange poems with Genji, who then prepares to leave. He's interrupted, however, when a group from the Minister of the Left's house, including Tō no Chūjō, arrives. They decide to stay and enjoy the **cherry blossoms**. They drink wine, play music, and sing. The bishop even talks Genji into playing the koto. This impresses all the priests and nuns and, importantly, Murasaki. She deems him handsomer than her father, and the bishop suggests she be his little girl. Murasaki begins naming the handsomest male dolls and pictures "Genji."

Immediately upon reaching the palace, Genji looks in on the Emperor. The Emperor vows to promote the sage for his good work. The Minister of the Left is in attendance and convinces Genji to recover from his journey at the Sanjō mansion with Aoi. Genji unenthusiastically agrees. Aoi is stiff and remote per usual and has to be coaxed into coming down to see her husband. He says that it'd be nice if she acted more wifely, but Aoi implies that her behavior is to punish Genji for never visiting. Genji finds this very offensive and leaves for the bedroom in a huff.

Genji lies in bed and thinks of Murasaki. He recognizes that she's too young for him now, but he wonders if there's some way to bring her to the palace anyway. The next day, he writes to the nun. He attempts to impress upon her that his request is serious, and includes a tightly folded note for Murasaki. It says that the "mountain **blossoms**" are still with him and he's still with the blossoms. The nun writes back that Murasaki can't write properly yet and implies that Genji's interest is a passing fancy. The bishop writes a similar reply to Genji.

Genji sends Koremitsu up the mountain to speak with Shōnagon. Koremitsu explains how serious Genji is, but the nun and the bishop continue to think his interest will be fleeting. Genji sends another note for Murasaki with Koremitsu, asking to see her calligraphy exercises. The nun replies insinuating that Genji is shallow, but Shōnagon tells Koremitsu that they can speak again when they return to the city.

Fujitsubo falls ill and goes home to spend time with her family. Genji feels bad momentarily for the Emperor, but he soon starts planning how he can see Fujitsubo. He spends his days alone and, in the evenings, asks her maid Omyōbu to pass notes and arrange a meeting. Miraculously, Omyōbu is able to arrange one. Fujitsubo is very upset and tries hard to turn Genji away, but this only makes him want her more. He forces her to have sex and in the morning he cries at the thought of having to leave her. This makes her feel sorry for him. Genji spends a day in bed, crying and terrified the Emperor might find out.

*When the bishop and the nun take it upon themselves to turn Genji away so strongly and make sure that Murasaki is allowed to grow up before becoming a lover, it suggests that Genji may have had to grow up faster because he didn't have parent figures like that to care for him. It's worth considering that his father the Emperor is surely very busy, and though he may have dedicated time to dealing with Genji, Genji was still married to Aoi at about age twelve.*



*Genji's reluctant visit to Aoi shows that he does have a sense of needing to maintain the appearance of being a loving husband who is intimate with his wife. Aoi's ability to reprimand Genji, apparently with few or no consequences, suggests that within her marriage, she's actually quite powerful. When placed alongside Kokiden (who it's suggested is married to the Emperor), this suggests that married ladies have much more power than their unmarried peers.*



*Genji's unwillingness to drop the issue suggests that because he's so exceptional and knows it, he may be unused to not getting his way. This shows how court life can turn individuals like Genji into especially entitled men, particularly since he is wholly unwilling to respect the bishop and the nun's attempts to act as Murasaki's parents and keep her safe.*



*The fact that Shōnagon appears more willing to entertain Genji's request suggests that she understands that if Genji were to follow through, Murasaki may be able to rise far higher in the court ranks than if she didn't have someone as powerful interested in her.*



*Here, Omyōbu's willingness to arrange the meeting regardless of Fujitsubo's wishes mirrors Shōnagon's willingness to talk with Genji despite the nun and the bishop's wishes; this shows that even though Shōnagon and Omyōbu are just serving women, they actually have a great deal of power over which men their charges see. This is likely because as their ladies rise in rank due to these relationships, so do they.*



Fujitsubo gets sicker and sicker. After three months, it becomes clear that she's pregnant. Her attendants find her unwillingness to inform the Emperor strange. Omyōbu allows the Emperor to believe that a spirit is possessing Fujitsubo, but this leads the Emperor to send constant messengers, which make Fujitsubo feel even worse. Genji begins having bad dreams that he consults a soothsayer about, and the soothsayer suggests he keep it to himself. Several months later, Fujitsubo returns to court. The Emperor is overjoyed at her pregnancy and keeps her and Genji close to him. This is torture for Fujitsubo, who just wants to forget the night she spent with Genji.

When Genji learns that the nun is now living in the city, he begins to write her more often. She continues to deny him custody of Murasaki but Genji doesn't worry; he's too caught up in worrying about how things are going with the Rokujō lady. As he prepares to visit the lady one night, Genji is sidetracked when Koremitsu points out the nun's house and explains that she's become very ill. Genji decides to stop in and check in with her. He's a little put off by how dark and gloomy the house is. The nun sends a note out saying that she hopes Genji will still care about Murasaki when she's no longer a child.

Genji reminds the nun that he's entirely serious about taking custody of Murasaki, insisting that their relationship is so strong, it must have begun in a different world. He asks to speak to Murasaki, but the nun, through a note, says Murasaki is asleep. Just then, however, Genji hears Murasaki run to the nun and encourage the latter to go talk to Genji herself rather than send notes. Genji finds this very amusing but pretends not to hear. He decides he'll be her teacher as she grows.

The next day, Genji sends a note asking after the nun and includes a note for Murasaki, written in a childish hand. Murasaki is meant to copy it and send her copy back. Shōnagon answers that the nun is so ill, they're sending her to the mountains and they believe she'll die there. Genji spends his evening longing for Murasaki, though he fears that if he were to bring her to the palace, he'd be disappointed. He composes a poem referring to Murasaki as the lavender he'd like to bring in from the moor.

*Fujitsubo's reaction to being raped and becoming pregnant suggests that even if Genji got his way, he did actually transgress important boundaries when he did so. In particular, her fear can be attributed to the fact that she relies wholly on the Emperor's attentions to maintain her position as his favorite at court, something that would be jeopardized were he to find out that the baby is Genji's. This also underscores that while women can hold power in this world, they are still ultimately at the mercy of men; Genji's transgression becomes her own.*



*The novel's unwillingness to say outright what's going on with the Rokujō Lady is likely a symptom of being translated and condensed, though others believe that some of these earlier chapters were actually written out of order or by someone else entirely. Regardless, note that Genji is passing over the Rokujō Lady to spend time with others. This continues to build up a history of neglect in his relationship with the lady.*



*Murasaki's behavior here makes it very clear that she's very much a child without a complete understanding of how the world works and specifically, of what Genji wants from her. This helps to cast her as a victim of predatory behavior even more obviously.*



*Lavender is used as a symbol of affection or love; by referring to Murasaki as a lavender plant, Genji is able to voice his "love" for her in a culturally appropriate way. The rest of his poem about specifically bringing her in from the moor suggests he views her as something wild to be caught and tamed, not something with her own mind and agenda.*



Over the next month, Genji gets caught up in court events and doesn't ask after the nun for a while. When he finally does, the bishop writes that she has died. Genji knows Murasaki must be very sad and sends Shōnagon a sympathetic letter. Several days later, Genji learns that Shōnagon and Murasaki are back in the city, so he goes to visit. Shōnagon tells him about the nun's final days and mentions that Prince Hyōbu has expressed some interest in taking her in, though he knows his other ladies will be awful to her. She again laments how immature Murasaki is, but Genji tells her to stop: his mind is made up and he wants to take her to the palace. They exchange poems in which Shōnagon again tells Genji no.

One of Murasaki's playmates tells her that a gentleman is visiting. She races out, believing she'll see her father. Genji admits he's not her father but says he's just as important. He calls Murasaki to him to sleep on his lap. Murasaki is embarrassed and shy, but Shōnagon pushes her forward. Murasaki pulls away from Genji and Genji slips behind the screens with the women. Though Shōnagon reprimands Genji, he insists that it's too stormy for the women to be alone. He goes to Murasaki's bedroom, covers her, and tells her that he has dolls and pictures for her at his house. Shōnagon feels she has no power to stop this. Genji and Shōnagon sit with Murasaki all night, and the other women whisper that Genji is certainly helping with their fear of the storm and they wish that Murasaki were older.

Genji prepares to leave just before dawn. He tells Shōnagon that he must bring Murasaki to the palace so she doesn't have to live in this terrifying house anymore, but Shōnagon tells him that Prince Hyōbu is going to come for his daughter soon. Genji suggests that both men are strangers to Murasaki and he believes he loves her more before taking his leave. He feels somewhat depressed and knocks on the gate of a lover on his way home. She invites him in, but he declines the invitation and goes home.

Prince Hyōbu visits Murasaki later that day and comes to the same conclusion Genji did: Murasaki shouldn't live in the sad and gloomy house. Shōnagon asks that they wait a while so Murasaki has time to grieve. Prince Hyōbu thinks this is silly but agrees. He leaves in tears and Murasaki cries for days. Genji receives summons from the palace and so sends Koremitsu to call on Murasaki in his place. This worries Shōnagon and she shares some of her concerns with Koremitsu, including Prince Hyōbu's desire to take Murasaki away the following evening. Koremitsu relays this to Genji and then returns in the evening. Shōnagon is short with him.

*Prince Hyōbu's worries about Murasaki being bullied shows that the kind of abuse that the Lady of the Paulownia Court suffered isn't unique to the Emperor's ladies; that kind of toxic rivalry between women possibly takes place among the lovers of every man. It's telling, however, that Prince Hyōbu worries about this happening to a child, as it suggests that like Genji, Murasaki is somehow special enough to garner special interest and stir up a sense of rivalry.*



*Again, when Shōnagon encourages Murasaki to get close to Genji and do as he says, it's likely because she recognizes that Murasaki will benefit from Genji's attentions—and Shōnagon will benefit as well. The fact that no one here is willing to listen to Murasaki's clear desire to have nothing to do with Genji shows that she's disadvantaged twice: once as a woman and again as a child. This is reinforced when the other women wish that Murasaki were older, as it implies that then, they'd be pushing for Murasaki to have sex with Genji in order to benefit them, regardless of her thoughts on the matter.*



*Notice how Genji phrases his desire to take Murasaki to the palace: he must bring her. He phrases it in such a way as to put himself in charge, rather than asking her to come in a way that would give her some agency in her life. This shows on a structural level that women like Murasaki don't have much power to dictate the course of their lives.*



*Wanting to remove Murasaki from the house because it's sad and gloomy again ties in with the novel's insistence that one's surroundings are indicative of one's feelings or emotions. This shows that both Prince Hyōbu and Genji want to do their best to make Murasaki happy, even if Genji's proposed methodology is absolutely questionable. Shōnagon's worry shows that it's very important for men to woo women themselves without messengers, even though it's acceptable for women to use messengers.*



Koremitsu again relays this to Genji, who is at Aoi's house in Sanjō, bored as usual. Genji decides he must swear the women to secrecy and take Murasaki to the palace in the morning, as taking her from her father's house would look especially bad. Genji makes excuses to Aoi and sets off with Koremitsu. Shōnagon is annoyed with Genji's early visit and attempts to turn him away, but he forces his way inside, picks up a terrified Murasaki and tells her to think of him as her father. Shōnagon again tries to protest as he bundles the girl into the carriage, but she agrees to go with Genji and Murasaki.

At the palace, Shōnagon is worried. She knows that Prince Hyōbu will be upset, but she feels she has to remain loyal to Murasaki. Genji has Koremitsu set up screens and makes Murasaki lie down with him to sleep. Shōnagon sits up with them and they all rise late in the morning. Genji sends for little girls to play with Murasaki and tells his charge that she's not to sulk: she should do as she's told to make him happy. He thinks she's even prettier now and brings her pictures and toys to play with. He spends several days writing poems for her to copy on lavender paper and he finds her childish handwriting endlessly endearing. Soon, Murasaki forgets her troubles.

Prince Hyōbu goes to fetch Murasaki on schedule. He's aghast to find her gone and her serving ladies can only tell him that Shōnagon spirited her away. He writes to the bishop and receives no information there. Murasaki continues to settle in at the palace, though she still sometimes cries for the nun. She becomes very fond of Genji and Genji of her. He thinks of her as a toy to play with and thinks their relationship is even better than that of a father and daughter.

## AN AUTUMN EXCURSION

In the middle of October, the Emperor plans to make an excursion to the Suzaku Palace. This will include dancing and because the Emperor doesn't want Fujitsubo and the other ladies to feel left out, he orders a full rehearsal at the palace so that the ladies can watch. Tō no Chūjō and Genji dance "Waves of the Blue Ocean," and though Tō no Chūjō is a fine dancer, Genji is described as a blossoming **cherry** next to a nondescript shrub. His performance brings the entire audience to tears; even Kokiden is in awe. Fujitsubo, however, still feels disconnected and guilty about her secret. She spends the night with the Emperor and is forced to make small talk about how fine Genji's performance was.

*The fact that Genji does take it upon himself to make excuses to Aoi suggests that he does have some respect for her, even if he doesn't actually like her that much. His decision to take Murasaki now so he doesn't have to take her from Prince Hyōbu's house shows that at least when it comes to biological fathers, Genji definitely respects that relationship and doesn't want to mess with it; taking her now allows him to simply avoid it altogether.*



*Shōnagon's choice to remain loyal to Murasaki shows that there can actually be real, caring relationships between women—provided there's a status difference between the women in question. Genji's desire to make Murasaki into the kind of woman he wants suggests that he's going to begin to blur the lines between being fatherly and being a lover, especially since the novel implies that Murasaki is too young to know much about men or sex at this point.*



*When the other women are unwilling to tell Prince Hyōbu the truth about Murasaki, it shows that what's really going on here is that they're afraid of Genji and the power he has to make or break their lives. Even if they're not going to benefit from Murasaki since they didn't go with her, he could still make life difficult for them if they were to stand up to him through Hyōbu.*



*Again, when even Kokiden is unable to truly hate Genji, it reinforces that Genji is somehow set apart from everyone else in some fundamental way. The way that the narrator compares Genji and Tō no Chūjō—by using nature imagery and specifically, the symbol of cherries for Genji—suggests that Genji is even more important, given that he's conflated with this symbol of renewal and rebirth.*



The next morning, Genji sends Fujitsubo a letter asking if she could sense his feelings for her through his dance. She agrees that she could, and Genji treasures the letter. Several days later, Genji and the other courtiers leave for the Suzaku palace. The Emperor chooses virtuosos to play the flute, and again Genji's dance "Waves of the Blue Ocean" moves people to tears. The other dances are boring in comparison. Genji and Tō no Chūjō are promoted, along with others.

Fujitsubo goes home to her family. Genji tries to see her, but his in-laws criticize him for this. He also has to fend off rumors of Murasaki, and Aoi in particular is very upset. Genji feels that if Aoi were open about her complaints that he might tell her the truth about Murasaki—which would certainly make her less jealous—but she isn't, so he doesn't share. He continues to believe that once his wife gets to know him better, she'll come around. Murasaki, on the other hand, begins to mature, though she remains childishly clingy. Genji continues to keep her a secret from others at court. He spends a great deal of time tutoring her in calligraphy and how to be a proper lady. He stays the night when he can and when he doesn't, Murasaki's wistfulness when she says goodbye charms him.

Finally, Genji is able to visit Fujitsubo. Omyōbu and other ladies in waiting receive him, but Fujitsubo herself won't see him. Prince Hyōbu is there as well. At dusk, Hyōbu goes behind the blinds to speak to Fujitsubo and leaves Genji to feel secretly jealous outside. Finally, Genji stiffly bids Omyōbu and Fujitsubo goodbye. He laments how fleeting their relationship had been.

Shōnagon continues to marvel at where her life is taking her. Though she worries some that Genji isn't as attentive to Murasaki as he could be, Murasaki's future seems secure. Murasaki's mourning period for the nun ends on New Year's Eve, and Genji thinks she looks even more beautiful now that she can wear color again. On New Year's Eve, he watches her take repairs to her dollhouse very seriously and try not to cry. When he leaves, Shōnagon encourages Murasaki to try to grow up a little bit and be "a little more wifely." Murasaki is somewhat perplexed that she has a husband and realizes she's growing up. The narrator notes that it didn't occur to Murasaki's women that, at this point, she's not yet a wife.

*It's somewhat unclear throughout the remainder of the novel if Fujitsubo actually does nurse feelings for Genji or if she's writing to him like this to appease him; regardless, it reinforces how powerful Genji is that he can garner either response from her. This also illustrates how, in comparison, she has little power to either turn away Genji or control how she feels about him.*



*The way that Genji speaks about Aoi here shows him viewing the callous way that he treats her as her fault rather than his, which illustrates another way in which men are able to take power from the women around them. Though the novel doesn't say it outright, it implies that "the truth about Murasaki" is her age, which suggests that Genji believes that an outside observer wouldn't be concerned about his relationship with a child. Again, this shows that Genji knows how to use courtiers' understandings of customs to his advantage, as the reader is well aware that his intentions are absolutely improper.*



*In her family home, surrounded by someone as powerful as Prince Hyōbu, Fujitsubo does have some power to dictate how and if she sees Genji. This reinforces the importance of having powerful family members, as this is clearly the only reason Fujitsubo has any agency here.*



*Shōnagon's private thoughts make it much clearer that she and other serving women want their ladies to become involved with powerful men for their own benefit; her musing about where her life is taking her suggests that she occupies a far more important station than she ever imagined she would've without Genji's help. Shōnagon and Genji's advice to Murasaki suggests that her coming of age will happen soon and she'll make the shift from being a child to being Genji's lover.*



Genji heads to Sanjō to visit Aoi. He suggests that for the new year, she could be friendlier. However, Aoi has no intention of being friendlier; she's convinced that the lady her husband is spending so much time with (that is, Murasaki) has become his favorite. Aoi's elegance still manages to make Genji feel like a child, and he feels as though he can't do anything right. The Minister of the Left is annoyed that Genji has other dalliances as well, but he likes Genji himself too much to bring it up. He bestows a belt upon Genji as a gift. Genji makes only a few other visits for the new year.

Fujitsubo was supposed to give birth in December, but her pregnancy continues through January. She becomes so worried she falls ill but finally, at the end of February, she finally gives birth to her and Genji's son (Reizei). Not wanting to give Kokiden the satisfaction of seeing her die, her will to live returns and she recovers. Genji attempts to visit Fujitsubo early to see his son, but she denies his request. The narrator notes that the baby looks a lot like Genji, and Fujitsubo feels guilty and afraid that this will out her secret. Omyōbu refuses to help Genji see the baby or Fujitsubo, though she tells Genji that everyone is upset. This upsets Fujitsubo, and she never treats Omyōbu the same again.

In April, Reizei is finally brought to the palace. He looks amazingly like Genji, which thrills the Emperor. He dotes on the baby and names him crown prince, regretting that he couldn't do the same for Genji. One afternoon, Genji sits in Fujitsubo's apartments listening to music when the Emperor walks in with Reizei. He notes the resemblance between Genji and Reizei, and Genji is simultaneously scared and touched. Fujitsubo begins sweating from nervousness. Genji finally leaves, trying to hide how upset he is.

Upon his return to the palace, Genji sends a long letter with carnations to Omyōbu to give to Fujitsubo, but Fujitsubo instructs Omyōbu to reply with something short. Fujitsubo does, however, include a short poem insisting she can't change anything. Genji decides to visit Murasaki to lift his spirits and plays the flute for her. Murasaki is annoyed that he didn't come to see her sooner. She petulantly recites a poem asking why he never visits, and Genji reprimands her for complaining. He asks her to play a thirteen-stringed koto for him and she does, beautifully. They look at pictures until Genji's attendants surreptitiously remind him that it's time to go out.

*It's worth noting that Aoi isn't wrong about the "lady" that Genji is spending time with, given that the narration is pretty vocal about the fact that Genji enjoys spending time with Murasaki more than he enjoys any of his other ladies. That Genji still feels like a child next to Aoi suggests that such an age difference between husband and wife is partially to blame for their problems, which further implies that Genji and Murasaki may experience issues in the future.*



*When Fujitsubo resolves to recover just to spite Kokiden, it again reminds the reader that female jealousy and competition is what truly drives the story and how women conduct their lives. The fact that Fujitsubo appears to now live her life in fear reinforces how precarious her position is, as Genji's decision to rape her is clearly something that has the power to damage her standing with the Emperor (even though she, herself, did not instigate the act).*



*It's worth noting that Genji's transgression doesn't go entirely unpunished; though his fear doesn't seem to be nearly as strong as Fujitsubo's, he still fears what might happen if the Emperor finds out that Reizei is Genji's son. This shows that it's important that men get involved with the right women, though they certainly have more choice as to what the "right" woman is.*



*Keep in mind that while Genji has power over all of the women he sees, he has even more power over Murasaki because she's a child. This is evidenced by the fact that Aoi complains nearly every time Genji sees her yet seems to not suffer because this seeming rudeness, while it appears that Murasaki may actually suffer if she becomes too petulant or whiney for Genji's taste.*



Murasaki is suddenly forlorn, so Genji asks her if she misses him while he's gone. He explains that he misses her too, but he must keep Aoi happy. He promises that when Murasaki is an adult, he'll never leave her. She falls asleep in his lap and Genji decides not to go visit Aoi. He wakes Murasaki to have dinner and agrees to stay the night.

Those at the Minister of the Left and Aoi's house think it's odd that Genji is spending so much time with his mysterious lady. They gossip that he must have lost his mind over the lady and is now ashamed to have people see her, though by now they have discovered that Murasaki is a child. Later, the Emperor reprimands Genji for not pleasing his in-laws, but feels bad that Genji isn't happy with Aoi.

The narrator notes that the Emperor still keeps pretty women around and Genji smiles and jokes with most of them. One woman, Naishi, piques Genji's interest: she's sixty years old and talented, but isn't discriminating when it comes to lovers. He finds her forwardness fun but after a few rendezvous, he calls the whole thing off. He doesn't want to be seen as a child lover of an old lady. This upsets Naishi. One morning, Naishi and Genji find themselves alone together, so Naishi flirts with him. He approaches her, thinking that her hair is stringy and her fan is far too gaudy for an old lady.

Naishi and Genji chat for a while and she attempts to convince him to visit her in private. He tries to shake her off, but she cries and accuses him of neglecting her. The Emperor walks in and is very amused by what he finds. Naishi doesn't correct the Emperor when he believes she and Genji are having a true affair; she thinks that the rumor might help her. The rumors spread and Tō no Chūjō decides he'd also like to begin seeing Naishi. Genji doesn't know about this and one evening, comes across Naishi singing. The two flirt for a while and finally, Genji accepts her invitation to have sex. Genji dozes off after.

Tō no Chūjō believes that Genji's normal self-righteousness and sense of propriety is surely hiding something incriminating. Discovering Genji with Naishi, he decides to teach Genji a lesson. Genji hears someone come in and believes that Naishi neglected to tell him about another lover. He gathers his clothes and hides behind a screen. Tō no Chūjō folds the screen back and steals Genji's clothes as Naishi tries to get him to stop. Tō no Chūjō tries not to laugh and finally, Genji realizes who interrupted him. Genji watches Naishi flutter about and decides the whole scene is stupid and funny. When Tō no Chūjō refuses to give Genji his clothes back, Genji tries to take Tō no Chūjō's clothes off. They exchange poems as some of their clothing rips and finally, they go off together laughing.

*Genji's decision-making process here shows that he's very much governed by his whims and desires in the moment. This suggests in turn that he's not great at thinking ahead or considering consequences, which will become important later.*



*The fact that the Emperor is sad about Genji's unhappy marriage but is mostly concerned about keeping the Minister of the Left happy shows that in some ways, Genji is a pawn just as some of the women and other children are—he needs to behave properly to keep the Emperor in favor.*



*Naishi is different from other women Genji sleeps with primarily in that she's not afraid to ask for what she wants. It's telling then that Genji doesn't think well of her, as it plays right into Genji's desire to dominate and control the women he's involved with. It's also important to keep in mind that Naishi also becomes the butt of jokes late—in other words, the reader isn't supposed to like her forwardness either, which points to it being uncouth in Heian culture as a whole.*



*Again, Naishi's calculation that a rumor of being involved with Genji may be of help her reinforces the fact that women gain power in this culture by associating with (or by appearing to associate with) powerful men. This also begins to develop Genji's reputation at court, as it implies that being one of Genji's lovers carries with it specific social benefits.*



*Here in particular, Naishi is the one the reader is supposed to laugh at, even as Tō no Chūjō seeks to make Genji the butt of the joke. This shows that Genji is, once again, beyond reproach and is exceptional in fundamental ways, while women like Naishi, who ask for what they want and seek to have sex with powerful men, are funny. It's also telling that Tō no Chūjō barely seems to acknowledge Naishi; this suggests that he doesn't see her as worth his time or acknowledgement at all, even though her presence is what makes his "joke" even work.*



The next morning, Genji wakes to an angry note from Naishi about being abandoned along with packages containing several articles of his clothing. He finds the note wholly inappropriate and sends her an admonishing poem in return. He realizes the belt is Tō no Chūjō's, so he wraps it and returns it to him. Tō no Chūjō returns Genji's ripped sleeve and tells him to keep Naishi. Later at court, the men smile at each other and in private, Genji remarks that Tō no Chūjō must be upset that he wasn't invited to the rendezvous. He vows to not see Naishi again. After this, the rivalry between Tō no Chūjō and Genji intensifies.

In the summer, the Emperor names Fujitsubo empress. This, of course, sends Kokiden into a rage. Rumors fly that the Emperor is neglecting a lady with twenty years experience (Kokiden) for someone else. On the night that Fujitsubo makes her formal appearance, Genji is distraught. He knows this title bump will mean that she'll be out of his reach forever. Fujitsubo continues to fear that the secret will get out as Reizei grows and resembles Genji more and more.

## THE FESTIVAL OF THE CHERRY BLOSSOMS

Near the end of February, the Emperor holds the festival of the **cherry blossoms**. He seats Fujitsubo and Reizei on one side of him and Genji on the other, which makes Kokiden extremely angry. Her anger doesn't manage to ruin the event, however. Genji and other courtiers draw subjects for a poetry competition. Genji's voice when he announces that he drew "spring" is quite distinguished, and Tō no Chūjō does his best to sound just as distinguished when he announces his subject. Others are reticent to announce theirs given Genji's perfection.

The Emperor arranges a concert as well. Genji performs part of "Spring Warbler," and Tō no Chūjō performs "Garden of Willows and Flowers." After the dances, a reader reads the courtiers' poems. Genji's is so exceptional that the reader comments on every line. As Fujitsubo listens, she wonders simultaneously how Kokiden can hate Genji and how she's so drawn to him. She silently recites a poem in which she wishes she could see Genji as just another **blossom**.

*Naishi is likely very embarrassed and hurt by what happened; Genji's inability to see this indicates that he absolutely views her as a means to a fun romp, not a person in her own right with thoughts and feelings that also matter. The jokes about "keeping" Naishi also suggest that both men view women in general as property, which adds more reasoning to why they seek to gain power over their lovers.*



*The rumors about Fujitsubo closely mirror the ones that plagued the Lady of the Paulownia Court, which indicates that the intense rivalry that killed the Paulownia Lady is still alive and well in the Emperor's court. Keep in mind too that Fujitsubo now has no female allies, as she's no longer close with Omyōbu.*



*Kokiden's anger seems somewhat misguided, given that her son is still the next in line for the throne. This implies that she may have a longer view of things that's somewhat different from what's currently apparent to the reader, and which would oust her from power sooner than she would like.*



*Fujitsubo's private poem suggests that she does have feelings for Genji, but she's unable to act on them or voice them because of her relationship to the Emperor. This shows how in some cases, women are actually trapped by the men whose attentions are actually supposed to free them, or at least grant them more power.*



After the festivities end, a slightly drunk Genji prowls through the ladies' apartments to see if Fujitsubo left her door open for him. She didn't. He notices that near Kokiden's pavilion, there's an open door. Genji slips in with a mysterious woman (Oborozukiyo). Genji catches at her sleeve, frightening her, and lifts her down to the gallery, closing the door behind him. She calls for help, but Genji insists he always gets his way and tells her to be quiet. Wanting him to think that she has good manners, Oborozukiyo gives in to his advances. At dawn, Genji asks for her name so he can write to her. She recites a poem refusing. Genji settles for exchanging fans.

After he leaves, Genji reasons that Oborozukiyo must be one of Kokiden's younger sisters. He thinks through the sisters, of which there are many, but can't figure out which lady she was. He's intrigued that she clearly didn't want their relationship to continue and thinks too of Fujitsubo. At a banquet later that day, Genji plays the koto and wonders whether he may have an opportunity to see Oborozukiyo in the daylight. He sends Koremitsu and another attendant, Yoshikiyo, to investigate. Their investigation turns up nothing useful.

Genji wonders if the Minister of the Right might accept him into the family because of this liaison, but he wants to figure out who the lady is first. He thinks of Murasaki, who is surely lonely since he hasn't visited in days. Genji also thinks of Oborozukiyo's poem and jots a reply on his fan. Then, he reasons that comforting Murasaki is more important than visiting Aoi. He finds her more fun to be around, though he does worry that their closeness means that she'll be too at ease with other men. After a music lesson, he heads for Sanjō.

Aoi keeps Genji waiting, so Genji fiddles with a koto. The Minister of the Left congratulates Genji on his poem and his dancing at the **cherry blossom** festival, saying his music even made him want to dance. As Tō no Chūjō is in attendance, Genji insists that "Garden of Willows and Flowers" dance was far superior.

Oborozukiyo is very sad. Her father, the Minister of the Right, wants to give her to Suzaku in mere months. Genji wants to figure out who she is, but he's afraid of getting involved with such a dangerous and powerful family. Late in April, the Minister of the Right hosts an archery meet and a banquet. The mountain **cherries** are still in bloom and Genji grudgingly agrees to attend. He arrives late and is so handsome that he puts the blossoms to shame. After playing instruments, Genji pretends to be drunk and wanders off to where he knows two of the minister's daughters live.

*The way that Genji goes about intimidating and raping Oborozukiyo reinforces how little power women have in comparison to the extremely powerful men around them—even though she clearly doesn't want to have sex with him, her desire to look like she has good manners and not anger him is enough to outweigh that. As in the case of the Lady of the Evening Faces, Oborozukiyo is only able to eke out a bit of power by keeping her name from Genji.*



*Oborozukiyo's relationship to Kokiden suggests that there may be consequences for getting involved with Oborozukiyo, given how intent Kokiden is on ruining Genji's life. However, it's important to note that Oborozukiyo will presumably not face any consequences for being involved with Genji; this shows that romances affect men publically more than they do women.*



*When Genji wonders if Murasaki will be too comfortable with men, it offers the possibility that even though he's raising her to be his perfect lover, he's aware that she may see other men as well. This also reinforces that Heian women are supposed to defend themselves against men (even as men are also supposed to push through those defenses), something Murasaki may be unable to do due to her relationship with Genji.*



*The way that Genji interacts with Tō no Chūjō and particularly the way he compliments him suggests that Genji does so mostly to appease the Minister of the Left, Tō no Chūjō's father and Genji's his father-in-law.*



*When Genji puts the cherry blossoms to shame, it again shows that the natural world can work to make Genji even more beautiful and perfect than he is already. This reinforces the novel's logic that nature mirrors and heightens human emotions or states of being. The fact that Genji recognizes he needs to sneak around shows that he's well aware that he's playing with fire by becoming involved with Oborozukiyo; he just doesn't care.*



The daughters trail their sleeves out from under the curtains. Genji playfully asks the women to hide him, and they respond in a similarly playful manner. He grabs one woman's hand and mentions that someone stole his fan, an allusion to Oborozukiyo. The woman doesn't show any sign of recognition. Genji takes the other lady's hand and recites a poem referencing the image on Oborozukiyo's fan, and he's is thrilled to recognize Oborozukiyo's voice.

*The exchanges here illustrate clearly how poetry and nature imagery can work to convey multiple meanings very easily. Oborozukiyo's willingness to show herself shows again that regardless of how romances begin, the relationships themselves can still be desirable for the women involved.*



## HEARTVINE

Around this time, the Emperor abdicates and Suzaku takes the throne. With this, Genji finds that he has to be extra discreet with his romances. This means he has less to amuse him and people begin to complain that he's quite aloof. Fujitsubo happily spends her time with the Emperor, which annoys Kokiden. She doesn't follow the Emperor when he moves out of the main palace. The Emperor, meanwhile, spends his time missing Reizei and worrying that he has no strong backers, so he asks Genji to be Reizei's guardian and advisor.

*Though the novel doesn't say outright, Genji has to be more careful because Kokiden's power increases now that her son, Suzaku, is the emperor. By remaining in the palace and not following the Emperor, Kokiden shows that she means to take her role as regent seriously and plans to use her son's position to her advantage as much as she can.*



The Rokujō Lady is also affected by the change in emperor. Her young daughter, Akikonomu, is appointed high priestess of the Ise Shrine. Because Genji no longer shows her reliable affection and because of Akikonomu's youth, the Rokujō lady decides to go to Ise with her daughter. The Emperor is very upset about this, especially when he learns that Genji neglected the lady. He reprimands Genji and tells him to not make women angry with him. Genji shudders at the possibility that his father might learn of his affair with Fujitsubo, and then excuses himself.

*The Rokujō Lady's decision shows that one way women can take power and attempt to control their lives is by removing themselves from court life altogether. It's telling too that she's able to do this because of her daughter, as it reinforces that parents can absolutely use their children to their advantage in situations like this.*



The Emperor's words do little to make matters better; in fact, they instigate a number of rumors instead. Genji makes it seem as though he's leaving the Rokujō lady alone because she wants to be left alone (effectively making his neglect her fault). Fearing a similar fate, one of Genji's regular correspondents, Princess Asagao, preemptively cuts off communication with him. Genji's in-laws are also upset with him, though they keep their complaints to themselves since Aoi is pregnant and very ill. Genji neglects all his other lovers.

*When the Emperor isn't able to help Genji anymore and in fact, makes things worse for his son, it indicates that he's truly no longer in power: Suzaku and by extension Kokiden are the ones in charge now. In turn, this means that Genji is no longer the darling he once was and is consequentially less able to woo new lovers like Princess Asagao.*



The high priestess at Kamo resigns and is replaced by one of Kokiden's daughters. In preparation for the ceremonies and the festival, courtiers decorate their carriages. The streets are filled with carriages on the day of the celebration, and ladies' sleeves coming out of the carriages are bright and colorful. Though Aoi has no interest in going, her serving women and her mother, Princess Omiya, convince her to go. Aoi and her ladies take a minimally decorated carriage and find two unattended carriages in the street. Aoi's footmen try to get the carriages to move. Both these footmen and the footmen meant to be manning the unattended carriages have been drinking, however, and the conflict devolves into an argument.

The Sanjō footmen (that is, Aoi's) recognize that the unattended carriages belong to the Rokujō Lady, who only wants to watch the parade and forget her sorrows. Aoi's carriages squeeze in, completely blocking the Rokujō Lady's view, who is upset both by the insult and that she was recognized despite not decorating her carriages. She considers going home but decides to wait and see Genji go by. He doesn't even look at her as he passes, making her feel even worse. Genji's beauty outshines that of all of his attendants, and ladies jostle to see him even though it's in poor form.

Genji finds out about the carriage debacle later. He feels horrible for the Rokujō lady and angry at Aoi, who he feels is uncompassionate and rude. Genji tries to call on the Rokujō lady to apologize, but Akikonomu sends him away. He instead goes to see Murasaki and marvels at how long her hair has grown. He decides it's time to trim it. She writes him a childish poem asking why he doesn't visit more often. After this, Genji returns to the festival.

Genji's carriage can barely find a place. Eventually, a lady dangles her fan out of a window and invites Genji to take her place. Genji and the lady exchange poems and he realizes the woman is none other than Naishi. He refuses her advances and thinks she's tasteless.

The Rokujō Lady continues to dwell in her sorrows. She knows she'll be lonely at Ise, but she fears that people in the city will laugh at her if she stays. Genji attempts to convince her to stay, but his notes only make her sadder and angrier. Meanwhile, in Sanjō, Aoi appears to be possessed by a malign spirit. Genji takes up temporary residence there and summons exorcists. The Sanjō household asks the exorcists if the Rokujō Lady and Murasaki, the two ladies of Genji's who are sure to be the most jealous, may be to blame for the spirit. The exorcists think not. When the Rokujō Lady learns that the Emperor is calling for religious services for Aoi, she becomes even more jealous.

*Remember that the sleeves dangling out of the carriages at this event are the only way for women to appropriately flag down and flirt with prospective lovers, given that the women themselves are supposed to remain hidden. When Aoi's mother and her ladies are able to talk her into going, it again suggests that serving women may hold more power in this society than one might think, given how objectively powerful Aoi is all by herself.*



*Remember that the Rokujō Lady has been slighted several times by Genji at this point. The anger and sadness she feels when Aoi's carriages block her view suggests that one of the reasons she's been able to keep herself together is because she doesn't have to actually see Genji's wife in person. In turn, this sets the stage for her jealousy to become even more pronounced.*



*Though Genji's annoyance at Aoi is understandable, the fact that he's so angry suggests that he's not entirely aware of how jealousy works among women. While he sees that he has enough affection to go around, the women he sees clearly don't feel the same way—and since they have no way of knowing, they act as though it's in short supply.*



*Again, when Genji thinks of Naishi as being tasteless, it shows that women aren't supposed to ask for what they want. This in turn shows that as far as Genji is concerned, he needs to be in charge of romantic relationships.*



*The Rokujō Lady's preoccupation with what others might think reminds the reader that the only currency she has is her reputation—and, at this point, it's unclear if Genji is going to help or hinder that. Again, though Genji is doing the right thing by spending time with Aoi in her time of need, it makes other women who are far more vulnerable question if they're important enough for him to similarly care for, which only heightens their sense of jealousy.*



Genji disguises himself and visits the Rokujō Lady at her new house. He explains Aoi's illness and stays the night, but this does little to make the Rokujō Lady feel better. In the morning, Genji writes that Aoi is getting worse and he can't visit again. They exchange several poems in which the Rokujō lady laments that she's turning herself inside out for Genji, but Genji insists that his excuses aren't lies.

The Rokujō Lady hears rumors that her father's spirit may be the one possessing Aoi. Distraught, the Rokujō Lady thinks that she's never wished anyone ill. She wonders if her soul is possibly off wandering and thinks of the anger she's felt since Aoi insulted her, as well as dreams she has of shaking a beautiful rival lady. She fears that nobody will like her if this is true and vows to not think about Genji anymore.

Aoi goes into labor prematurely. Priests arrive to attempt to exorcise the evil spirit, but it won't move. Finally, Aoi calls for Genji. Everyone else leaves them alone as Genji looks at his wife. He takes her hand as she gazes at him and cries. He comforts her, and Aoi speaks—but in the voice of the Rokujō Lady. She tells Genji to bind the hem of her robe, a method of keeping a spirit at home. Genji is aghast. Princess Omiya returns with medicine and suddenly, Aoi gives birth to a baby boy (Yugiri). Aoi appears to be free of the spirits and for the next several days, the house celebrates the new baby.

The Rokujō Lady has mixed feelings when she learns of this. Strangely, she finds that no matter how much she washes, her clothes smell like the poppy seeds that are burned at exorcisms. Genji remains horrified that he heard the Rokujō Lady speak to him through Aoi and he finally decides to send her a note, though he doesn't visit. Aoi's son, Yugiri, looks so much like Reizei that it makes Genji feel he must see the other boy. Before returning to court, he sits on the other side of her curtains and speaks to Aoi, but she's too weak to respond. He prepares medicine and as he goes behind her curtains, he admires her beauty and wonders why he's been so dissatisfied with her. Aoi watches him go.

The Minister of the Left and Genji both leave for court. Not long after, a messenger arrives at court with the message that Aoi has died. The men wander aimlessly, and the minister decides to leave Aoi's body for a few days in case it's the work of the evil spirit and she might come back. She remains dead, however, and her funeral services go on through the night. Genji spends the night at Sanjō, wondering why he angered Aoi and let her die angry with him. He dresses in his gray mourning robes in the morning, recites a prayer, and holds Yugiri, glad that he has the baby to remember his wife by.

*The choice to go in disguise indicates that visiting the Rokujō Lady isn't something that Genji should be doing right now, which may contribute to her belief that Genji is slighting her and is using her as a convenient diversion from his wife's illness.*



*When the Rokujō Lady starts to wonder if her soul is possessing Aoi, it shows clearly that the power of female jealousy isn't just theoretical—it truly does have the power to go out and make life miserable for other women, even without one's conscious knowledge.*



*The supernatural elements here recall the apparition that Genji saw on the pillow by the Lady of the Evening Faces. When considered together, this makes it clear that the Rokujō Lady is more overcome by jealousy than any of her peers. However, when she asks Genji to bind the hem of her robe, it does suggest that the Rokujō Lady doesn't necessarily want to be this way—instead, it implies that she's at the mercy of her runaway emotions.*



*It's worth noting that in her illness, Aoi is also too weak to be sassy or belligerent with Genji, which could also be why he experiences this moment of regret—he's been very clear about the fact that he likes women who don't push back on his desires and are, instead, yielding and childlike.*



*Aoi's death is telling, as she has been one of Genji's unhappiest lovers and a source of discontent for him throughout their marriage. Though he's able to think more generously now in his grief, it's worth thinking of Aoi as an obstacle that has now been removed from Genji's life. This suggests that the Rokujō Lady, who is similarly somewhat annoying for Genji to deal with, may also not survive to the end of the novel.*



Genji attempts to contact the Rokujō Lady, but she refuses to answer. Weeks later, Genji receives a letter from the lady offering condolences. It's a beautiful letter, but he fears it's disingenuous. He can't sort out his feelings about Aoi and the Rokujō Lady, but he finally replies and suggests they end their relationship, implying that he knows her spirit killed Aoi. The Rokujō Lady fears that she's irreparably damaged her reputation, but the narrator insists this isn't the case: her relationship with her daughter Akikonomu and her good taste make her very popular.

Genji stays in seclusion for seven weeks, though Tō no Chūjō visits often. They laugh about Naishi and cry sometimes. One evening, Tō no Chūjō finds Genji on the veranda, crying in the driving rain. It's clear that he's wracked with grief. Tō no Chūjō finds this strange as Genji never seemed happy in his marriage, but decides this is proof that he did actually love Aoi. After Tō no Chūjō leaves, Genji sends flowers to Princess Omiya about their "wild carnation," Yugiri.

Genji composes a note to Princess Asagao telling her of his grief. She replies that she's looked for him in the "stormy autumn skies," and Genji feels that her handwriting suggests mysterious things. Genji thinks of how he wants to raise Murasaki to not be an "affected, overrefined" woman and then calls some of Aoi's women to keep him company. They're all sad because they believe that he'll leave them soon, but he promises to take care of them.

After his time in seclusion, Genji returns to court. He leaves notes for Princess Omiya and says goodbye to the Minister of the Left in person. The Minister asks Genji to tell the Emperor that he's still too sad visit, and Genji agrees. The Minister then says that he believes Genji will come back because of Yugiri, regardless of what the women believe. Genji promises to take care of everyone at the house and then leaves. After he does, the Minister goes inside and looks at some of Genji's practice calligraphy. He reads Genji's sad poems and then goes to his wife. The Minister sadly laments that Genji's absence means he misses Aoi even more. The entire household weeps.

*The disconnect here between what the Rokujō Lady thinks is most important to her reputation and what the narrator insists is most important reinforces again just how much women are forced to care about how their relationships with men influence their public images, as she clearly believes her convoluted relationship to Aoi via Genji means more publically than does her relationship to her daughter.*



*As before, the rain on the veranda reflects just how sad Genji is about his wife's death. The addition of nature to Genji's grief is, notably, enough to convince Tō no Chūjō that Genji actually did love Aoi, which shows just how compelling these natural wonders can be.*



*Genji's conversation with Aoi's serving women illustrates the power imbalance between men and women very clearly: the serving women have no reason to believe Genji if they go off of how he treated Aoi, and yet their future and wellbeing depend on his decision to be kind and follow through on his promise to take care of them.*



*When the Minister of the Left says that Genji will return to the Sanjō mansion because of Yugiri, it shows that he believes that the relationship between father and son is one that's far more reliable than that between lovers or even husband and wife. This is another way that the novel suggests that the parent-child relationship is strong and can be used for ulterior motives, as the Minister is clearly prepared to use it to get to see more of Genji.*



Genji visits the Emperor at the palace and then calls on Fujitsubo. She sends out condolences through Omyōbu. Genji then visits Murasaki and tells her that now she'll surely get bored of him. He spends days thinking of Yugiri and Murasaki, thinking she's no longer too young for marriage. He can't help himself, and Murasaki's attendants have no way of knowing that the line has been crossed. One morning, Murasaki remains in bed. Later, Genji pushes a note behind her curtains saying that they've spent many nights together "purposelessly," separated by covers. Murasaki feels foolish for not understanding that sex had been his intention and thinks that Genji is disgusting.

Genji returns at noon and invites Murasaki to play a game, but she pulls the covers over her head and refuses. Her ladies leave them alone as Genji reprimands her for being rude. He discovers that she's crying under the covers and agrees to leave her alone. In the evening, Genji and Murasaki eat the traditional wedding sweets and after, he and Koremitsu make oblique references to consummating the marriage. Genji feels like a "child thief" and is very amused, feeling as though he couldn't love Murasaki more. Koremitsu stealthily sneaks Murasaki the next box of wedding sweets and in the morning, Murasaki's women are overcome with joy that Genji followed through on his promise. Over the next few weeks, Genji spends little time away from Murasaki.

It comes to Kokiden's attention that her sister Oborozukiyo seems to be pining for Genji. The Minister of the Right isn't particularly upset about this since Genji's attentions are clearly elsewhere, but Kokiden suggests that Oborozukiyo must go to court. Genji is sad to hear this, but he resolves to remain true to Murasaki. He thinks too of the Rokujō Lady and thinks that if she's willing to continue seeing him, they may be able to be fine companions. Finally, Genji performs the initiation ceremonies for Murasaki. She feels betrayed and refuses to look at him, which he finds simultaneously sad and interesting.

On New Year's Day, Genji visits the Emperor and then goes to see the Minister of the Left. He's thrilled to see Yugiri. Princess Omiya sends a note with New Year robes for Genji and he dutifully changes into them. They exchange notes grieving for Aoi but recognize that the new year should bring renewal.

*Murasaki's sense of betrayal again shows just how important the parent-child relationship is, particularly to a child—she wouldn't feel so betrayed had Genji not taken it upon himself to act as her father until she was old enough to have sex. It's also important to pay attention to the fact that while Murasaki is upset, there's no indication that she has any power to stand up to Genji and tell him she doesn't want to be his lover. In other words, she's stuck going through with his wishes.*



*When Genji is delighted to think of himself as a child thief, it indicates that his understanding of the parent-child relationship is definitely warped and damaged. His inability to draw lines in appropriate places opens him up to later abuse his relationships with his biological children and use them to angle for his own gain, whether that's a sexual gain or a gain in power. The happiness that Murasaki's attendants feel shows again that as awful as this is for Murasaki, they're going to benefit from her sexual relationship with Genji.*



*Again, Genji's assessment of Murasaki's reaction to sex with him shows that he doesn't understand how he's abused her trust or how powerless she is in this whole situation. This reinforces that he sees her as little more than a toy to play with, even though she's now passed over into adult territory and, in theory, should be able to act more like an adult and stand up for herself.*



*When Princess Omiya and Genji recognize that the new year should bring renewal but still feel sad, it opens up the novel's logic to more nuance: while the cycles and seasons certainly do dictate how life should be lived, there is room for some disconnect.*



## THE SACRED TREE

The Rokujō Lady grows more and more despondent. Genji stops visiting altogether and so she decides to accompany Akikonomu to Ise. Genji is sad about this and tries to convince her to stay, but she refuses. Finally, he goes to visit her at the shrine. The Rokujō Lady agrees to receive him through curtains though when he arrives, she only passes a few notes. The lady's ladies finally convince the Rokujō Lady to go talk to Genji herself. He offers her a camellia branch in lieu of an apology for neglecting her, and the two make up to a degree. Genji remembers how close they once were and begins to cry. The Rokujō Lady tries not to cry as Genji tells her everything, and she finds her resolve to leave weakening.

At dawn, Genji takes the Rokujō Lady's hand and professes his love. She expresses sadness that she's leaving and finally, Genji goes. He writes her the next day and his letter almost makes the Rokujō Lady reconsider, but it's too late. Akikonomu is thrilled to get to take her mother with her to Ise. The Suzaku Emperor, who is romantically interested in Akikonomu, appoints a grand retinue to escort the priestess and Genji sends a letter as they leave, to which the priestess herself replies. Genji spends the rest of the day in seclusion and thinks that Akikonomu interests him, wondering if he'd have a chance to meet her in the future.

The Suzaku Emperor puts the farewell comb in Akikonomu's hair and in the evening, the procession of carriages leaves for Ise. As the procession passes Genji's mansion, he sends out a poem asking the Rokujō Lady if she'll regret her decision. The Rokujō Lady replies briskly the next morning that she's firm in her decision. Genji spends the day alone.

Beginning in October, the court begins to fear for the Emperor's health. He begs Suzaku to be good to Genji and to ask Genji for advice. Suzaku agrees to follow his father's wishes. Reizei also visits the Emperor with Fujitsubo. Later, the Emperor tells Genji to take care of Reizei. Kokiden delays her visit and because of this, the Emperor dies before she can see him. His death is a surprise and brings possible turmoil with it: the Suzaku Emperor is still young and his grandfather, the Minister of the Right, is vindictive.

Fujitsubo knows that Kokiden will be horrible to live with, so Prince Hyōbu arrives to take her home. The prince and Genji exchange poems about their grief before the procession leaves for Sanjō. Genji grieves into the new year. In February, Kokiden appoints Oborozukiyo to be the wardress of the ladies' apartments and gives Oborozukiyo her former pavilion. Genji and Oborozukiyo continue to write to each other.

*Though it's unclear what exactly Genji telling the Rokujō Lady "everything" entails, dumping his emotional turmoil on her is another cunning way that Genji can force the women in his life to take responsibility for his feelings and emotions. This has great results for him, as he's somehow compelling enough to get back into the lady's good graces by doing so. All together, this shows how Genji is able to manipulate his lovers so that they'll continue to accept his abuse.*



*When Genji's letter is able to make the Rokujō Lady seriously reconsider whether or not to go, it reinforces the power of well-written letters to create change and help a person carry out their wishes in the real world. Genji's decision to consider Akikonomu in this moment shows that even though he's still grieving for Aoi, that's not stopping him from looking elsewhere for more lovers—and in this case, he's looking again at a child.*



*Again, the fact that Genji spends a day in seclusion after being turned down by the Rokujō Lady while the lady was driven to drastic measures when she felt lonely shows that Genji, as a man, is in a far more secure position in his romances than she is.*



*Though the narration never gives the Suzaku Emperor's age, it's important to keep in mind that he's young enough to be easily taken advantage of by both Kokiden and the Minister of the Right. This then illustrates how individuals who are already powerful—like Kokiden—can use their children to become even more powerful and effectively take control of the government.*



*Fujitsubo's precautionary measures indicate that the fear that other women will suffer the same fate as the Lady of the Paulownia Court is absolutely still alive and well—and is even more pressing, given that Kokiden's rage is no longer tempered by the Emperor and his power.*



With the Emperor gone, Kokiden sets about making Genji's life miserable, as she and the Minister of the Right haven't forgotten that the Minister of the Left gave Aoi to Genji instead of to Suzaku. Genji dedicates himself to Yugiri's education and neglects his many ladies. He's sad, however, when the Princess Asagao is called to take a priestess position. Regardless, he continues to write to her. Suzaku wants to call on Genji, but his mother and grandfather won't let him.

Genji and Oborozukiyo continue their romance and one evening, she invites him to her chambers. Near dawn, Genji is awakened by guardsmen yelling, flushing out men in ladies' chambers. Oborozukiyo recites a poem as Genji tries to sneak out. Unfortunately, an officer affiliated with the Minister of the Right sees Genji.

Fujitsubo continues to worry about Reizei. Though she's happy that the Emperor never found out about Reizei's paternity, she's still afraid of what might happen if the truth were to get out. She's also unhappy that Genji is still in love with her. One day, he manages to get close to her. It feels like a nightmare to her; his "comforting" words aren't comforting at all and she begins to experience chest pains. Genji is shocked at how hard she resists him but refuses to leave, even when dawn comes. Omyōbu pushes Genji into a closet to hide him and calls for Prince Hyōbu and priests.

By evening, Fujitsubo is feeling better, so Prince Hyōbu leaves. Genji slips out of the closet and watches Fujitsubo for a moment. He marvels at how much she and Murasaki look like each other. Genji approaches Fujitsubo again. Terrified, she sinks to the floor and tries to run, but she trips on her hair. Genji berates her with years of pent up frustrations, but she remains unmoved and won't let him force himself on her. Genji feels ashamed by morning. He begs to see her occasionally in a nonromantic capacity, but Fujitsubo passionately says that she should die—though if she did, her love for Genji would keep her from finding salvation.

Distraught, Genji leaves and vows to make Fujitsubo feel sorry for him. He locks himself away and doesn't write to her. Fujitsubo spends days worried and disturbed, fearing that she needs to give up her title of empress to appease Kokiden. She resolves to become a nun and goes to see Reizei. While at court, she remembers why she can't live there: the stress of worrying about Kokiden is too much. She asks Reizei if he'd be sad if she left court and cut her hair, and he quietly says he'd miss her.

*The reasons why Kokiden is out to get Genji remind the reader that in Heian court culture, marriage is something that is undertaken for political motives, not love. The Suzaku Emperor's willingness to call on Genji suggests that he's a decent person at heart and is just powerless because of his youth and because of how forceful his relatives are.*



*Even though this unfortunate sighting never goes anywhere in this translation, it helps to build the case that the court is no longer someplace where Genji can expect to get his way and conduct himself as he sees fit.*



*When Genji once again refuses to read the room and take Fujitsubo's wishes into account, it shows that he still thinks of women as existing only to serve him however he sees fit—even if it makes women seriously ill or upset, as happened with Murasaki. It's also telling that Omyōbu doesn't put a stop to this sooner; while it's possible she didn't have the power to do so, it's also worth keeping in mind that she may believe Fujitsubo being raped is a fair price for the reward of being associated with Genji.*



*It continues to be somewhat unclear if Fujitsubo genuinely does nurse feelings for Genji and believes she can't act on them in good faith, or if she's just saying she has feelings to appease him somewhat. When she trips on her hair in her hurry to escape, the novel shows how all the trappings of a woman's life can work together to keep her from ever escaping, even in these insidious ways.*



*Genji's method of retaliating illustrates again just how important it is for women to cultivate their relationships with powerful men, even if they're not all that into the men or the relationships themselves. The way this passage is structured, it implies that because Fujitsubo doesn't have Genji's support, Kokiden is going to be even harder to deal with.*



Genji ignores Reizei to punish Fujitsubo for her "cruelty." He attempts to avoid gossip by spending several days in a temple and is very affected by the holy life he observes there. He thinks the only reason he doesn't embrace the religious life is because of Murasaki. He writes to her often and she cries when she receives his letters. Genji is thrilled to see her writing style mature.

Genji also writes to Princess Asagao and asks to visit. Her response is cryptic though her handwriting is lovely, and Genji laments that he lost out on wooing two priestesses. Genji dedicates himself to studying Buddhist texts and finally, decides to return to Murasaki. He finds that she's even more beautiful and mature now, and he finds her very pleasing. He sends some branches of autumn leaves to Fujitsubo and Omyōbu, apologizing for his neglect. Fujitsubo blushes when she discovers a tightly folded note hidden in the leaves for her, but she doesn't read it. She understands she needs to remain friendly with Genji for the sake of Reizei, and Genji realizes the same.

Genji returns to court to call on the Suzaku Emperor. Suzaku is aware that Genji is seeing Oborozukiyo but doesn't see any reason to caution him in the matter. They discuss all manner of things and finally, they talk about Reizei and Fujitsubo. As Genji leaves the emperor's chambers, one of Kokiden's nephews boldly insults Genji for being disloyal to Suzaku. This shakes Genji, but he continues on to see Fujitsubo. They exchange poems about their sadness and the space between them.

Because of the climate at court, Genji stops writing to Oborozukiyo. Eventually, she writes him a poem expressing her sadness that he hasn't visited. He replies that he's sad too and intends to return. On the anniversary of the Emperor's death, Fujitsubo prepares to read the Lotus Sutra for him. She and Genji exchange notes expressing their continued grief for the Emperor. The reading ceremony takes place in December and the hall is decorated beautifully. On the last day, Fujitsubo announces her plans to become a nun. This takes the assembly, including Genji and Prince Hyōbu, by surprise. Everyone weeps as she takes her vows and cuts her hair. Genji feels as though darkness has settled over him.

When the ceremony is over, Genji goes to speak to Fujitsubo. He's angry that she surprised them all, but Fujitsubo sends notes through Omyōbu that she didn't want to attract attention. Because there are others around, Genji can't tell her his true thoughts. Fujitsubo sends out a note that her heart remains with Reizei. Finally, Genji leaves.

*When Genji chooses to ignore Reizei too, it offers another way in which parents can use children as tools. This also suggests that while the parent-child relationships in the novel may be respected, relationships between parents themselves are nowhere near as strong or powerful.*



*The decision to put their differences aside for Reizei's sake shows that Genji is growing up and maturing, while it indicates that Fujitsubo recognizes that her wellbeing depends on her son doing well at court—something that will happen only with Genji's help and guidance. The autumn leaves Genji sends Fujitsubo suggest that their relationship is coming to a close, acting as a symbol opposite the cherry blossoms that signal renewal and growth.*



*Even though it's somewhat unclear at this point in the text, the narrator later notes that Suzaku and Oborozukiyo are sexually involved. This understanding suggests that the rivalry and jealousy is something that exists only between women, not between men—which, again, speaks to the comfort that men feel in their positions.*



*Fujitsubo's choice to become a nun functions here in much the same way that the Rokujō Lady's choice to follow her daughter to Ise worked: it allows the women to take some control over their lives by removing themselves from the toxicity of court culture altogether. It's also clear here that this isn't something that the powerful men at court can argue with, which hearkens back to Heian culture as a whole and the deference afforded to religious figures at this time.*



*It's telling that Fujitsubo says her heart is with Reizei, not with Genji: this shows that even as she removes herself from court life, her relationship with her son is the one thing that will continue to guide her going forward.*



Genji wonders what will happen to Reizei all night. In the morning, he throws himself into getting the nunnery ready for Fujitsubo and Omyōbu, who also decided to take vows. He and Fujitsubo see each other more often, though they don't spend the night together. As the New Year arrives, Fujitsubo dedicates herself to prayer. The customs that are normally festive and exciting seem sad now. As spring approaches, he and Fujitsubo continue to exchange poems. He tries not to weep, and women feel as though Genji is almost more beautiful now that he's not the darling of the court.

When the spring promotions are announced, Fujitsubo's household is passed over entirely. She devotes herself to prayer and reminds herself that Reizei's security is the most important thing. Genji, the Minister of the Left, and Tō no Chūjō are also slighted when the promotions are announced. Tō no Chūjō and Genji spend a great deal of time together, distracting themselves with music and poetry. Genji becomes more interested in religious ceremonies and commissions several prayers.

One summer evening, Tō no Chūjō brings a collection of Chinese poetry with him when he visits Genji. Genji pulls out his own volumes and sends invitations out for a poetry rhyming contest that evening. Genji is the best at guessing the rhymes. Two days later, Tō no Chūjō throws a banquet for the winners of the contest. They play music and Tō no Chūjō's son sings for the assembled men. The narrator records several of the poems that were composed but insists that others were composed under the influence of alcohol and aren't worth recording. They were all, however, in praise of Genji.

Oborozukiyo begins experiencing malaria attacks and so goes to spend time with her family. As she improves, she arranges to see Genji. They begin seeing each other every night. Genji takes great care to sneak in and out, as Kokiden is also around. One night, a terrible thunderstorm passes through. Everyone in the household rushes around in a panic and Genji fears he won't be able to sneak out. Finally, the storm passes, dawn comes, and with it, the Minister of the Right jauntily lifts Oborozukiyo's curtains to check on her. Oborozukiyo slips out, looking as though she's having another malaria attack, but the minister notices a man's sash in her skirts and a note on the ground.

*The fact that Genji and Fujitsubo can see each other without even the question of sex again indicates that there's a great deal of power and agency available to women when they choose to remove themselves entirely from court life. When other women think that Genji is more beautiful now than he was before, it suggests that his sadness is preparing him for more greatness later, while also reinforcing his exceptionalism.*



*Genji's newfound interest in religion is one way that the novel signals his growing maturity, especially when combined with the fact that he understands now that Fujitsubo is totally off limits. This implies that his experience with Fujitsubo was an unintended coming of age experience for Genji and now, he may act more maturely.*



*The narrator's notes here suggest that Heian court culture isn't always something that's receptive to the very things it promotes and prioritizes, as the mention of drunken poems implies that either the culture itself is flawed or the prioritization of poetry is misguided. When they all praise Genji regardless of their relative value, it shows again that his exceptionalism is something that everyone knows about and everyone is willing to voice.*



*The thunderstorm here acts as a symbol for change and signals bad things to come: now that Genji has been discovered with Oborozukiyo, which is clearly not okay no matter what Suzaku said about it previously, he's angered the most powerful family at court. This also reinforces that now, Genji is on his own to manage his conduct and doesn't have the Emperor around anymore to protect him or to reprimand him for acting foolishly. As such, Genji may finally have to pay the price for his transgressions.*



The Minister of the Right lifts the curtains again and sees Genji in Oborozukiyo's bed, half undressed. The minister angrily leaves and Genji fears that this will cause quite the scandal. The minister immediately goes to Kokiden with the note. He rants that Genji used him by engaging with Oborozukiyo like this and calls Genji a disgrace to everyone. Kokiden takes this one step further, blaming Genji for slighting them and Oborozukiyo for letting Genji get the better of her. She insists that Genji is eager for the next emperor to take the throne. Feeling somewhat sheepish, the minister tells Kokiden to tell Oborozukiyo to be careful and to tell no one else. Kokiden, however, feels as though Genji personally insulted her.

*Notice that though Kokiden takes it upon herself to punish Genji, she still blames Oborozukiyo for sleeping with Genji—regardless of the fact that the first time they had sex, Genji raped her and told her that trying to fight him off wasn't worth it. Essentially, Kokiden's anger at Oborozukiyo reinforces that women have very little power in this culture, as they're supposed to fight men off but can also expect to be punished by the men themselves for doing just that.*



## THE ORANGE BLOSSOMS

After the Emperor's death, one of his ladies, Reikeiden, had been forgotten by everyone but Genji. One evening in summer, he decides to visit her and her younger sister. On his way, he notices a house with ladies playing the koto inside. Koremitsu carries a note to the ladies. In their reply the ladies feign ignorance as to who Genji is, so Koremitsu decides they should continue on. When they arrive at Reikeiden's house, Genji and Reikeiden talk all night about old times. Genji promises to visit her more often so they can remember the past together. Then, Genji goes to look in on her younger sister, the Lady of the Orange Blossoms. The narrator notes that because Genji is so beautiful and kind, he succeeds in developing long-term relationships with most women.

*Even while the particulars of Genji's relationships with Reikeiden and the Lady of the Orange Blossoms aren't explored here, it's still worth noting that these two women are dependent on Genji and Genji alone to keep them connected to the outside world, given that they've been forgotten by everyone else. This makes them vulnerable, as their reputations must be thought of before their desires in regards to their romantic relationships.*



## SUMA

Genji feels as though his life is an endless stream of unhappiness. He deliberates about removing himself from court life to the Suma coast, and his indecision drives his servers mad. He knows that the time apart would hurt Murasaki, but he understands that taking her would be inappropriate. Genji also worries about the Lady of the Orange Blossoms; he doesn't visit her often, but he is her only visitor. Fujitsubo also begins to write him, worried about rumors. Finally, at the end of March, Genji decides to leave the city.

*Genji's understanding that exile is the only way to recover from the consequences of being caught with Oborozukiyo shows that women aren't actually the only ones who can be punished for inappropriate sexual behavior. Further, Fujitsubo's worried letters show that Genji being on the outs means that all of his other women are also affected, reinforcing that Genji has a lot of responsibility when it comes to his lovers.*



Genji visits the Minister of the Left. All the women of the house gather with Yugiri to look at Genji. The Minister of the Left expresses displeasure about the rumors concerning Genji, but Genji accepts responsibility for what happened, insisting that exile is the only way to fix things. The two men reminisce and cry as Yugiri plays among them. Genji and Tō no Chūjō drink until late and then, Genji spends the night with one of Aoi's former serving women. In the morning, Genji makes a note of the **cherry blossoms** past their prime and receives a message from Princess Omiya. She apologizes for not saying goodbye in person. The women all assemble to say goodbye to Genji before he returns briefly to his mansion.

The women at the mansion are all awake and crying. Genji looks around and realizes that all of the beauty of the mansion will crumble in his absence. He goes to visit Murasaki and explains why he spent the night away from her. She's upset; Prince Hyōbu and his wife have fallen into line with the current regime, so she long ago decided to cut contact with them. Murasaki is even more upset when Genji insists that he cannot take her with him into exile. As Genji dresses, he looks in the mirror and comforts Murasaki with a poem, promising her that his reflection will remain in the mirror with her while he's gone.

Because Genji keeps getting notes from Reikeiden and the Lady of the Orange Blossoms, he decides to spend one final night with the ladies. The narrator notes that the two women are entirely dependent on Genji's attention, and Genji realizes how sad they'll be when he's gone. After visiting with Reikeiden, he talks with the Lady of the Orange Blossoms until dawn. Genji assures her that he'll be back and encourages her to not dwell on the bad times.

After this, Genji heads home and delegates the household affairs to trusted men, packs a few things he'll need, and assigns all the women to Murasaki's wing of the house. He sends parting notes and gifts to his lovers, including Oborozukiyo, who writes back that she's crying about all of this as well.

*Despite this being a sad time for everyone involved, when Genji notices the cherry blossoms it offers hope that his time in Suma won't actually be all that bad—it may even be able to be a time of rebirth for him. However, the fact that the blossoms are past their prime may be an allusion to Genji himself and the fact that he's getting older and can no longer get away with his youthful sexual shenanigans anymore.*



*Again, Genji's ability to recognize that the mansion itself and the women in it will suffer in his absence shows that he's beginning to understand the many ways that he's solely responsible for the women he interacts with, whether they're lovers or serving women employed by his lovers. In turn, this illustrates how women are dependent on the powerful men around them.*



*The simple fact that Genji recognizes his responsibility to Reikeiden and the Lady of the Orange Blossoms and takes steps to make them feel somewhat more secure suggests again that Genji is growing up and becoming more mature in this difficult time.*



*For Oborozukiyo, it's possible that she's suffering even more than Genji is, given that she has to live with Kokiden and the Minister of the Right. The fact that the narration never says either way focuses the narration on Genji.*



The night before Genji leaves, he visits the Emperor's grave and but stops in first to see Fujitsubo. They discuss their worries about Reizei and Genji refrains from bringing up old complaints. The nighttime ride to the grave is subdued, and Genji notices that the path to the grave is overgrown. He thinks he sees the Emperor standing there. At daybreak, Genji sends a farewell message with a **cherry** branch to Reizei. The prince asks Omyōbu to send back a note that he'll be very sad that his father is gone. Omyōbu feels as though the prince, Fujitsubo, and Genji should've lived tranquil lives, and she feels responsible for messing it all up. With Reizei's note, she includes one of her own assuring Genji that he'll return to a "city of flowers."

Genji spends the day with Murasaki and at nightfall, he asks her to see him off. He feigns pleasantness as they say goodbye and thinks she looks extremely beautiful in her sadness and the moonlight. He thinks of her all the way to Suma. Genji feels utterly lost when he sees the ruins and the desolation at Suma. His attendant Yoshikiyo oversees the remodel of Genji's house in the mountains, however, and soon it feels like a home. The only reason Genji remembers he's in exile is because he has nobody to talk to.

As the seasons pass, Genji thinks often of Murasaki, Reizei, and Yugiri. He sends letters to Murasaki, Fujitsubo, and Oborozukiyo. In her grief and loneliness, Murasaki takes to her bed, making her serving women fear that she might die. She does send supplies to Suma and thinks often of Genji. Fujitsubo spends her time worrying about Reizei and wondering if she effectively kept the gossips from discovering the relationship between her and Genji. Believing she was successful, she thinks fondly of Genji and sends affectionate replies to his letters. Oborozukiyo sends notes that tell Genji of her intense sadness, and Murasaki's poems are also extremely sad. Genji again thinks about bringing her to Suma, but turns to fasting, prayer, and meditation instead.

Genji even resumes correspondence with the Rokujō Lady. He's entranced by her calligraphy and her five-page letter, and thinks he was wrong to get so upset with her about Aoi's death. Genji laments to her that he didn't just go with her to Ise. He also receives comforting letters from the Lady of the Orange Blossoms and Reikeiden, and he sends friends in the city to make repairs to their house and garden.

*As has been the case previously, the overgrown brush around the Emperor's grave implies that his legacy is being tainted by those at court and shows that sadness grips the court now that the Emperor is gone. Totally opposite this, the cherry branch that Genji sends to Reizei acts as a way for him to tell his son to remain hopeful despite his absence, and Omyōbu's assurance that Genji will return to a city of flowers works in much the same way. Together, they show how poetry and nature allow people to maintain a sense of hope.*



*It's worth keeping in mind that with Genji gone, Murasaki may find herself especially vulnerable to other men's advances—and possibly, those from the other side of the political aisle. It's also possible that because of the convoluted and unhealthy nature of her relationship with Genji, she may also be unable to discern what a man's intentions are, making her even more vulnerable to manipulation.*



*Fujitsubo's sense of fear and the fact that she feels able to respond to Genji because she believes she kept the gossips at bay again shows just how important one's reputation is at court. It's also important to note that were anyone to find out about Reizei's paternity, despite it not being Fujitsubo's fault (given that Genji raped her), Fujitsubo would pay the price, not Genji. This suggests that the social and political structure of the time punishes women more heftily than it does men.*



*Putting Genji's interest in the Rokujō Lady's handwriting right next to his decision to forgive her for Aoi's death shows just how powerful a well-written letter can be in Heian culture: it's enough to bring the lady back into Genji's good graces and possibly, restore some power to her.*



Oborozukiyo spends her days feeling upset. The Minister of the Right attempts to help her and the Suzaku Emperor forgives her for her offense in sleeping with Genji. They begin to see each other romantically, though Suzaku is annoyed that she seems caught up in pining for Genji. One evening, he fears he's gone against the Emperor's wishes to be good to Genji and will pay for it. He suggests he'd like to die and then expresses sadness that he and Oborozukiyo don't have children. Suzaku says he'd like to adopt Reizei, but fears doing so because of guaranteed objections from those in power.

When autumn arrives, Genji feels as though the ocean is right outside his window. One night, he weeps and plays the koto, but the music only makes him sadder. This wakes up his attendants, who all begin to cry with him. Genji realizes he has a responsibility to make this time easier for his attendants. He arranges games and activities during the day and paints for their amusement. Some of his paintings are exceptional. Genji's attendants feel as though they could never leave his service.

One evening, Genji admires the flowers in the garden and the coast in the distance. He recites a Buddhist sutra, and his men feel as though they've never heard a finer voice. They listen to fishermen singing and geese honking overhead. The geese inspire poems from Genji, Koremitsu, and Yoshikiyo about the power of friendship. They stare at the moon and Genji cries for Fujitsubo and the friendship he shared with Suzaku. He realizes he holds no ill will towards his half-brother.

As the days go by, an assistant viceroy passes Suma by boat with his daughters. He has the Gosechi dancer with him, one of Genji's former lovers. The viceroy and Genji exchange letters and poems and Genji and the Gosechi dancer also write to each other about their love. She wishes she could stay in Suma.

Back in the city, everyone grieves Genji's exile. The Suzaku Emperor and Genji continue to exchange poems, which sends Kokiden into a fit of rage. After this, the letters stop. Murasaki remains unhappy, though serving women who once thought her simple decide that she's absolutely worthy of Genji's affections. Genji continues to think about bringing her to Suma but decides that "plebian life" is too dirty for her. Genji spends his winter playing music with Koremitsu and Yoshikiyo and thinks of Chinese literature telling of situations similar to his. He spends his nights in prayer, which impresses his men.

*Here, the Suzaku Emperor shows that he recognizes that one of the ways he can begin to take some power for himself is by having children, especially with powerful women. However, he also speaks in a way that suggests he sees Genji as a rival now, which shows that the women can cause strife between men too.*



*Genji's ability to influence his attendants' emotions and feelings about being in exile again shows how powerful he is, given that as far as the reader is aware, they only cry when he does. When he realizes that this is a difficult time for them and decides to do his best to make this time easier, it illustrates again how Genji is beginning to take responsibility for his actions.*



*As unfortunate as Genji's exile is, it's clearly doing Genji some good: remember that Koremitsu has spent a great deal of time annoyed with Genji and his antics, and it seems that being in exile has put a stop to the antics and encouraged Genji to think more maturely about his friendships and relationships.*



*The appearance of the Gosechi dancer shatters the illusion that Genji is actually taking this time to step away from romance and think about the consequences of his romantic life.*



*Genji's assessment of "plebian life" offers insight into how upper-class Heian courtiers view the lower classes and, in turn, shows how separated court life is from the lives of the people they govern. The focus on the dirtiness of lower-class life is one way that the narrator and Genji suggest that in their eyes, those who aren't at court or don't have money are, in some ways, less than human.*



Yoshikiyo remembers the Akashi lady, the daughter of the former governor, and writes to her. Her father replies and invites Yoshikiyo to visit. He refuses. The former governor, upon learning that Genji is in Suma, tells his wife that they must offer Genji the Akashi lady instead of marrying her to the "upstart" current governor. His wife thinks this is silly, especially given their daughter's country upbringing and the fact that Genji is in exile for a crime, but the former governor insists that Genji's only crime is being talented and the son of a woman who was disliked. The narrator notes that the Akashi Lady herself is no beauty but is sensitive, and she's decided to throw herself into the sea or become a nun if she has to marry someone of her class.

As spring arrives in Suma, Genji looks at the blossoms on the **cherry** tree he planted and thinks of the festivals going on in the city. In the city, Tō no Chūjō has achieved the rank of counselor and is doing well, but he spends most of his time lamenting Genji's fate. Finally, he decides to visit. He finds Genji's house charming and thinks that Genji himself looks extremely handsome in his rustic robes. Tō no Chūjō chats with fishermen about their work and brings clothes and gifts. He and Genji laugh, cry, and compose poetry all night. As Tō no Chūjō leaves, he expresses hope that Genji will return to the city.

In March, Genji decides to go down and look at the shore. He asks a soothsayer to perform prayers and cast a ceremonial doll out to sea. Genji is magnificent next to the sea and asks the gods to help him, as he's innocent of his crimes. Suddenly, a storm comes up out of nowhere. Everyone on the beach carefully makes their way back to the house. Genji calmly sits and recites prayers and eventually, the storm subsides. Genji falls asleep near dawn. The king of the sea comes to Genji in a dream and tells him the court is summoning him. Upon waking, Genji decides he can't stay at Suma any longer.

## AKASHI

The storms continue for several days. Genji knows that if he were to return to the city because of the storms, he'd look ridiculous. However, the king of the sea continues to visit him in his dreams. A messenger arrives from Murasaki, looking more like an animal than a person. She writes that storms plague the city too, and the messenger explains that this weather is so unusual that courtiers are ordering religious services. Genji wonders if this is the end of the world and with his men, dedicates himself to praying to the Sumiyoshi shrine. As he prays, lightning strikes one of his rooms. Genji moves to a kitchen building and finally, night falls and the storm subsides.

*With the introduction of the Akashi Lady, the novel continues to expand its exploration of status and how different life situations influence this. Here, the novel reiterates the idea that one can only be properly upper class if one lives in the city, where a majority of court life takes place. Notably, the governor isn't entirely wrong about why Genji is in exile: he's still paying the price for his mother's popularity, and Kokiden's fears are certainly rooted in an understanding that many would rather have Genji as governor.*



*When Tō no Chūjō observes that Genji still manages to look surprisingly handsome in "rustic" robes, it's another way that the novel is able to show just how exceptional and special Genji is. This also hearkens back to the novel's insistence that one cannot be courtly if one doesn't actually live at court; Tō no Chūjō's visit and continued support leaves open the possibility for Genji to return to court and resume a position of power.*



*All of the elements of the natural world here appear to be in cahoots with Genji himself—it appears as though he almost calls the storm, and it also doesn't appear as though he's afraid of it. This conflates Genji with the natural world and suggests that the natural world will begin to act to right some of the perceived wrongs and, hopefully, restore Genji to glory back in the city.*



*Again, Genji continues to look as though he's not actually afraid of the storms. The continued appearances by the king of the sea suggests that the divine world and the natural world are taking a keen interest in Genji's fate and want to see him back in the city, which provides more evidence that Genji is not simply more exceptional than normal but so exceptional that he attracts this kind of divine interest.*



Genji and his men return to the main house. The damage is ugly, the house is filled with scared fishermen, and Genji feels utterly alone. Exhausted, he dozes off. In a dream, the Emperor comes to him and tells him to leave Suma. Genji is overjoyed, even after his father leaves to attend to something in the city. He remains awake until daylight. After dawn, a small boat pulls in from the former governor's house, asking to speak to Yoshikiyo. Genji sends Yoshikiyo down, thinking that the small boat must have been helped along by the Emperor.

A messenger tells Yoshikiyo that earlier in the month, the former governor saw in a dream that he'd receive a sign on the thirteenth of the month and needed to have a boat ready. On the thirteenth, the storm rose up. The former governor sent his messengers out despite the storm, and a strange wind blew them to the Suma coast. Yoshikiyo relays this story to Genji, and Genji believes the gods are offering to help him. He sends a message back asking if he could seek refuge with the former governor. The governor is delighted, and Genji sets out before dawn.

The Akashi coast is gorgeous. The former governor installs Genji in a house on the beach, and the narrator notes that the governor's women live further inland. Genji is thrilled to discover that the former governor leads a lifestyle only slightly less grand than the one he led at court. After resting, Genji sends messages back to the city, promising Murasaki that he's still thinking only of her. The rains stop and Genji and the former governor discuss the Akashi Lady. Genji secretly wants to see her and wonders if there's a bond between them, but he reasons that Murasaki would be extremely upset if he acted on this impulse.

The former governor doesn't want to push the issue, but he prays that his hopes for the Akashi Lady might be realized. The Akashi Lady herself is in awe of Genji, but feels her attraction is inappropriate. As spring truly arrives, Genji continues to receive notes from the city. Lost in thought one evening, Genji pulls out his koto and begins to play. The ladies in the former governor's house sigh and the former governor sends for a thirteen-string koto. Genji plays this too and remarks that he loves it when women play the koto. The former governor smiles and explains that he was classically trained on the koto and his daughter learned to play by imitating him. He asks if Genji would listen to her play.

*The Emperor's presence again suggests that the supernatural world is taking a keen interest in the human world. This also helps to flesh out the novel's logic of what's right and what's wrong, as the Emperor's advice to Genji reminds the reader that the Emperor's wishes and desires are the ones that the characters are supposed to follow.*



*Though the novel doesn't overtly characterize the move to Akashi as such, it's worth keeping in mind that going to Akashi means that Genji has more people to talk to—essentially, he's going to have access to what makes Suma feel most like exile. This suggests that things are beginning to look up for Genji. It's also important to remember that he may once again become involved in romantic pursuits, given the presence of the Akashi Lady.*



*The way that Genji uses letters to care for Murasaki and his desire to keep her happy shows again that he's maturing, but his belief that he and the Akashi Lady might have a bond suggests that he's still prone to pursue romance whenever it seems to suit him. Further, saying that he has a bond with the lady is, notably, the same language he used to justify taking Murasaki, which doesn't bode well for the relationship.*



*Once again, the wishes of the Akashi Lady's father are given precedence. This reinforces how little power she has to control her life, even if she can, in theory, control what happens by choosing to become a nun or throw herself into the sea if things don't go her way. By appealing to Genji's love of music and of beauty, the former governor shows that he understands how to manipulate Genji's association with the natural world for his own benefit.*



Genji is very interested in hearing the Akashi Lady play. He asks the former governor to play the lute. They pass the night happily singing, playing, and drinking. Late at night, the former governor tells Genji about his life and about that of his daughter. He explains his hopes for her to marry a "noble gentleman" in the city and if he's unable to arrange this for her, she's supposed to throw herself into the sea. Genji weeps, feeling this is a sign that he and the Akashi Lady have a bond, and asks if he can see her.

The next afternoon, Genji sends a note on saffron paper to the Akashi Lady. The former governor insists she respond quickly, but she feels unequal to Genji and refuses. The former governor replies for her, telling Genji that she is indeed interested. Genji is startled by how upfront the note is but responds later in the day. Genji's letter makes the Akashi Lady cry, as she again feels as though he's too good for her. Finally, she chooses lavender paper and writes back. Her handwriting is lovely. Genji begins sending notes every few days in secret, afraid that Yoshikiyo has already laid claims to the lady. The Akashi Lady remains generally proud and aloof.

Genji spends much of his time thinking of the city and Murasaki. However, he reasons that he won't be in exile much longer. Meanwhile, back when the storm had ravaged the Suma coast, the Suzaku Emperor had a disturbing dream in which the Emperor yelled at him about Genji. Kokiden didn't think it was anything to worry about, but Suzaku came down with a painful eye condition after that. Soon after, the Minister of the Right died and Kokiden became ill as well. Suzaku fears that as long as Genji is away, he'll suffer, and he suggests that Genji be allowed to return. Kokiden refuses.

As colder weather arrives, Genji begins to ask the former governor if he could bring the Akashi Lady to visit in secret. He believes he can't go visit her, as he thinks she's too independent and they're of different stations. He decides that her parents have impossible hopes and vows to only exchange notes with her while he's in Akashi. The Akashi Lady only wanted to see Genji, so she's satisfied with this. The former governor fears that he's going to fail to marry her to Genji.

*When Genji becomes even more interested in the Akashi Lady after hearing what she's supposed to do if she can't marry well, it suggests again that Genji likes being important, especially when he can use his status to "help" vulnerable women. He is, in other words, drawn to her because of her relative lack of power.*



*Notice how the former governor bullies the Akashi Lady into replying when she doesn't want to. This reminds the reader that the Akashi Lady must do as the men around her want her to do, as she has little power to stand up for herself and choose anything else but death. Also notice that Genji feels more attracted to her when he sees her lovely handwriting, which reinforces the importance of letters and handwriting in his assessment of a lady's worth.*



*The Emperor's visit to the Suzaku Emperor likely happened right after the Emperor spoke to Genji and told him to return to the city, while the Suzaku Emperor's eye condition indicates that he's being punished for going against his father's wishes. This brings the importance of the parent-child relationship back to the forefront, as Suzaku must listen to his father in order to right these wrongs.*



*The way that the Akashi Lady sells herself short because of her relatively low status shows how tuned in women have to be to the way the court works, as she recognizes that it may be in her best interest to not push too hard for a relationship with Genji. Again, this shows that she likely fears she'll suffer something like what happened to the Lady of the Paulownia Court.*



Finally, one night, the former governor arranges for Genji to visit the Akashi Lady's house. Looking at the moon, Genji thinks of Murasaki, but the house intrigues him. Stopping at the door, Genji speaks. The lady doesn't answer, as she has decided to not let him in. This annoys him; women always want to talk to him and he thinks it would ruin the mood to force himself on her. Hearing the sound of a koto, Genji asks the lady if she'd play for him. Her sad reply reminds Genji of the Rokujō Lady. The lady runs to an inner room. Genji follows and does force himself on her, thinking she's almost too beautiful.

Genji sends her a note in the morning. Every so often, he secretly visits the Akashi Lady, though he's constantly overcome with guilt that Murasaki will find out about his affair. Finally, he writes to her and confesses that he's having an affair. Her reply is generally pleasant, though she does note that he broke his vows. Feeling guilty, Genji stays away from the Akashi Lady for several days. This terrifies her, and she considers throwing herself into the sea. She does her best to not annoy Genji, and when he resumes his visits, he continues to find her pleasing.

Genji starts keeping sketchbooks of his time in Akashi. He sends them to Murasaki. When the New Year arrives, the Suzaku Emperor is still ill. Suzaku realizes he must abdicate and allow Reizei to rule. Finally, he decides to go against Kokiden and in the summer, summons Genji back to court. Genji is thrilled, though sad to leave Akashi. The former governor and the Akashi Lady are upset, though Genji visits nightly to comfort her. She'd become pregnant in June, and she's very unhappy about it.

Genji's men are thrilled to be leaving, but Genji is sad. He wonders why he continues to get involved in "profitless affairs of the heart," and those who know that the Akashi Lady is pregnant gossip that Genji causes trouble. When Genji visits the Akashi Lady before his departure, he assures her that he'll bring her to the city. She insists that she only deserves a tiny bit of affection. She weeps and recites poems about her sadness. Finally, Genji sends for a koto. He plays, and the former governor asks his daughter to play. Genji finds her playing much like Fujitsubo's and he regrets not asking her to play for him sooner. He asks her to keep the koto as a memento.

*When Genji is willing to go against his earlier decision to not visit, it shows that as mature as he may be now, he's still prone to giving into his desires to be involved with interesting and relatively powerless women. The connection between the Akashi Lady and the Rokujō Lady implies that like the Rokujō Lady, the Akashi Lady may be dangerously overcome with jealousy when Genji looks elsewhere.*



*The Akashi Lady's response to Genji's few-day absence shows that now that she's begun a relationship with Genji, it's absolutely in her best interest to maintain it. This is especially true for her, given that on the coast she doesn't have a palace full of other suitors. Here, Genji is her only option.*



*Because the Akashi Lady is pregnant, it means that Genji will be unable to follow through on his decision to only write to her as long as he's on the coast in her vicinity. This suggests that the Akashi Lady may have some hope of keeping Genji interested in her, given that he'll be unable to ignore her when she has his baby.*



*It's telling when Genji notices a connection between the Akashi Lady and Fujitsubo, as it implies that he may have formed a deeper connection with her had he realized how similar they were earlier. This in turn would give the Akashi Lady a better sense of security, especially given how Genji and Fujitsubo have been able to maturely put aside their differences for the sake of their son.*



On the last morning, Genji sends the Akashi Lady a regretful poem, and he cries as he writes it. Those who don't know she's pregnant think that Genji is just sentimental, but those who do know are jealous. The former governor arranges a farewell feast. Genji and the Akashi Lady exchange robes, and Genji promises the former governor that he'll write to the Akashi Lady. The lady continues to weep and is nearly inconsolable. Her father begins spending days in bed.

The reunion when Genji reaches the city is joyful. Murasaki is more beautiful than ever, though the sight of her makes Genji think of the Akashi Lady. He tells Murasaki about his lover in Akashi. Murasaki insists she's not worried. The Suzaku Emperor restores Genji's titles and they talk happily all night. Genji sets about commissioning prayers, checks in on Reizei and Fujitsubo, and sends a note to Akashi. The Gosechi dancer is disappointed that Genji is back in the city, so she sends a note attempting to obscure her handwriting. Genji recognizes it anyway and writes that he still misses her, though he doesn't pursue a relationship with her. Similarly, he sends a very short note to the Lady of the Orange Blossoms.

## CHANNEL BUOYS

Though Kokiden is seriously ill, she's still very angry that she hasn't crushed Genji yet. Suzaku feels as though he's paying for going against the Emperor's wishes. His health is better now that Genji is back and the two become fast friends. As the date of his abdication approaches, he worries for Oborozukiyo. He tells her one evening that he knows she prefers Genji, but he doubts that Genji will love her as much as he does. Oborozukiyo is embarrassed, especially when Suzaku points out that it's sad she hasn't had a child yet and if she becomes pregnant by Genji, their baby will be a commoner.

In February, eleven-year-old Reizei comes of age. Suzaku abdicates suddenly a few weeks later and makes one of his sons crown prince. Genji tries to refuse an appointment to be a minister and The Minister of the Left also tries to refuse an appointment to be a regent; both, however, must ultimately accept their roles. Tō no Chūjō is also promoted and hopes to send his twelve-year-old daughter, the Kokiden girl, to court.

Genji begins to remodel an inherited house for his "neglected favorites" such as the Lady of the Orange Blossoms. The Akashi Lady gives birth to Genji's first daughter, which delights him. He wonders why he hasn't brought the lady and her daughter to the city and thinks about a fortuneteller's prediction that two of Genji's children will become emperor and empress, while the third will be a chancellor. With Reizei's ascension to the throne, Genji feels as though all of this is coming true.

*Promising to write to the Akashi Lady shows Genji leaning on court customs to make it seem as though he's going to continue to care for her, though it's worth keeping in mind that Genji has also exchanged letters with a number of women while still neglecting them entirely.*



*Genji's notes to the Gosechi dancer and the Lady of the Orange Blossoms reinforce that notes alone don't always equal care and romance: he's still neglecting these women. While the Gosechi dancer's situation is unknown, the Lady of the Orange Blossom's precarious position at court—and the fact that Genji is her only avenue to do better in life—suggests that with this return to court, Genji may begin to shirk his responsibilities in favor of romances that are more fun and less work.*



*Suzaku's mention that a baby fathered by Genji would be a commoner is a way for him to point out that in order to improve her position, Oborozukiyo will need to choose the father of any children very carefully—and as ineffective of an emperor as he may be, his status will provide her more power than Genji would as the father of her child.*



*Suzaku's powerlessness is reinforced again here, as his abdication very much mirrors how women can gain power by becoming nuns and removing themselves from court life. Appointing the Minister of the Left to be a regent shows that the power is returning to Genji and the Emperor's favor.*



*Though Genji never goes on to answer the question he poses here, it's possible that he recognizes that the Akashi Lady would be treated in much the same way that his mother was, given her country origins and the fact that her mother seems relatively powerless—like Genji, she'd be without powerful female relatives at court.*



Genji dedicates himself to finding an appropriate nurse for his daughter. He finds one poor woman who had one child through an "untrustworthy liaison" and has few other prospects. He finds her beautiful and charming and even jokes that he should keep her in the city. Though the nurse privately agrees she'd rather stay, she leaves for Akashi right away. The former governor is thrilled with his granddaughter and is very happy that Genji wants to care for her. The Akashi lady also feels more secure and sends a poem to Genji, telling him his "**blossom**" awaits him.

Finally, Genji tells Murasaki about his daughter, lamenting that he doesn't have children where he actually wants them. He promises to bring the baby to the city and instructs Murasaki to not be jealous. She finds this insulting and thinks of Genji telling her about the Akashi Lady. She's annoyed that Genji was able to amuse himself during his exile while she spent her time crying. Murasaki suggests that she'll die first in retaliation. Though Genji finds this rude, he also thinks that Murasaki's anger is delightful and interesting.

Genji begins to regret that he didn't bring the Akashi Lady to the city to give birth, as it will seriously disadvantage his daughter to be born far away. He sends messengers with gifts for her fiftieth-day celebrations and a note promising to bring the lady and her baby to the city. The nurse finds that she likes Akashi a lot and as she tells her lady about the city and Genji, the Akashi Lady begins to feel important for giving birth to Genji's daughter. She returns Genji's poem, asking him to send for her soon. Murasaki continues to be jealous.

Because Genji is now so important, he has little time to visit his other lovers. When the summer rains begin, he goes to visit Reikeiden and the Lady of the Orange Blossoms. The lady is beautiful, and Genji wishes that his lovers had something wrong with them so that his life could be less complicated. As they discuss Genji's time away, Genji comforts her with his usual speeches. When Genji hears from the Gosechi dancer again, he decides that she'll live in his remodeled house with the Lady of the Orange Blossoms. He also writes to Oborozukiyo professing his love for her, but she refuses to communicate with him.

At the palace, everyone is happy. Suzaku enjoys his retirement, Genji has moved into his mother the Paulownia Lady's old rooms, and Fujitsubo is treated with the respect of a retired empress. She's able to see Reizei again and now, Kokiden is on the outs. Genji is cold towards Prince Hyōbu because of his support for the old regime, and as such stops him from bringing one of his daughters to court.

*Though the Akashi Lady doesn't specify what kind of blossom she means in reference to their daughter, the blossom here acts as a symbol for growth and renewal just like the cherry blossoms regardless. This shows that Genji is once again truly on the way back up to power, as his children are now in a place where they can begin to help him become more powerful.*



*Though Genji is the one who is vocally upset about (presumably) not having children with Murasaki, it's also important to recognize that Murasaki is also disadvantaged by not having children, given how children help adults to do better in their adult lives.*



*Given the way that the supernatural world helped Genji return to the city and the fact that there's a prophecy about how successful Genji's children will be, his fears about his daughter seem a bit out of place here. His fears may have more to do with a sense of guilt for not properly caring for the Akashi Lady than anything else.*



*Again, when Genji wishes his lovers would help him make the decision to not see them by having faults, he passes a lot of the blame on to them and is able to think of himself as helpless and a victim of his emotions. Oborozukiyo's refusal to communicate suggests that she believes she now has enough power to stand up to even Genji, despite the fact that her family is now on the outs at court.*



*The rift between Genji and Prince Hyōbu is the first time that the novel really gets into questions of male politics and how those rivalries play out when they're more serious than, say, Tō no Chūjō and Genji's rivalry for Naishi. This suggests that Genji is becoming more calculating as he ages.*



In the fall, Genji makes a pilgrimage to the Sumiyoshi shrine. By chance, the Akashi Lady travels there on the same day. She arrives after Genji and when she sees his elaborate offerings arranged everywhere, she feels inferior and sad. She feels as though her daughter is insignificant and prays fervently. Finally, she cries that the gods wouldn't even take note of her "miserable" offerings with Genji's right there, so she suggests her party go to a different shrine.

Genji has no idea about any of this, but he's very upset when he learns the Akashi Lady turned away from the shrine. He sends her a note from the Naniwa shrine and the note makes her cry. They exchange several notes as Genji and his party travel to different shrines. Genji continues to promise to bring her to the city, but neither the Akashi Lady or the former governor really believe him.

A new high priestess is appointed to the Ise shrine, so the Rokujō Lady and Akikonomu return to the city. The Rokujō Lady decides not to call on Genji and he believes he has no time to pursue her anyway, though he is still interested in Akikonomu. Suddenly, weeks after returning, the Rokujō Lady becomes very ill. Genji rushes to her side. She's touched he still cares for Akikonomu and asks him to care for her if she dies. Genji promises he will, though the Rokujō Lady asks him to not take Akikonomu as a lover. Genji peeks behind her curtains and sees both the lady and Akikonomu looking extremely beautiful, but promises to think of Akikonomu as a sister.

A week later, the Rokujō Lady dies. Genji arranges the funeral and writes several notes to Akikonomu. The relationship makes her wary, but her ladies encourage her to write. Genji finds her handwriting pleasant and considers taking her as a lover, but he decides it will be better to bring her to the court for Reizei. Genji makes sure that Akikonomu's other suitors are all turned away, and he learns that Suzaku still nurses feelings for Akikonomu.

Genji consults Fujitsubo in the matter, and she suggests that Genji pretend to not know that Suzaku loves Akikonomu. When she accepts Akikonomu as a candidate for Reizei's hand, Genji makes plans to bring Akikonomu to his mansion to keep Murasaki company. Fujitsubo is worried, about Prince Hyōbu's desire to have Reizei marry his young daughter instead, and as such is thrilled that Akikonomu could be an older wife for her son.

*For the Akashi Lady, this sighting is proof that Genji will never come for her or follow through on his promises. She can see that he absolutely has the wealth and the wherewithal to bring her to court, which makes it clear that he's simply choosing to not bring her for other unknown reasons.*



*Genji does recognize that he needs to keep the Akashi Lady reasonably happy in order to keep control of his daughter, who will presumably one day give him political capital to spend. This means that he must continue to communicate with her, even if she's not buying it.*



*The Rokujō Lady's final request shows that she's one of the only women who understands what happens when a woman becomes involved with Genji: it leads to jealousy, neglect, and unhappiness for all parties. Her final hope is to be able to save her daughter from the fate that she herself suffered, illustrating again the power of the bond between mothers and their children. When Genji accepts these terms, it implies that he's now willing to respect the Rokujō Lady.*



*Once again, the actions of Akikonomu's ladies show that serving women will benefit from these relationships to powerful men, and their loyalties lie almost more with the men than with the women who employ them. Genji's decision to give Akikonomu to Reizei shows that he recognizes it's time to position the next generation for success.*



*The prospective relationship dynamics that the narrator suggests between Reizei and Akikonomu mimics the one between Genji and Aoi, which suggests that the parents here aren't willing to look to and learn from the past even as they make plans for their children's futures.*



## A PICTURE CONTEST

Fujitsubo desperately wants Akikonomu to come to court. Genji has decided to not bring Akikonomu to his own house as to not anger Suzaku, but he knows Suzaku is still upset. Suzaku sends gifts for Akikonomu to commemorate coming to court, and Genji feels as though they're ostentatious mostly to put Genji off. Genji feels extremely guilty for depriving Suzaku of his love interest and encourages Akikonomu to write to Suzaku. She tries to refuse but finally writes him a short poem and doesn't let Genji see it. Genji feels as though it's true that Suzaku and Akikonomu would've been a perfect couple, but it's too late now.

Genji helps install Akikonomu at court and feels the Rokujō Lady would be proud. Fujitsubo tells Reizei about the new lady. Reizei fears that because she's older than he is she'll be hard to talk to, but he finds he likes her nevertheless. Reizei begins splitting his time between Akikonomu and the Kokiden girl, whom he loves to play with. This worries Tō no Chūjō. Reizei begins spending more time with Akikonomu when he learns she's an artist; he loves paintings more than anything.

Catching on, Tō no Chūjō commissions painters to illustrate classic stories and installs the paintings in the Kokiden girl's apartments. Reizei loves them but is sad when Tō no Chūjō won't let Akikonomu look at the paintings. Genji ransacks his art collection and sends Reizei a number of paintings to do with what he pleases. He also pulls out his sketchbooks and journals from exile to show to Murasaki. They move her to tears with their beauty.

Tō no Chūjō decides to offer his art collection for royal review. By now, the palace is filled with the Kokiden girl and Akikonomu's favorite art. Their two styles are very different. Fujitsubo, a great art lover herself, decides that the court ladies should split into two sides and engage in a contest of art critique. Akikonomu's side enters an illustration from the tale *The Bamboo Cutter*, while the Kokiden girl's side presents one from *The Tale of the Hollow Tree*. The ladies discuss both pieces in terms of how they represent their stories and the painting styles. The Kokiden girl's side wins. The next two entries engage the women in endless debate.

*Because Genji has chosen to not pursue Akikonomu romantically, she shows here that she has marginally more power to stand up to him when she refuses to let him see her letter to Suzaku. Again, this indicates that the only way that women can gain power through their relationships with men is by removing themselves from the culture or the relationships themselves in some way.*



*The way that the adults and the narrator describe Reizei in particular makes it very obvious that he's an easily manipulated child first and foremost, as his affections are easily won at this point. This turns what happens next into a chess game of sorts between adults, in which children are the pieces.*



*Now that both Genji and Tō no Chūjō are fathers (or are acting as fathers), their rivalry returns. Now, however, it's far more consequential, as there are actually major gains to be had by having their daughter earn Reizei's affections.*



*This organized competition between women is a powerful way for the novel to explore how female rivalry functions within the novel, especially since the prize for winning this contest is the affection of one of the most powerful men at court. Fujitsubo's role in organizing the competition illustrates how women perpetuate this system and make sure that it persists, even if it doesn't actually serve them.*



Genji notices the contest and suggests that Reizei should be present for the final judgments. The narrator notes that by now, the most important business at court is collecting fine art and presenting it to one's favored side. Genji makes veiled jabs at Tō no Chūjō's secret studio, suggesting they should only offer paintings that have been in their collections for a long time. Suzaku gives some paintings to Akikonomu, some of which he painted himself. Suzaku and Akikonomu exchange notes and Akikonomu refuses Suzaku's advances, which angers him. He begins giving paintings to the Kokiden girl.

Finally, the final contest is arranged. The ladies' chambers are elegantly decked out and Tō no Chūjō, Genji, and other courtiers attend. Reizei asks Prince Hotaru, his uncle, to act as umpire. The debate is lively and by evening, Hotaru still hasn't reached a decision. Finally, Akikonomu's side brings out one of Genji's paintings from Suma. The painting that the Kokiden girl's side offers simply can't compete. The courtiers fall silent admiring the work and thinking of Genji in exile. Akikonomu's side wins.

Before daybreak, Genji becomes melancholy. He says that as a child, he excelled in painting without having to practice much. Prince Hotaru admits that in most cases masters must make a concentrated effort to get better at their craft, but that's not true for art. He cries drunkenly that the Emperor doted on Genji, and they ask for instruments. Hotaru, Genji, and Tō no Chūjō play until morning.

The court turns to examining Genji's journals and Genji gives his paintings to Fujitsubo, promising to one day tell her everything. Tō no Chūjō hopes that Reizei won't forget the Kokiden girl after her loss in the art contest. Genji is thrilled to have things going his way, so he begins to make plans to withdraw from public affairs when Reizei is a little older. He purchases land in the mountains, sets up a chapel, and dedicates his time to educating his children.

*When Suzaku switches sides, it's important to keep in mind that he's actually reaffirming his loyalty to his birth family as much as he's attempting to punish Akikonomu for standing up to him. The fact that Akikonomu is punished at all for this again shows that women simply can't win in this system: even if she wins the competition, she's still lost the support of an important man because she refused his advances.*



*Genji's win here again conflates Genji himself with the perfection of nature, as his paintings of the natural world are beautiful enough to win this competition with no questions asked. Again, this shows that Genji himself is more exceptional than anyone else and importantly, is able to remain that way even after exile—but only because he embraced the natural world while he was exiled.*



*Even though the competition wasn't necessarily about men, this drunken conversation and concert brings the narrative back to focus on the male characters over the female ones, reminding the reader that these men are the true heroes in the story while the female characters are merely tools.*



*When Genji makes plans to spend his later years away from court and specifically, in nature, it again reinforces his exceptionalism: because of his children's positions at court, Genji can afford to leave and surround himself with nature. While this might damage someone else's reputation, Genji's exceptionalism means he'll be just fine.*





## HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

### MLA

Brock, Zoë. "The Tale of Genji." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 2 Nov 2018. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

### CHICAGO MANUAL

Brock, Zoë. "The Tale of Genji." LitCharts LLC, November 2, 2018. Retrieved April 21, 2020. <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-tale-of-genji>.

To cite any of the quotes from *The Tale of Genji* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

### MLA

Murasaki, Shikibu. *The Tale of Genji*. Vintage. 1976.

### CHICAGO MANUAL

Murasaki, Shikibu. *The Tale of Genji*. New York: Vintage. 1976.