

"A Tale of Flowering Fortunes," in McCullough, pp. 203-250.

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

- Atsunori (997-1054), Atsuhira (999?-1050). Sons of Emperor Sanjō by Seishi
- Go-Ichijō, Emperor (1008-36; r. 1016-36). Son of Emperor Ichijō by Shōshi
- Ishi (999-1036). Third daughter of Michinaga by Rinshi. Married Emperor Go-Ichijō in 1018
- Kenshi (994-1027). Second daughter of Michinaga by Rinshi. Married future Emperor Sanjō; named Empress in 1012 and Grand Empress in 1018
- Kintō (996-1041). Son of former Regent Yoritada; second cousin of Michinaga; father-in-law of Norimichi
- Kishi (1007-25). Fourth daughter of Michinaga by Rinshi. Became consort of future Emperor Go-Suzaku in 1021; died shortly after giving birth to a son
- Koichijōin (994-1051). Son of Emperor Sanjō by Seishi. Was Crown Prince until forced by Michinaga to resign in 1017
- Michinaga (966-1027). Most influential figure at court. Held top posts; took Buddhist vows in 1019
- Norimichi (996-1075). Second son of Michinaga by Rinshi. Became Palace Minister in 1021; later held top positions
- Okisada, Prince. The future Emperor Sanjō (976-1017; r. 1011-16)
- Rinshi (964-1053). Principal wife of Michinaga
- Sanesuke (957-1046). Grandson and adopted son of former Regent Saneyori; second cousin of Michinaga. Called the Ono-no-miya Minister of the Right
- Sanjō, Emperor, *see* Okisada
- Seishi (972-1025). Daughter of Michinaga's second cousin Naritoki; original consort of Emperor Sanjō
- Shōshi (988-1074). Oldest daughter of Michinaga by Rinshi. Married Emperor Ichijō; named Empress in 1000, Grand Empress in 1012, and Senior Grand Empress in 1018. Mother of Emperor Go-Ichijō

A Tale of Flowering Fortunes

8

So began the fifth year of the Kankō era [1008]. The mists on the peaks were transformed overnight, and the skies stretched calm and hazy to the horizon. The Kyōgoku Mansion was gay with the seasonal finery of the ladies in attendance on Michinaga's second daughter, Kenshi (known to everyone by her official title of Principal Handmaid), and on her younger sister Ishi.¹ When Michinaga went to visit Kenshi, who was then fourteen or fifteen years old, he found her seated in a chamber decorated with a charmingly youthful touch. She wore a number of lined robes in different hues, and her lustrous hair, of which every strand seemed polished, brushed the hem of her red-plum bombycine mantle, longer than her height by seven or eight inches. The aristocratic refinement of her features was softened by a radiant charm that made her, Michinaga thought, almost too beautiful for her parents' peace of mind. There were seven or eight young ladies in attendance, all looking happy and proud to be serving such a mistress.

With the coming of the Twelfth Month [of 1009], it was time for Kenshi's marriage to Crown Prince Okisada. The presentation that had been so long in the planning was carried out with spectacular magnificence. Indeed, it made people realize what an extravagant place the

1. The Kyōgoku Mansion, also called the Tsuchimikado Mansion, was Michinaga's principal residence.

world had become. The wives and daughters of the senior gentlemen in Michinaga's service all assembled at the mansion to accompany the bride, whose retinue included forty ladies, six girl attendants, and four maids.

I fear that a long description of Kenshi's appearance would impress the reader as tiresomely familiar and repetitious, but it seems a pity to write nothing at all. She was sixteen, and her hair shone with an almost theatrical beauty, even richer and more abundant than the elegant tresses of her sisters. The delighted Crown Prince treated her with the utmost consideration.

Life at the Crown Prince's palace must have been gayer and more fashionable after Kenshi's arrival. People had talked about "radiant Fujitsubo" when Empress Shōshi had first entered the imperial palace, but I could not possibly describe the splendor of even the most trifling of Kenshi's belongings. When one considers that ten years had elapsed since Shōshi's marriage, each bringing its own changes, it is not difficult to imagine the degree of luxury that had been attained.

The Crown Prince treated Kenshi with a gracious consideration that she found rather embarrassing, coming as it did from someone so much older. Confronted with this slip of a girl after his many years of devotion to Seishi, the Prince had felt at first as though one of his own daughters had been installed at his side, but he was wholly enchanted as the days passed and he came to know her. By night he called her to his bed-chamber, and in the daytime he visited her apartments, where he set out her belongings, inspected them one by one, and marveled at their beauty. Needless to say, he was particularly fascinated by the articles from the trays and the tiny containers inside the comb boxes, which had been supplied by her mother and brothers in a spirit of keen rivalry. . . .

Prince Okisada's other wife, Seishi, had inherited a pair of gold-lacquered comb boxes, made for an earlier Sen'yōden Consort by order of that lady's husband, Emperor Murakami. The Prince had always liked nothing better than to examine their contents, but now they struck him as distinctly old-fashioned in comparison with Kenshi's. Emperor Murakami, who had had better taste than any other sovereign, had personally supervised the creation of the articles in question, instructing the Office of Palace Works by word and by brush, and sending back whatever failed to meet his standards. Yet to Prince Okisada, Kenshi's boxes appeared incomparable. He knew that his preference might

simply reflect the changed tastes of his time, but he remained convinced of their superiority, which seemed to him still another illustration of Michinaga's astonishing faculty for doing things well.

Seishi's folding screens were splendid works of art from the brushes of Tameuji and Tsunenori, with calligraphy by Michikaze himself on the colored-paper sections; and they were as clean and bright as new ones, despite their age. Kenshi's were the work of Hirokata, with calligraphy in what appeared to be Yukinari's hand. Confessing himself unable to choose between them, the Prince appealed to Michinaga and Yorimichi, who felt embarrassed and very much on their mettle in dealing with so mature, discriminating, and sophisticated a critic.

Magnificently attired in bombycine jackets and trains decorated with dramatic marine designs, Kenshi's beavies of ladies sat in groups, hiding their faces behind fans, whispering, and uttering mysterious laughs. They seemed a bit overwhelming to the Crown Prince, who was never quite at ease during his visits.

Seishi took care of the Prince's wardrobe, contriving elegant color effects and scents for even the least of his garments. There is a special air about any Emperor or Crown Prince, however young and childish, but Prince Okisada's maturity, dignity, and refinement inspired a profound sense of awe in those who saw him. Kenshi put the other consorts in the shade with the exquisite sleeves and skirts that lent distinction to her most casual costume. It was clear that Michinaga was keeping her provided with ample supplies of beautiful robes.

"How do you feel about it all? Is your sleep troubled?" Seishi's attendants and others asked her.

"The marriage ought to have taken place years ago," she answered. "I grieved for the Crown Prince because of the delay, and now that it has finally happened I am much relieved." She worked early and late on the Prince's elegant costumes, and saw to it that he received incense balls whenever she made new ones. It seems natural that he should have thought of her as a mother.

[*Crown Prince Okisada becomes Emperor Sanjō in 1011.*]

On several occasions, Emperor Sanjō remarked to Michinaga that he considered it proper to raise Kenshi to imperial status. Michinaga always

protested. "Seishi has been with Your Majesty for years," he would say, "and she also has a large family of children. It would be only right to promote her first. Kenshi's future will take care of itself; there's no need for haste."

"Your attitude is not as I would have it," the Emperor finally told him in an aggrieved voice. "Do you object to the connection with me?"

"If such is Your Majesty's pleasure, by all means issue the decree as soon as an auspicious date can be chosen," Michinaga answered. He left the palace and set swiftly about the necessary preparations. Since there were no obstacles or other reasons for postponement, it was decided to make Kenshi an Empress, with the title *Chūgū*, on the Fourteenth of the Second Month [of 1012]. Michinaga worked frantically to get things ready on time.

Though the ritual on the day of the investiture was merely the usual one, it seemed exceptionally dignified and impressive. In the past, it had been almost impossible to distinguish the various ranks of Kenshi's attendants, who had all dressed as they pleased. Some of them had disapproved of such laxity, but many of those very ladies found their prescribed costumes a source of embarrassment on the day of their mistress's elevation. The timid and conservative were obliged by the regulations to put on bombycine jackets, whereas others who had prided themselves on their elegance were suddenly confronted by the devastating necessity of appearing in plain silk. The affair had its amusing side, but everything was different now that Kenshi was an Empress. It was only natural that distinctions should be enforced, and thus that everyone should envy certain ladies who had formerly seemed undistinguished—like *Ōsaishō-no-kimi*, whom people had derisively nicknamed Granny, but who now waited on Kenshi in a stunning bombycine jacket in grape colors—and that no attention should be paid to others who had thought rather well of themselves. All the ladies were secretly upset, but they concealed their distress as best they could, unable to complain to Kenshi. One could not help feeling sorry for them. Some very pretty daughters of gentlemen of Fifth Rank had been told to act as Lady Chamberlains, and they too were most pathetic as they stoically carried trays, ran errands, and performed similar duties, all of which seemed to them dreadfully humiliating.

Wearing a white costume and a formal coiffure, Kenshi took her place on the dining bench, with a fierce-looking lion and a Korean dog

mounting guard beside her curtain-dais. The coiffure suited her admirably, lending an impressive air of dignity to her plump, girlish face, and everyone agreed that she made a perfect Empress. She was just nineteen. "It can't be more than three or four years since her presentation, and here she is already an Empress," people calculated. Grand Empress *Shōshi* had entered the palace at twelve and received imperial status at thirteen, but Kenshi was much more grown up. The fire posts in the courtyard and the new guard station were staffed by low-ranking guards officers, who performed their duties with a great air of importance; and freshly appointed Head Samurai and others bustled officiously about. The great banquet was to take place directly. Michinaga's oldest brother, Major Counselor *Michitsuna*, had been selected to serve as Master of the Empress's Household, and almost all the other offices had been filled. It was rare indeed, people said, for two sisters to have the good fortune to become Empresses in succession.

Although the Emperor was anxious to promote Seishi, he could not bring himself to speak to Michinaga about it. Seishi herself did not mind, but various people who claimed connections with her ladies made a point of passing along the views of those outside the court. "Her Ladyship must be miserable. It's a disgrace! I've never heard of anything so unfair," the visitors said, putting on knowing airs. Some of the ladies showed Seishi letters from such people. "See what So-and-so has to say about it," they urged her.

"Why must they repeat those disagreeable things?" Seishi said in a serious voice. "If people choose to gossip, I don't want to know about it. I've given up any idea of becoming an Empress; nowadays I think of nothing but my lot in the next world." Her protests merely provoked sage comments from the ladies. "Yes, but Her Ladyship is looking at things from a very special point of view—one that isolates her from human emotions and worldly concerns."

II

Empress Kenshi had taken up residence at Major Counselor *Tadanobu's* *Ōmikado* house after her withdrawal from the imperial palace early in her pregnancy. Now, several months later, she decided to move to *Tsuchimikado*, just as everyone was expecting the baby to be born at *Tadanobu's*. Her host racked his brains for a suitable gift. She had moved

to Ōmikado after a fire at the Higashisanjōin Mansion, where she had stayed first, and he was determined to find exactly the right farewell present to mark her departure. It would be best not to attempt anything elaborate, he concluded. Expensive trifles were unlikely to intrigue a lady accustomed to every luxury. So he prepared a diary-like tale of life at Emperor Murakami's court, made up of four large picture scrolls, with calligraphy by Sukemasa's daughter and Enkan, and presented it to her in an elegant set of boxes, together with appropriate copybooks. She was delighted. To the ladies-in-waiting, he presented big partitioned cypress-wood boxes, filled with cosmetic powder and incense balls.

At the Tsuchimikado Mansion, all the prayers that had been offered for Shōshi were recited again. With the weather so unbearably hot, Michinaga could not help worrying.

I should mention, perhaps, that a number of Tadanobu's Chief Stewards were honored by promotions in rank.

Kenshi's labor began on the evening of the Sixth of the Seventh Month in the second year of Chōwa [1013], while Michinaga was still fretting and offering prayers. The prayer-monks raised a deafening chorus of mystic incantations and scattered rice furiously. A succession of imperial messengers arrived, a cacophony of calamity-averting chants rang out, and the child was safely delivered during the Hour of the Dog [7:00–9:00 P.M.]—an answer, perhaps, to all the months of supplication. There was a brief interval of noisy prayer, and then the afterbirth appeared. The monks were still quite fresh.

It was splendid that everything had gone so well, but Michinaga realized that the child must be a girl when those in attendance avoided mentioning its sex. Although he was disappointed, he told himself that it was not so bad; this was not his first grandchild, and besides, Kenshi would produce a son in time. He set about making the preparations for a bathing ceremony to be held that very night.

No formal announcement was made to the Emperor, but he naturally learned of the birth, and a messenger came from the palace with a sword. It was not usual to send a sword to a newborn Princess, but there was no need to be constrained by the usages of the past in so flourishing an era, especially since the baby was Michinaga's grandchild; and thus a precedent was set. The messenger's reward was a magnificent robe, as white as crane plumage, which shines even in the dark.

One of the Crown Prince's nurses, Ōmi-no-naishi, was summoned

for the rite of the first suckling. Numerous others were available, but Naishi was the daughter of one of Rinshi's own nurses, and she had also served Shōshi as a Handmaid.

The reader will be able to imagine the splendor of the bathing ceremonies performed during the next several days. Twenty men of Fifth and Sixth Rank were commanded to serve as bow-twangers. (Those of Fifth Rank were Chamberlains.) Since the baby was a girl, the Emperor was at pains to select handsome men.

Everyone would probably have preferred a boy, but if people had spoken of the birth of Michinaga's first grandchild, the Crown Prince, as "the first blossom in the flowering of Michinaga's fortunes," then might not one say that the birth of this little Princess was a bud? For although the present might be a time of uncertainty and impatient waiting, the petals of a brilliant destiny would one day unfold.

The white furnishings and all the other arrangements were just as they had been for Shōshi's confinements.

There seemed to be innumerable applicants for the office of nurse. Certain ladies in the Empress's entourage, the mothers of children fathered by men of some consequence, had apparently convinced themselves that their past services made them the only suitable candidates, but Kenshi had made up her mind to ignore their pleas and bring in new people from outside.

Despite the oppressive heat, each of the ladies took infinite pains to make her white costume appear unusual and interesting, with most pleasing results.

Just as had happened after the births of Shōshi's sons, senior nobles of the first three ranks and ordinary courtiers of every rank down to the Sixth presented themselves for the birth ceremonies, which were sponsored by Michinaga on the Third Night, by the Empress's Household on the Fifth, by the court on the Seventh, and by Grand Empress Shōshi on the Ninth.

The Crown Prince was not yet weaned, so the new baby's attendants were soon deluged with messages demanding Ōmi-no-naishi's return. There was no lack of volunteers to take her place. Kenshi was not entirely satisfied with any of them, but at length the honor fell to a daughter of the Governor of Ise, a lady who was married to the late Regent Michitaka's son Chikayori, the Senior Assistant Minister of Central Affairs. She put the Princess to the breast on the night of her arrival,

freeing Naishi to go back to the Crown Prince. Lavish presents were bestowed on Naishi, and it was announced that her service would not be confined to the first suckling; she was to be counted among the Princess's regular nurses.

The infant Princess's hair was so long that it parted, and they decided to let it hang naturally. How splendid it all was! Emperor Sanjō waited impatiently to see her, charmed by glowing reports of her beauty.

Things happened to be fairly quiet elsewhere, and Michinaga took to appearing at odd hours of the night on errands connected with the baby. His visits upset the ladies, who were too oppressed by the intolerable heat to worry about appearances when they went to bed. The new nurse found the intrusions particularly embarrassing.

Aware that the Emperor was anxious to see the baby, Michinaga decided to arrange an imperial visit to Tsuchimikado during the Ninth Month. (Empress Kenshi had been in poor health since the birth, and it seemed unlikely that she would be returning to the palace very soon.) A great deal of preparatory polishing and repairing went on at the mansion.

The Emperor had hoped to hold the Fiftieth Day ceremonies at the palace, but now they were to take place at the Tsuchimikado Mansion because of Kenshi's inability to travel.² Michinaga assumed responsibility for all the preparations. Supplies poured in from the Courtiers' Hall, from the Office of the Ladies-in-Waiting, and even from Grand Empress Shōshi's Household. It would have been impossible to count all the different varieties of boxed dainties and fruit baskets. The Emperor showed a gratifying interest in every detail of the proceedings, adding many admirable touches of his own. With the ceremonies scheduled for a date shortly after the Twentieth of the Eighth Month, the ladies worked early and late on their costumes, at the same time hurriedly preparing as best they could for the imperial visit in the following month.

All of Emperor Sanjō's principal ladies-in-waiting went to the Tsuchimikado Mansion for the baby's birth, and also for the Fiftieth Day celebration. The daughter of Tachibana Naishi-no-suke (the Emperor's nurse), Minamoto Naishi-no-suke, and other prominent gentlewomen,

2. A child was fed from an assortment of 50 special rice cakes on or around the 50th day after his birth, probably as a formal indication that his future diet would include solid food. An elaborate banquet accompanied the event.

such as Sakari Shōshō, were registered on Kenshi's duty-board, and they seem to have been very faithful about visiting the mansion.

Once the Ninth Month had begun, everyone sensed that the imperial visit was imminent, and there was much rushing about. Aware that Kenshi's ladies would be magnificently attired, the attendants of her sister and mother, Ishi and Rinshi, had determined not to be outshone. Great pains were also taken with the boat music. The visit itself I shall not describe in detail, since it followed the usual pattern. It was exactly like the one after the birth of Grand Empress Shōshi's son, the Crown Prince.

The mansion and grounds were a marvelous sight. To the delight of the spectators, the ivy on the island pines flamed with far greater brilliance than in ordinary years, as though caught up in the spirit of the occasion. The Emperor felt he had never beheld such dazzling splendor. And when the boats glided into sight as the dancing began, it seemed to him that such beauty must come from another world. The sound of the wind, sighing through the pines like the strains of a zither, blended harmoniously with the music, and the ladies' dresses, billowing out at the edges of the blinds, were magnificent beyond description.

As soon as the Emperor went inside, he asked to see his daughter. Michinaga carried her in, and the Emperor took her in his arms to look at her. She was a plump, sweet infant, whose hair, he noted with some surprise, was parted in the middle. When he spoke to her, she babbled enthusiastically, giving him a bright smile.

"Isn't she cunning? She seems to know me. I've never seen such an appealing baby. And what a head of hair! It will be down to her hips by next year," he said, already very much the adoring father.

He observed that Kenshi was wearing a set of Chinese damask robes in white chrysanthemum colors—an auspicious reminder, he thought, of those other garments of white. "How did you manage in all that heat?" he asked. "It must have been terribly hard on your hair." But her hair lay coiled on her skirts in thick, luxuriant masses. "Really! What kind of hair is that for a mother?" he said. "Women who are old hands at child-bearing have pitiful, skimpy locks and sallow faces. You must be some sort of a freak. And the baby takes after you, I can see."

"Where is the nurse?" the Emperor asked presently. Michinaga himself took custody of the baby and carried her away. "The nurse is rather countrified in her ways," he said. "She's too shy to show herself."

Stepping inside Kenshi's curtain-dais, the Emperor began to chat about the events of the past months, very much at his ease. "Just think," he mused, "this has been my first glimpse of that beautiful baby. She will have a splendid future. But life is hard for a man in my position. When I am worried about someone dear to me, it's sad not to be able to see the person at once." Then he said, "What do you say to having the baby brought here to lie between us? She's such a little doll. When Seishi's daughters were babies I thought them pretty, but they were ordinary by comparison. It's the long hair, I suppose, that makes this child so remarkably attractive. Come back to the palace as soon as you can. You won't need any nurses there; I'll take care of her myself." Kenshi gave him a small, indulgent smile.

Soon twilight fell, and there began a nostalgic, moving musical performance, presented by the senior nobles. The faint sound of other instruments, drifting shoreward from an island in the lake, mingled with the lapping of the waves and the murmur of the wind in the pines.

Since the Emperor seemed in no hurry to emerge, Michinaga went to fetch him. "It's getting late, and the music is quite nice. Perhaps Your Majesty should watch," he suggested.

"I like listening from here. It's more interesting to hear a performance than to watch it. As for the dances, I've seen them all," the Emperor answered in an indifferent voice. Michinaga withdrew in something of a huff.

When darkness had settled over the scene, Michinaga came back again with his request, and the reluctant Emperor emerged from behind the curtains, repeating to Kenshi, "Don't forget, you must come very soon—within the next day or two if you can." Then His Majesty summoned the Major Captain of the Left to write out a list of honors—sons of the house and stewards were to have promotions, and the baby's nurse was to be granted Fifth Rank. The Major Captain read off the names to the Empress, after which Michinaga performed the obeisance of gratitude. So the young Princess's nurse acquired court rank. Ōmi-no-naishi also received a promotion. Michinaga gave the usual presents to the Emperor, senior nobles, and others—all very handsome, as may be imagined.

The Tsuchimikado Mansion was amazingly favored by fortune. It is indeed cause for envy when a single private residence is honored by repeated imperial visits, and when it sees its daughters depart for the

palace, one after another, to become Empresses. Even the humblest of the humble thought, with smiles of satisfaction, "This is what people mean when they talk about 'celebrated places'; this is what is called 'flowering fortunes.'" Human beings derive pleasure from the good fortune of others, just as they feel involuntary compassion in the face of suffering, and all the common people greeted the successes of Michinaga's sons and daughters with admiration and joy.

After the Emperor's return, he thought of little but the baby. He sent off many messengers begging Empress Kenshi not to linger in the city. Kenshi, who had not fully recovered her strength, seemed content to stay at home, but he made such a nuisance of himself that she agreed to go to the palace around the Tenth of the Eleventh Month. Since the Gosechi dances and the Kamo Special Festival were to follow almost at once, it may be imagined that her ladies had their hands full with the quantities of robes required for their costumes. The younger ones seemed especially eager to make a gay and fashionable appearance after their long absence from court.

Two more nurses for the baby had arrived. One was Ben-no-menoto, a daughter of Masatoki, the Governor of Awa, and the other was Nakatsukasa, a daughter of Takakata, a former official in Ise Province. There also seemed to have been a considerable increase in the number of Kenshi's attendants during those months. One who came was Go-no-onkata, the fifth daughter of the Hōjūji Minister of State Tamemitsu. Another was a lady who had been Mistress of the Crown Prince's Wardrobe while Emperor Sanjō was the heir apparent. (Her parents were the late Regent Michitaka and the Lady in the Wing Chamber; the Reikeiden Principal Handmaid Suishi had presumably been her sister.) A third was a daughter of Treasury Minister Masamitsu by Minamoto no Takaakira's second daughter—a lady who also bore the title Mistress of the Wardrobe. And there were a great many other daughters of important men. Those were times in which the wives and daughters of all the great nobles entered imperial service. If anyone stayed at home, the gossips interpreted it as a sure sign that she suffered from some dreadful defect. She might even be a cripple, they said. What a queer world it had become, with Chancellors' daughters leaving home to serve as ladies-in-waiting! The daughters of former sovereigns would be doing the same thing before long, people predicted.

There was little work for the nurses after Kenshi's arrival at the

palace. In a somewhat excessive display of parental love, Emperor Sanjō carried the tiny Princess about and dandled her in his arms all day long. He had resolved to make himself responsible for even the most trifling of her furnishings.

Soon the year ended and the third year of Chōwa began [1014]. From the First of the First Month on, there was a fresh new feeling in the air. With the passing of the old year, the dwellers in the realm above the clouds raised bright faces skyward, and the spring haze appeared overnight, trailing its banners of purple and lavender, as though to share in man's welcome to the new season. The sun shone mild and clear, a myriad birds chirped in swelling choruses, the buds on bare limbs suddenly burst into bloom, and new green clothed the hedge grasses. Searchers pushed through the reeds on the burnt fields at Ashita-nohara, and at Kasuga, too, the Tobuhi watchman gathered the first tender sprouts of a "myriad generations" spring. The breezes that melted the ice blew in gentle silence through the boughs, and the voices of warblers from the valleys lingered in the ear, singing, it seemed, of a long, happy reign. On the Day of the Rat, the pines at Funaoka impressed everyone with their eternal green, as though they were destined to live forever, transformed by the imperial example. Even the bamboo leaves at the lip of the wine-crock seemed to presage a long and prosperous reign, and the rose bushes at the foot of the stairs to await summer with impatience. It was all very pleasant and auspicious.³

The Congratulations and other ceremonies went off in splendid style. The gorgeous, richly scented costumes of Kenshi's attendants occasioned no particular surprise, since her ladies invariably appeared to great advantage, even on occasions of much less importance. Certain of the gentlemen assigned to drink the leftover spiced wines seem to have disrupted the ceremonies in an unforgivable manner, a result of their having got disgustingly drunk and noisy.

In spite of the pressure of official functions, the Emperor found time to visit Kenshi's apartments. Dressed in a splendid informal cloak and several dazzling inner robes, he seemed to the intimidated ladies a model of masculine beauty and breeding. Kenshi was half hidden behind green curtains. She wore eight or nine red-plum robes under a float-patterned

3. Many of the images in this paragraph are drawn from *Collection of Early and Modern Poetry* and other anthologies.

mantle of deep purple, and she too was an awesomely aristocratic and elegant sight as she languidly concealed her face behind a purple fan, which was decorated on one side with a huge painted mountain. The Emperor gazed in fresh astonishment at her long, abundant hair. The hair that inspired the saying "tangled locks on bombycine" must, after all, have been thin and scanty. Kenshi's beautiful tresses covered her whole skirt.

When the Emperor asked about Princess Teishi, the nurse Myōbu brought the baby in. Ben-no-menoto carried the sword. Observing that the Princess's hair had been trimmed at the ends, her father said in an affectionate voice, "Ah! Now she looks like a baby again." He carried her in his arms to show her the mirror cakes, all the while reciting the auspicious phrases in a long-winded manner that the onlookers found hilarious. "He sounds like someone offering hare-wand congratulations," one of the ladies whispered. He noticed the surreptitious titters and asked pleasantly, "What are you laughing at?"

The nurses had all done their best to make a splendid appearance, with brilliant results.

The Emperor chatted with Kenshi, laughing from time to time. How nice it would have been to paint the scene as the younger ladies sat in a group beside the curtains! Major Counselor Yorimichi put in an appearance, and he and the Emperor went off together after a little more talk. . . .

At last the ceremonies ended and everyone was able to relax. Emperor Sanjō sent Kenshi a poem suggested by some pine boughs covered with frozen snow:⁴

haru kuredo
suginishi kata no
kōri koso
matsu ni hisashiku
todokōrikere

Though springtime has come,
the ice of the departed year
refuses to melt:
long indeed has it lingered
on the branches of the pine.

Her reply:

chiyo fubeki
matsu no kōri wa

Though springtime has come,
something has made the ice

4. The Emperor's poem appears to be a complaint about Kenshi's prolonged absence from the imperial palace. Her answer implies that she is annoyed with him for some reason.

haru kuredo
uchitokegataki
mono ni zo arikeru

reluctant to melt
on the branches of the pines
that will live a thousand years.

[*Emperor Sanjō abdicates in 1016 and dies in mid-1017. The year 1017 is now ending.*]

13

At the Ichijō Palace, Empress Kenshi occupied the quiet days with religious rites. Startled awake one night by the sound of a bell announcing the predawn services, she raised a lattice shutter and looked out, murmuring a poem:

minahito no
akazu nomi miru
momijiba o
sasoi ni sasou
kogarashi no kaze

With cold wintry blasts,
the wind sweeps them all away—
those autumn leaves
of whose red and yellow hues
no eye can ever tire.

Presently, there was the usual excitement about the Gosechi dancing. In Kenshi's apartments, the commotion served only to call forth poignant memories of bygone days. Whenever a prominent courtier came to pay his respects, the younger ladies would emerge to seek consolation in a chat, and no doubt the Empress's brothers, in particular, made a special effort to be kind.

The Emperor, who had not yet visited Kamo, was to go there on the Twenty-fifth. The prospect was arousing great interest. Since the procession was to pass the north gate of the Ichijō Mansion, Empress Kenshi's ladies thought they might permit themselves the pleasure of watching, but the Empress was afraid of what people might think if there was any sort of public display at her residence. "How much can Her Majesty see by simply peeking out through a gate?" protested the disgruntled ladies. They had been going on in the same vein for several days when Michinaga called. "Do you intend to watch the imperial procession?" he asked the Empress. "It will pass your north gate."

"No," she said. "My ladies seem to be talking about it, but how could I?"

"What odd things you say! People might be critical if you were to build a viewing-stand and make a spectacle of the affair, but nobody

would expect you to close your eyes to a procession passing right in front of you," he answered. Her best course, he advised in parting, would be to contrive a vantage point by breaking down part of the north embankment in such a way as to create a natural effect. The younger ladies were delighted.

The procession was a brilliant one. To the imperial spectator at the Ichijō Palace, everything was indescribably beautiful—Emperor Go-Ichijō's litter, shared by Grand Empress Shōshi, the elegant carriages of the ladies-in-waiting, and all the rest. The last to pass was Michinaga, a magnificent figure.

[*In 1018, Kenshi is named Grand Empress; in 1019, her father, Michinaga, takes Buddhist vows.*]

16

In the Eighth and Ninth Months [of 1021], the weakening leaves could no longer cling to the branches. Insects shrilled as though aware of the pathos of life, a cold wind sighed through the reeds, and the plaintive calls of migrant geese lingered in the ear. On a melancholy, depressing evening, when it seemed that even the belling of the deer in their mountain recesses must sound sadder than ever, Grand Empress Kenshi's ladies sat gazing into space and making conversation.

"With everything so uncertain, it's a serious business to simply go through life accumulating karma burdens," someone said. "Why don't we get the gentlemen to help us make a copy of the *Lotus Sutra* to dedicate? We can do a chapter apiece." "That would be splendid," the others agreed. They went to Kenshi with their plan and asked for her opinion. "An excellent idea," she said, "but if you start you must be conscientious about finishing."

"We ought to be able to manage with thirty capable people. First of all, for the Preface, Go-no-onkata," they decided. "For the 'Tactfulness' chapter, the Tsuchimikado Mistress of the Wardrobe . . ."

With the main decisions made, they all began to wonder aloud about the best way to proceed, making such a commotion that it was impossible to understand them. The married ones were afraid that their husbands' modest resources might prove unequal to the occasion, and the others felt even more uneasy, since they were going to have to rely on nobles and other men with whom they were friendly. The enterprise

seemed indeed to have become less a pious work than a contest, which might, one feared, have the contrary effect of creating a karma burden.

More than ten days of hectic activity followed. (The time was around the Twentieth of the Ninth Month.) The sutra boxes commissioned by Kenshi were ready, the copying had been completed in spite of sundry misgivings, and the ladies were occupying themselves with preparations for the dedication, which they hoped to hold before the end of the month. They had settled on Master of Discipline Yōshō as lecturer, and had assembled a set of damask and gossamer night-duty robes and 100 rolls of silk as his recompense. Michinaga happened to drop by while they were trying to select a site for the ceremony. Kenshi mentioned the matter to him in the course of conversation. "My ladies have copied a sutra and are wondering where to hold the dedication."

"Of course they mustn't think of having it anywhere except at my Buddha Hall," he said.

"Very well, we shall plan on it."

"Who is to be the lecturer? What are you going to give him?"

"We intend to have Yōshō."

"Excellent. What do you have for him?"

"A damask and gossamer night-duty costume and one hundred rolls of silk," said Naishi-no-suke, one of the ladies in attendance.

"Much too extravagant," Michinaga replied. "I suggest that you give fifty rolls to the lecturer and the rest to the title-chanters. But when is the dedication to take place?"

"We were thinking of today or tomorrow."

"Two days from now would be an auspicious date. I'll have my people clean the Buddha Hall. And they'd better straighten up this old monk's living quarters too. It would be embarrassing if the young ladies-in-waiting laughed at me." He hurried off home.

Back at the Buddha Hall, Michinaga began hasty preparations. "There is to be a sutra dedication. Decorate the Amitābha Hall with rich furnishings, and arrange seating in the south corridor for the ladies-in-waiting. Our friends and relatives among the senior nobles will be coming, so the Kitchen Office will have to get ready for them—and there must be fruits and other dainties for the ladies."

It was easy to see that Kenshi's attendants were abashed and agitated by such attentions. The Amitābha Hall was being fitted out with the utmost magnificence.

Each of the ladies produced her work when Michinaga called at Kenshi's apartments early on the morning of the dedication. The sutra was indescribably magnificent. Some chapters were true chrysographed texts, inscribed in gold on lustrous cobalt-blue paper. Others were written over pictures superimposed on damask, or contained pictures above and below the text, or provided textual illustrations—the "Gushing Forth" chapter, for instance, depicted the emergence of multitudes of bodhisattvas from the earth, and the "Eternal Life" chapter showed the Buddha's eternal abode on Vulture Peak. It was all quite beyond words. The "Devadatta" chapter was illustrated with a drawing of the dragon king's abode; others were attached to branches of silver or gold. . . . But it would be impossible to describe them all. Their splendor and sumptuousness made them resemble collections of elegant verses rather than sutras. Jeweled rollers had been used, and almost every scroll was embellished with the seven treasures. Nobody had ever seen anything so gorgeous. Kenshi's sandalwood sutra boxes bore gold-edged figured designs into which multicolored gems had been worked, and she had had the corner decorations made of dark blue Chinese brocade with a tiny figure. Ah, the splendor of it! One would have liked to make just such a sutra to keep always at one's side.

"I'll put it in the sutra treasury," said Michinaga, overcome with admiration. He went off with it, leaving word for the ladies to follow at once.

Four or five household carriages were summoned, and Go-no-onkata and the rest of the thirty ladies crowded inside for the journey to the Buddha Hall. They had kept on their usual dress with much reluctance—it would have been only proper, they thought, to make suitable preparations for so grand an event—but to the onlookers, watching them cram themselves helter-skelter into the carriages and start off, it seemed that even the most elaborate special costumes would have served no better, so brilliantly did their attire capture the hues of the season's chrysanthemums. They alighted at the gallery south of the Amitābha Hall, where the senior nobles were seated in a row against the balustrade of the eastern veranda.

"I didn't expect the project to amount to much," said Michinaga, "but I was absolutely astounded and dazzled when I saw the results." The gentlemen were impressed by the warmth of his praise.

Attractive dishes of fruit were brought to the ladies' seats, and the

gentlemen also partook of refreshments. Yoritō, Koreyori, Tamemasa, and other officials from Kenshi's household looked after the ladies. Tokinobu, acting on Kenshi's behalf, took charge of the offerings for the lecturer and title-chanters.

When all was in readiness, the lecturer made his appearance, clad in gorgeous red vestments, and the anticipation of the congregation mounted as he raised his censer in an impressive gesture of homage to the Buddha. He ascended to the high seat, spoke of the nature of the occasion and its significance, read a small portion of the supplication, described what had been done, and explained the general meaning, titles, and text of the sutra, proceeding with such clarity and skill that Michinaga and the others showered him with praise. During the exposition, which began with the *Sutra of Innumerable Meanings* and continued through the *Sutra of Meditation on the Bodhisattva Fugen*, the ladies basked in reflected glory, and Kenshi's situation was admirable indeed.

Ten million people aspired to enlightenment while the Buddha lived on earth [Yōshō said], but never before, perhaps, have ladies entered into a compact, held consultations, and, like these, conceived a desire for enlightenment so fervent as to have written out, richly adorned, and presented a copy of the *Lotus Sutra*, "impossible to comprehend, impossible to penetrate." This is a rarity of rarities. Those who copy and dedicate the *Lotus Sutra* are assured of birth in the Heaven of the Thirty-three Divinities. What is more, it is unthinkable that any of these ladies-in-waiting should have failed to read the *Lotus*, and thus they will undoubtedly be born in the Tuṣita Heaven, there to lead a life of bliss. Consider, too, that they have made use of gold, silver, beryl, and pearls in copying their dedicatory text. What a noble enterprise! Their resolve is loftier than Mount Sumeru and deeper than the four great seas. Today their flowery sleeves are dyed in exquisite hues and shades, and the scents of Indian sandalwood and aloeswood permeate their robes. They paint their faces with cosmetics of many colors, and like the woman of Śrāvastī, they find themselves most comely when they see their reflections in the mirror. Their amusements within the Ninefold Palace are like those of damsels in the Heaven of the Thirty-three Divinities; they are not inferior to those of the Garden of Joy; they are superior to those of the Joyful-to-see Palace. Yet what thoughts can have entered the minds of these ladies, who, like fair maidens in the Heaven of the Thirty-three Divinities, sit on the soft, pearly stone beneath the kalpa trees, bathe in the marvelous Mandākinī Pond, savor the four kinds of nectar, and listen to the music of the five tones? Beholding the scattering of springtime blossoms, they have understood ephemerality; beholding the falling of autumn

leaves, they have felt sadness. The cock's crow at dawn has brought tears to their eyes. The morning frost vanishing before the ascendant sun, the evanescence of the evening dew, the sound of the vesper bell marking the end of yet another day—those things have moved them to pronounce their great vow. They pray for the safety of their mistress, the Grand Empress, in whom they place their trust, and for that of the Princess of First Rank; likewise, they hope that their private petitions, encompassing this life and the next, may be granted, and that through their intercession every sentient being may also achieve peace in the present life and rebirth in paradise. There can be no lack of efficacy in a single character of this scripture elucidating the marvelous truth of the One Vehicle. The Jewel of the One Vehicle has been fastened inside garments adorned with damask, gauze, brocade, embroidery, gold, and gems. Can anyone doubt that so great a petition, encompassing this life and the next, will be granted?

There were many other moving and splendid things, but I cannot describe them all. Yōshō looked especially impressive as he took his leave at the end of the ceremony, after having received some silk and the package containing his reward. The Buddha Hall officers and title-chanters also went off with presents of silk, and the gentlemen, much impressed, felt that Kenshi had handled matters admirably. The sutra was stored in the treasury.

19

At the Biwa Mansion [Kenshi's residence], elaborate preparations had been under way since spring for Princess Teishi's Assumption of the Train, which was to take place in the Fourth Month [of 1023]. Michinaga was providing indescribably splendid articles for the Princess's use, and every effort was being made to lend distinction to the attendant events. Shōshi was to attach the train, and her ladies, faced with the need for costumes to see them through three days of festivities, found themselves almost as busy as the ones at Kenshi's house.

The Princess was to proceed to the Tsuchimikado Mansion⁵ early in the morning on the First of the Fourth Month, the day on which she was to assume the train. It was clear that her nurses had devoted much anxious thought to their attire. Although such women are expected to appear as quiet, conservative figures, they had decorated their jackets and sashes with gorgeous mountain and river designs, gold and silver

5. Where Shōshi was living.

edging, mother-of-pearl appliqué, gold and silver lacquer, gold and silver damascene work, and bits of glass. And of course the young attendants had indulged their fancies with an extravagance verging on lunacy.

Shōshi had assembled presents of many kinds for the Princess.

All the ladies-in-waiting with any claim to superiority had placed themselves at the Princess's disposal, including elderly women who had previously retired to their homes, feeling unequal to the rigors of court service, but who were now coming in to sew and perform other tasks. The whole group assembled at the Biwa Mansion during the night of the Thirtieth, some of them just before dawn on the First.

At the Tsuchimikado Mansion, the west wing had been decorated for the occasion. Its appearance was impressive enough under ordinary circumstances, but now each of the furnishings had been specially brought in, and they gleamed with indescribable brightness and purity. Throngs of people from the staffs of the two mansions streamed in to look, expressing a noisy admiration that was in itself a diverting spectacle.

Their other preparations complete, Kenshi's ladies-in-waiting were making up their faces in a state of great agitation. Meanwhile, people sent by Ishi, Kishi, Yorimichi, and others kept bringing in different kinds of elegant clothing boxes containing sets of robes and tasteful accessories, such as fans and incense. So much was going on that the messengers received no replies. Koichijōin also sent splendid gifts. There seem to have been innumerable poems, too, but it must have been hard for Kenshi to tell one from another, what with the bustle and confusion of the ladies' carriages being brought up and the gentlemen assembling. A variety of handsome fans arrived from Princes Atsunori and Atsubira, who had assembled exactly the right numbers and kinds to provide every lady-in-waiting with one appropriate to her age. Some of the recipients seem to have preferred creations of their own design, and it was those they chose to carry.

Michinaga was deeply concerned about the preparations. Since he felt he should not appear in public to keep an eye on things (to do so, he thought, would be inauspicious), he besieged Yorimichi with urgent instructions about tasks that needed to be performed. Early in the morning, the Regent betook himself to the Biwa Mansion, and there, in his eagerness to hurry matters along, he went so far as to urge the ladies-

in-waiting to greater speed. Then he rushed off again. "It's time to begin," he said. "I'll see that everything is in order at the Tsuchimikado Mansion and then come back."

The gentlemen had assembled.⁶ "Here's Yorimichi already," someone said. "Princess Teishi will be leaving at the Hour of the Hare [5:00–7:00 A.M.]." But it was not until the Hour of the Dragon [7:00–9:00 A.M.] that the party from the Biwa Mansion set out. Because it would have been undesirable for the Princess to travel separately, Kenshi used a Chinese carriage instead of the customary palanquin, and the two rode together, accompanied by Go-no-onkata. Fifteen carriages followed in an indescribably splendid and glittering procession, escorted by the Regent, the Palace Minister, and a host of other notables. Needless to say, the courtiers were also present. There were no ordinary men among the samurai attached to the imperial carriage; they were all Kenshi's own people. The other samurai and Head Samurai in the service of the two personages accompanied the party on foot. Even for the short distance between the Tsuchimikado and Biwa Mansions, they all wore elaborate court costumes, including boots. Their faces were flushed with embarrassment, for despite their low status they were the sons of men of Fourth and Fifth Rank, and they found it trying to endure the stares of the crowds in sight-seeing carriages and elsewhere along the way—to say nothing of having to suffer the inspection of the illustrious ladies they were escorting.

In deference to Shōshi's presence, Kenshi's men unyoked the ox at the Tsuchimikado Guards Office and drew the carriage in by hand. The Regent and the Palace Minister stood waiting at the point of descent to help the Grand Empress.

That day, the ladies-in-waiting from the Biwa Mansion wore robes of different colors under trains stenciled with designs of their own choosing. Shōshi's ladies sat from the south to the west side of the main hall, their skirts and sleeves billowing from behind the blinds. Ten were attired in wisteria colors, ten in deutzia, ten in azalea, and ten in kerria—a magnificent spectacle. Kenshi's ladies were seated along the eastern side of the west wing, their robes visible all the way to the south corner. Rinshi sat in privacy in a two-bay room with a southern exposure, somewhat to the west of the eastern side of the main hall. (It was

6. At the Tsuchimikado Mansion.

the chamber in which continuous sutra-recitations were performed for Shōshi.)

The day drew to a close amid ceremonies of many kinds, and then Michinaga sent a number of messages pointing out that it was time for Shōshi to join Kenshi. In the ordinary course of events, the guest would have gone to the hostess in the main hall, but Michinaga had probably decided to arrange things otherwise so that Shōshi could see the jewel-like perfection of the west wing's furnishings. Kenshi proceeded along the middle corridor to the hall in order to welcome her sister to the wing. What a splendid sight the two Empresses presented as they crossed in turn! Both were wearing semiformal coats, trains, and formal coiffures, and the spectacle was so magnificent that one longed to capture it in a painting.

Thus Shōshi arrived at the west wing to view the furnishings. The bombycine lavender curtains, shading to purple toward the bottom, were embroidered with branch designs, and their streamers, braided in the Chinese style, were cluster-dyed in purple. The curtain-dais was decorated in the same manner. The folding screens and other accessories were also very splendid, and Shōshi gazed at them with astonished eyes, accustomed as she was to considering her own apartments the last word in luxury. The curtain-stands and the frames of the screens were inlaid with mother-of-pearl and gold lacquer. On the five-foot screens, there were quotations from Chinese works, inscribed in elegant Chinese script on colored-paper sections by Major Counselor Yukinari; and on the four-foot Chinese damask screens, their colored-paper sections lightly tinted with purple, there were texts in Yukinari's cursive script, the calligraphy and underlying designs combining to produce an effect of indescribable brilliance and taste. The edgings were of Chinese brocade. The articles for the Princess's use were decorated with gold lacquer and mother-of-pearl, with gems inlaid wherever space permitted. But I could not possibly describe everything. The blinds were edged in green bombycine with a large figure.

Princess Teishi was looking very drowsy in the dim glow of the lamps. There were repeated messages from Michinaga; he was sure it must be past time for the ceremony to begin. Finally, Naishi-no-suke, one of the imperial nurses, brought up a lamp and stood next to the Princess. Shōshi looked at her niece. She was an exquisite child, with hair that seemed to fall in an extraordinarily splendid manner. A doll

may be all very interesting, but its stiffness is disappointing; and a picture may be painted with admirable skill, but it can neither move nor speak. Princess Teishi, though she might have been mistaken for either, was so sweet, dainty, elegant, and radiant that Shōshi found it impossible to turn her eyes elsewhere.

The nurses waited behind curtains and screens, barred from closer approach.

The Princess changed into a white costume, and Assistant Handmaid Ben-no-saishō came forward to put up her hair. It would have been appropriate for Ōmi-no-sanmi to perform the ritual, but Kenshi had felt that she would not be a particularly novel choice, considering that she had been one of the Princess's nurses ever since she had been called on for the first suckling. Ben gazed in delighted admiration at the sweet little figure. Shōshi had always thought of the Crown Prince as having a special radiance, but her small niece's refined, winsome air made her long to keep the child where she might see her day and night.

"If she was beside His Majesty looking like that, wouldn't they be as cute as two dolls?" said Ben. The Empresses laughed.

The Princess looked incomparably pretty and lovable in the lamp-light as her hair was being dressed. She seemed half asleep while Shōshi was tying the sash. Since the train had now been attached and the hour was late, Shōshi took her leave. "We'll meet tomorrow," she said. As before, Kenshi escorted her.

The magnificent costumes presented as gifts⁷ included robes made of bombycine, damask, gossamer, and other fabrics in various colors, rolled together in sets of five and three. They were packed in beautifully decorated chests, which had been built to match their length, and which far excelled the ordinary sort of box trimmed with gold edging and lacquer. Since there were ten chests, they must have contained about 100 rolls. Modern colored paper always seems to be assembled in copybook form, but the sheets of paper presented by Kenshi followed the old style, and their different colors and shapes were more interesting than I can say. And then there were the dinner things—silver dishes on standing trays made of aloeswood, sapanwood, and sandalwood. Instead of following the usual design, the tray tops imitated the appearance of the sea, with mountainous islands and indented shorelines on which

7. From Kenshi to Shōshi.

many kinds of objects were arranged. Silver and gold were the only materials used. Shōshi put the trays and their contents on top of a cabinet, where, she said, they were to remain as ornaments, which no one must touch.

That evening, a splendid room was set aside for Ben-no-saishō, the Assistant Handmaid who had put up the Princess's hair; and all of its luxurious furnishings were given to her to keep. Her presents included two clothing boxes containing costumes in sets of two, with appropriate accessories. She also received the things that had been presented before the Princess that night.⁸ And everything in her room went to her—the screens and curtain-stands, the double-tiered cabinet, the inkstone box, the comb box, the incense burner, the water jug and basin, and even the mats. Such largesse was not without precedent, but it was unlikely, people agreed, that any other Assistant Handmaid had been so lavishly rewarded for putting up a young lady's hair. For Shōshi's ladies-in-waiting, her household staff, and even her lesser servants, there were garments or rolls of silk appropriate to their status, and also, of course, presents of food. Every gentleman was given similar cause for rejoicing.

Emperor Go-Ichijō sent Shōshi a letter announcing promotions for three nurses in the service of the Princess of First Rank. Shōshi rewarded the messenger, and Kenshi also gave him an indescribably splendid present. The nurses were Ben, Tayū, and Chūjō. When Michinaga heard what had happened, his awe and gratification moved him to tears, inauspicious though they were on such an occasion. "His Majesty's act was everything that one might have wished for," he thought.

On the following day, Shōshi's ladies made a splendid appearance in China-pink robes, their colors paling toward the bottom, and Kenshi's wore layers of yellow kerria, which were a delightful complement to the red.

Kenshi would ordinarily have stayed until the Third, but the day was unlucky for her, so it was decided that she would go home on the night of the Second. Shōshi gave Princess Teishi an incomparable present—a set of gold and silver boxes containing all twenty scrolls of *Collection of Early and Modern Poetry* in Tsurayuki's own hand, Prince Kaneakira's transcription of *Later Collection*, and a copy of *Collection for a Myriad Ages* made by Michikaze. All of the manuscripts had probably

8. The dinner tables and trays.

been inherited from Emperor En'yū by Emperor Ichijō, and all were quite unique.

After amusing themselves until nightfall, the senior nobles and courtiers escorted Kenshi home. There had naturally been rewards for everyone on the preceding day, and all the members of Kenshi's party now received additional presents from Shōshi. Princess Teishi's three nurses, Kenshi's nurses, and the ladies-in-waiting were given robes, and there were other gifts for the senior nobles and courtiers, the Master of the Household Office, and the lesser household officials. High and low joined in singing the praises of the two sisters, whose warm regard for one another made it worthwhile indeed, people said, to be in their service.

When the company reached the Biwa Mansion, they found a sumptuous feast in readiness. The senior nobles in the escort stayed for a while, and on their departure they received fine quilts and oversized lined robes of the kind usually presented on official occasions. The courtiers were remembered in the customary fashion. Preparations were also made to receive visitors on the following day, which, as the last of the three, called for the same kind of entertainment.

24

[In 1025, Kenshi holds a New Year Banquet.]

Those of Grand Empress Kenshi's ladies who had been staying at home returned to the Biwa Mansion during the evening of the Twenty-second and the early morning hours of the Twenty-third. The wing to the east of the main hall and the other areas required for the banquet had been decorated on the Twenty-second. Although everything was more or less the same as at the Regent's banquet, there were differences in the presents for the guests, and also, presumably, in the disposition of the senior nobles, who were to go first to the east wing and then to Kenshi's south veranda.

After such a long period of impatient waiting, the younger ladies must have been consumed with excitement when the great day arrived. At last they were to match colors and combinations with their rivals! Regular ladies-in-waiting with assigned quarters dressed in their rooms, but the ones who came from outside were jammed together in the Table Room inside flimsy enclosures of screens and curtain-stands, where they



were joined by their male friends. In some of the cubicles, a last-minute frenzy of sewing went on, while the occupants moaned, "Oh, dear! My hair hasn't even been done yet!" In others, ladies who had finished most of their preparations calmly blackened their teeth and added other touches to their toilettes. Some members of the group, skeptical about the quality of the folding fans Kenshi might dole out, had asked that theirs be provided by friends or personal painters, and now they either waited nervously for the fans to come or discussed their merits. "How did you manage to get such a good one? Mine isn't at all what I wanted." Others passed judgment on the luster of their glossed silks or fussed



Grand Empress Kenshi's ladies prepare for a banquet (Chap. 24)

about the patterns in their bombycines. The ones who were authorized to wear forbidden colors sat with smug faces, aloof from the hubbub. The others, provoked by the superior airs of their companions, were filled with a burning desire not to be outshone. But the situation was hopeless for women who were condemned to appear in unfigured jackets, and even those who planned to wear bound-patterned fabrics complained because the figures were indistinct.

At dawn, the lattice shutters were raised, the doors and half-shutters

were thrown open, and there was a flurry of hair-tidying and face-freshening. In some places, people tramped in with enormous bags and bundles; in others, pairs of bearers carried stacks of trunk and chest lids, packed with unbelievable quantities of clothing. The amazed onlookers asked themselves how many robes one woman could wear.

As the sun rose, some of the ladies breakfasted in a pleasantly unaffected manner on food brought from home. For others, busily threading fans or burning incense balls, breakfast was the least of their concerns. "This is ridiculous!" their people said. "You shouldn't get so excited. You've been in such a state that you haven't eaten a bite for days. This morning, at least, please have a little watered rice or something. If you don't, how can you stand the weight of all those robes? Didn't you see what happened yesterday? Her Majesty had Saemon put on several layers so she could look at them, and Saemon couldn't budge—she simply stood there all hunched up." Absorbed in their tasks, their mistresses paid no attention.

When the sun had reached the Hour of the Dragon [7:00–9:00 A.M.], Kenshi sent attendants, housekeepers, bath maids, and other messengers to tell all the ladies not to dawdle. They went on with their primping—ceremonies were always late in starting, they said—and only moved to assemble after repeated warnings that the sun had risen much too high. Accompanied by court officials holding curtain-stands, and preceded by others clearing the way, they walked toward the Grand Empress with attendants carrying their skirts. They were graceless figures, their robes too numerous and thick to let them raise their fans to their faces. It looked as though the seams of their jackets had split open because of their bulky garments and had had to be held together with cluster-dyed yarn. As they filed in, one imagined how elegant Kenshi herself must look.

After all of the ladies-in-waiting had made their entrances, handsome curtain-stands were set up in the bay above the central stairway of the main hall, and the ladies took their seats, two in each bay west of the stairs and across the gallery to the southeast side of the west wing. East of the stairs, their ranks extended to the section of the gallery above the garden stream. I cannot tell you how many there were, but it must have been a huge number. The blinds were braided with cluster-dyed string and fitted with striking borders of an unusual kind. The long lines were grand beyond words.

The senior nobles assembled at about the Hour of the Sheep [1:00–3:00 P.M.].

Although the weather was mostly fair, a sudden flurry of snow added a delightful touch to the scene, enhancing the brilliance of the sand in the garden and bringing fresh charm to the murmur of the brook. It was just at that time that the gentlemen arrived. Their Escorts, dressed in exceedingly handsome costumes, resembled figures in a painting as they stood leaning on their bows near the inner gate. As I was admiring the grand entry of the Regent with his imposing company of Escorts, I noticed the Ono-no-miya Minister Sanesuke coming in. Young for his years, he still had a fine, attractive face, and I found him more appealing than any of the others. Because he held the title of Major Captain, he was accompanied by an impressive group of Escorts. All the senior nobles seated themselves in the inner chamber of the east wing, facing west. The courtiers took seats in the southern eavechamber. In the inner chamber, the seat of honor was on the south; in the eavechamber, it was on the west.

With all in readiness, the ceremonies proceeded as usual. Glancing toward the west wing, Kenshi could see a magnificent display of layered skirt edges, spilling out at the foot of the blinds like rows of pillow books made of differently colored brocades. The layers seemed to be more than a foot thick. And the sleeve openings were amazing, as large and round as small braziers. It was so astonishing and embarrassing an exhibition that she must have blushed with discomfort at the thought of the guests' reactions.

After the ceremonial obeisances, Yorimichi, as Minister of the Left, led a stately procession up the east steps of the main hall. He occupied the seat of honor east of the south steps. The Ono-no-miya Minister of the Right was next to him, and then came Tadanobu and all the others. They sat on square cushions facing north, with the tails of their under-jackets draped over the balustrade behind them. The color combinations of the jackets were glossed silk, willow, cherry, grape, and, in the case of the younger men, red plum—a delightful, glittering array.⁹

Once seated, the gentlemen inspected the edges of the row of blinds in front of them. By mutual consent, each of the ladies on the other side was wearing three of the same five color combinations—willow, cherry,

9. The glossed silk colors (*kainerigasane*) were red for both the front and the lining.

kerria, red plum, and yellowish-green. Some wore five robes in each of their three combinations, a total of fifteen; others, six or seven, amounting to eighteen or twenty-one in all. Some were wearing Chinese damasks; others seemed to have on bombycines that were either bound- or float-patterned, the difference being determined by the color combination. Some of the mantles were five-layered; others seemed to be glossed unlined garments dyed in pale green and other such colors. The jacket colors were chosen from among the same five combinations, and the trains were decorated with seashore patterns. The stand curtains were in red plum, yellowish-green, and cherry colors, deepening toward the bottom, and were decorated with paintings and brilliant green streamers. The unlined ones were all leaf green. The gentlemen exchanged amazed glances, dazzled by the display.

Kintō and Norimichi were not among the guests at the event, which took place in the month that marked the death anniversary of Norimichi's wife. But Norimichi was uneasy about absenting himself altogether from such an occasion. He also felt curious about what was going on, so he appeared at the mansion in an informal cloak and went behind the blinds, where he wandered among the ladies-in-waiting, arranging their sleeve openings and smoothing their hair. The ladies, distressed by his attentions, thought it the kind of situation for which the phrase "dripping with sweat" must have been invented. They felt their faces redden at the same time that their bodies chilled with perspiration. What would Kenshi think? Each was painfully aware that her mistress was scrutinizing every detail of her personal appearance and behavior, as well as the style and coloring of her costume. The row of gentlemen did not much concern the ladies. Knowing they could not be recognized, they felt like the "thin men" at the Sacred Spirit Service, who mask their faces with hand towels. But the intrusion of the smiling Palace Minister was very upsetting.

A marvelous assortment of scents and perfumes, borne on the breeze from the gentlemen's seats, mingled with the fragrance of a superb plum-blossom incense burning inside. On that occasion, the ladies felt, the "gentleman-in-waiting" was superior even to the Ministers of the Left and the Right.¹⁰

In the garden, where musicians waited to the west of the east

10. "Gentleman-in-waiting" was the name of an incense.

corridor, the splendid fragrance of a plum tree near a fire-post was diffused by the movements of the crowd. The musicians emerged by fours in the usual fashion to present exhilarating performances of the dances "Ten Thousand Years" and "Universal Peace." (It may have been because of the season that the music sounded especially fine.) The performers kept their eyes raised to the edge of the Grand Empress's blinds, a delightful touch that seemed to enhance the beauty of their playing.

Sanesuke went up to Yorimichi. "A man of my age has been present at a good many brilliant and showy events, but I have never seen anything like the costumes the ladies-in-waiting have on today. Their ostentation appalls me!" he said. Yorimichi's smile must have made the ladies behind the blinds speculate uneasily about the subject of the conversation. "At Your Lordship's banquet the other day," Sanesuke continued, "I thought all the arrangements indescribably magnificent—the appearance of the mansion itself and every other detail—but that was 'brocade on a dark night' compared to this. Today I keep feeling as though I were facing a bright mirror—I am so ashamed of my appearance that that's exactly how it seems. At a man's place, the ladies-in-waiting are far away, and things are more relaxed, aren't they? Here everything has been done in such lavish style that it becomes trying." His remarks were most interesting. . . .

The winebowls were filled again and again, and the guests seemed to find it increasingly hard to preserve their dignity. When the sun went down, post torches were lit here and there in the garden, and portable lights made the surroundings as bright as day. The oil lamps inside were being lit by smug-looking female servants in unconventional attire, whose lofty indifference to possible criticism struck the onlookers as most intriguing. One realized that such servants were not to be found in humble places. Guards in unfamiliar costumes resembling hunting robes had come into the garden and were cheerfully tending the fires. What could possibly go wrong, they seemed to be thinking. Kenshi's eyes lingered on the scene, which she found very noble.

The gentlemen ushered in the darkness with a delightful concert, the tones of the instruments most impressive. Something that might have been either a plum blossom or a snowflake drifted into a winebowl, and Tadanobu began to sing:

Plum blossoms swathed in snow fly above the zither;
Willow-color merging into mist enters the wine.

The abundant flow of wine suggested another song:

The cold light of a single lamp—night beyond the clouds;
Many cups of warm cordial—spring amid the snow.

Although the voices were beautiful, some people said "Ten Thousand Years, a Thousand Autumns" would have been a more appropriate choice.

The guests cast away their inhibitions and made merry in a number of diverting ways. When it became apparent that some of them were getting drunk, Kenshi took pity on them and brought out the gifts. It was too dark for me to see, but I heard that they were magnificent. The departure was rather noisy.

Yorimichi went behind the blinds to speak to Kenshi. "Things went too far today," he said. "Everybody has been indulging in excessive display during the last few years. All you ladies let your attendants wear lavish costumes when the Buddha Hall was dedicated, but there was a limit to what they could do in the summertime. There is no excuse for anyone's wearing twenty robes, I don't care who she is. Your ladies are outlandish! Those excellent nobles Sanesuke and Tadanobu both protested to me that they had never seen or heard of such ostentation, and who could blame them? I was also amazed by the gaudiness of the makeup." He continued in the same vein, his manner so affable and charming that one could not believe he was the forbidding First Noble who had taken part in the day's ceremonies. "If Father asks for an account of today's events," he said, "I hate to think of the scolding I'll get about the robes. He's all smiles when the Empresses behave well, but he pounces on every irregularity. You've been very foolish. He always praises Shōshi and Ishi for not letting their ladies wear more than six robes. You're the one who's a problem, he says." He took his leave.

The ladies-in-waiting, stiff from so much sitting, could barely struggle to their feet. There was great bustling back and forth as carriages were drawn up at the Guards Office for the ones who were leaving the mansion. The others returned to their rooms, where they propped themselves up or stretched out, faint with fatigue.

The banquet had lasted far into the night. On the following day, Michinaga sent word for Yorimichi to call at once. The Regent hastened to obey, curious about the summons, and found that his father merely wanted to chat. The conversation probably touched on the appointments list that was to be announced soon.

"Now tell me," Michinaga said, "how did Kenshi's banquet turn out yesterday?"

As Yorimichi described the event, Michinaga deluged him with questions, smiling in great good humor. But he was infuriated by the answer to his inquiry about the ladies' costumes. "Such extravagance is simply appalling! In my opinion, it's too much for them to wear even seven or eight, and I've told them all—Ishi, Shōshi, and the rest—to limit their ladies to six, even on the grandest occasions. The others have never failed to observe the limitation, but this Imperial Lady flouts my wishes! I won't put up with that kind of behavior!" Yorimichi could not help being amused by his indignation over something that was already past and done with.

Michinaga proceeded to dress Yorimichi down. "Let's forget about Kenshi for the moment," he said. "I'd like to know how you, a Minister of State, found it possible to tolerate such conduct. Who do you think is supposed to be the court's guardian? What kind of man would ignore that sort of thing?" Yorimichi admitted to being at fault.

Yorimune, Yoshinobu, and others also visited Michinaga and exclaimed about the lavishness of the banquet.

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Although the gossips were always speculating about whether Princess Teishi was destined for the Emperor or for the Crown Prince, no word of any match had reached the Biwa Mansion. Finally, in the Third Month [of 1027], hints of marriage to the Crown Prince were received, and the ladies-in-waiting huddled together in discussions of what the future might hold.

Messengers kept arriving from Michinaga. Yorimichi paid a visit, and there were long talks with Yoshinobu, the Master of the Empress's Household. The ladies promptly assumed that all the comings and goings had to do with the marriage and were impatient for matters to be decided as soon as possible. On the Sixth of the Third Month, it was decided that Yorimichi should come to settle things that very day, which had been found to be auspicious. The Grand Empress's household officials assembled, and the Chancellor appeared at about the Hour of the Sheep [1:00–3:00 P.M.]. He called for an inkstone, jotted down a few notations "as a formality," and went off again.

Michinaga took advantage of the auspicious day to send over quan-

tities of silk and damask, which arrived at about the Hour of the Cock [5:00–7:00 P.M.]. "Distribute them to your ladies today," he said. "I'm afraid you'll have to work day and night if you're going to be ready. The presentation is to be on the Twenty-third, which leaves practically no time. I've already told the weavers to make bombycines for the jackets and mantles; you'll have to get the rest of the costumes together as soon as you can." Kenshi distributed the fabrics to the ladies who were to take part in the ceremonies, and they set feverishly to work. "How can we ever get glossy robes ready in time?" they complained. "And we can't just wear bombycine the way it's given to us. What's to be done? The time is so short!"

Kenshi called in several of the ladies who had been begging for positions at the mansion. She also sent for one of the numerous daughters of the late Governor-General—Middle Counselor Minamoto no Tsunefusa, but Middle Captain Sanemoto responded that the family could not consider the arrangement.¹¹ When Michinaga heard of Sanemoto's refusal, he told him to send his sister to Kenshi, but Sanemoto declared to the Grand Empress that he really could not consent. Then Michinaga instructed Kenshi not to let the Middle Captain or his relatives visit her mansion, and vowed that he would not have anything to do with them, either. Sanemoto offered his apologies.

Michinaga sent Kenshi more supplies than her staff could cope with. "Don't neglect anything," his letter said. "With my health so much worse than it was last year, I simply can't visit you, much as I want to. This marriage is the only thing that keeps me alive; I don't intend to go until it takes place. Please, my dear, be sure that the arrangements are perfect." There were many other messages in the same ominous tone, which the Grand Empress found deeply distressing. Since it was a time of happy beginnings, she tried to keep her worries to herself, but tears often filled her eyes. Her ladies also looked as if they found it difficult to control their emotions.

Meanwhile, Kenshi was in and out of bed, plagued by a mysterious indisposition. Miserable and feverish, she would have her legs massaged and then be up and down again. She couldn't imagine what was wrong, she said, but somehow she managed to carry on with the wedding arrangements. In the thought that it might be a disorder of the nervous system, her ladies dosed her in vain with magnolia-bark tea.

11. Sanemoto was Tsunefusa's son.

After four or five days, Yorimichi came to call. What was making Her Majesty look so peaked, he asked. "She's been that way for several days," Naishi-no-suke answered. "It seemed to be a nervous disorder, so she drank magnolia-bark tea, but that didn't help."

"How very awkward." He had a samurai send for Morimichi, and the diviner proceeded to perform purification rituals in the Grand Empress's presence, giving it as his opinion that the cause of the illness was probably either a curse by the clan deity or a transgression against the Earth God.

"She isn't eating anything," one of the ladies told Yorimichi. "What a time for her to fall ill!"

Yorimichi set out toward the Hōjōji, leaving orders for the purification rituals to be repeated two or three times a day.

"This is most unfortunate," Michinaga said when he heard the news. "Do whatever else seems necessary." He told the Ninnaji Master of Discipline Jōten, who had recently been performing esoteric rites for Princess Teishi, to begin prayers and rites on Kenshi's behalf. The Grand Empress was determined to carry on, as appalled as everyone else by the untimeliness of her affliction. It was almost more than she could bear, but the marriage could not be halted. To Michinaga's distress, his own infirmity, from which he had been suffering since the previous year, forced him to remain a distant witness to these events.

Jōten became a Bishop. During his expressions of gratitude, he spoke of the promotion as a sure sign that his prayers would succeed.

Great preparations were afoot at the Biwa Mansion. All marriages tend to be lavish affairs, but Kenshi and Teishi's nurses had talked about the Princess's ever since her infancy, and the ladies must have been determined to spare no effort. Their instructions were to avoid outlandish extravagance and concentrate on making the conventional attire as fine as possible. Each was putting together three sets of costumes. There were to be the same numbers of ladies, girl attendants, and maids as for the earlier imperial marriages.

The mansion buzzed with activity as the wedding day drew ever closer.

After learning that the Crown Prince's messenger would come on the Seventeenth, which was auspicious, Kenshi's people made elaborate arrangements for his reception.¹² Everything was quite perfect, even to

12. The messenger brought the letter and poem with which the betrothal was sealed.

the pleasantly cool effect of the garden stream. Yorimichi, Norimichi, and the others were all waiting to greet the messenger when he arrived at the Hour of the Monkey [3:00—5:00 P.M.]. He was Lesser Captain Yukitsune, Yukinari's son, and his impressive bearing, as he proceeded through the east corridor to the main hall, bore witness to the excellence of his father's instruction. The Crown Prince's letter, written on willow-combination paper and attached to a willow branch, seemed extraordinarily elegant and splendid, but perhaps I only thought so because I barely caught a glimpse of it. I have no idea what it said. . . .

The usual ceremonies were observed, and the messenger left after dark with Teishi's reply. After that, there were daily messages from the Prince.

Rinshi was at the Biwa Mansion, working with the same anxious concern as the Princess's mother. The quiet spring rains, an added complication, caused exasperating delays. Since Michinaga was taking care of everything else, the sole task at the mansion was the preparation of the ladies' costumes, but Rinshi feared that even that might prove too much, in spite of the many hands at work. And then there was the added worry about Kenshi. Now that the wedding date was upon them, the Grand Empress was determined to bear up, but she was so miserable that it was hard for her to think of anything else.

It must have been unsettling for Michinaga to have to rely on others for news about the progress of things at the mansion and the state of Kenshi's health.

Yorimichi had been counting all along on having Kenshi join the Princess at the palace, but he now learned, to his distress, that there was no precedent to sanction the residence of an imperial lady who was neither the mother nor the wife of the reigning sovereign.

Early on the morning of the Twenty-third, the appropriate people went to the palace to decorate Teishi's apartments. Others were dazzled by the splendor when they peered into the Kokiden through the new blinds.

At the Biwa Mansion, the ladies-in-waiting slaved over their toilettes, and the Princess's nurses seemed equally convinced that their preparations were matters of crucial importance. Yorimichi appeared at midday to issue the necessary orders. The other brothers rushed around, eager to do their part, and there was a parade of messengers from Michinaga.

Messengers arrived from Shōshi and Ishi at the height of the confusion, but everyone was too excited to pay any attention to them. Kenshi must have been upset when she discovered what had happened. Shōshi's costume was an indescribably beautiful set of robes in shaded cherry-blossom layers, accompanied by a folding fan, incense balls, and other accessories, all showing meticulous attention to detail. Apt classical texts had been inscribed on the clothing box. Ishi had sent robes with wisteria designs woven in shades of purple.

Vast quantities of folding fans came from Koichijōin, Prince Atsunori, and Prince Atsuhira. From Yorimichi there were splendid costumes for the Princess's girl attendants—inner robes of red, others of yellowish-green bombycine, trailing robes in the globeflower and cherry-blossom combinations, and triple-layered trousers—every article a masterpiece, down to the last folding fan. Norimichi was responsible for the four maids, who were to wear robes of different colors, surmounted by green mantles and willow-combination jackets. The train patterns were far more elegant than the random stencil-designs one usually sees on maids' trains.

Toward sunset, there was much noise and confusion as the ladies' carriages were brought in from the establishments of various gentlemen. Princess Teishi, who looked uncommonly lovely that evening, had been led to believe that the purpose of the outing was to avoid a directional taboo. On learning that her mother would not be going, she refused to budge, but Kenshi managed to allay her fears. The Grand Empress watched with loving eyes as she entered the carriage, which had been drawn up to the bay at the head of the south stairs; and Rinshi was also deeply moved. Anxious messages streamed in from Michinaga.

The appearance of the ladies' carriages may be imagined.

The Princess's arrival at the palace and her descent were accompanied by singularly impressive ceremonies. The hand-drawn carriage and things of that sort took time, and it was rather late at night when the ladies-in-waiting alighted from the carriages in their beautiful costumes.

Numerous messengers came from the Crown Prince, all imploring Teishi to come at once. Meanwhile, the hour grew very late. Yorimichi was doing his best to persuade the Princess to go, talking to her like an affectionate father. All the other uncles were showering her with attention, mindful of the instructions they had received from Michinaga,

who desired, he said tearfully, that everyone who loved him should act as Teishi's faithful servant in his place. At length, Yorimichi took the girl by the hand and led her to the Prince's apartments, where she remained motionless until the Prince came out to carry her behind the curtains. She looked so sweet and charming that His Highness must have been well pleased with the match.

Teishi's retinue withdrew, except for her chief ladies, who remained on duty in the Courtiers' Hall.

After the cocks had crowed a number of times, ladies and gentlemen began to arrive to escort Teishi back, but it was almost light by the time she left.

Kenshi's motherly anxieties and physical ailments kept her from sleeping that night, and she stayed up until dawn talking to Rinshi. There had been an extraordinary hush over the mansion since the Princess's departure.

At the palace, the Crown Prince's messenger came around sunrise.¹³ He was Yoshiyori, the Provisional Assistant Master of the Crown Prince's Household. Teishi's stand curtains were of triple-layered bombycine in the wisteria combination, and her dais curtains repeated the colors. Everything was done in the usual splendid style, but this time the atmosphere seemed more dignified. Perhaps it was the fatefulness of the occasion that made it so very impressive. The Princess was using the eastern eavechamber of the Kokiden, and the edges of her ladies' robes, billowing out from behind the blinds, made an indescribably beautiful spectacle during the messenger's reception. The nurses and senior ladies-in-waiting all wore splendid double-patterned mantles in different colors.

Another Emperor's daughter who had made a similar marriage was Princess Shōshi, Emperor Suzaku's daughter, who had become Emperor Reizei's consort. But that happened long ago, and apparently the marriage was not all that might have been desired, because Emperor Reizei was an invalid. Everything was perfect in Teishi's case.

Yorimichi and the other brothers were all present, and they set out to get the messenger drunk. Since Yoshiyori was partial to wine, their relentless hospitality soon had him befuddled. He was an interesting sight as he took his leave and staggered, red-faced, back to the Crown Prince.

13. The messenger brought the expected "morning-after" letter and poem from the Crown Prince to Teishi.

The gentlemen thought it a great pity that Kenshi had been unable to witness the marriage proceedings or see the room furnishings.

Princess Teishi paid many visits to the Crown Prince, who was besieging her with messengers. There was a certain arranged look to the whole affair, but the Prince's affection seemed genuine, which must have pleased and reassured Michinaga and Kenshi. Both of them sent costumes to the palace.

Four or five nights after the presentation, Teishi was seized by a sudden severe pain as she was about to leave for the Prince's apartments. Yorimichi tried in alarm to make it go away by applying firm hand pressure, while messengers streamed in from the Prince. What was the matter? What had happened? When the pain subsided a bit, they persuaded the Princess to go ahead, and the perturbed bridegroom greeted her with a burst of anxious questions. She had seemed better, but another attack came on, and Yorimichi had to lead her away. Michinaga offered prayers for her as soon as he heard the news. It seemed that the attacks might well be the work of malignant spirits. The Crown Prince's nurses gathered solicitously at the Kokiden.

Teishi began to feel better toward dawn. Word of her improvement caused great joy at the Biwa Mansion, where Kenshi's concern had made her forget her own sufferings.

The Crown Prince thought it a pity that Teishi should have to journey to and from his apartments every night. In the future, he decided, he would sleep in her quarters. The Shōkyōden was prepared for his use.

There were preparations at the Hōjōji and the Biwa Mansion for the coming Change of Dress. The people at the mansion were also assembling a costume to be presented by Princess Teishi to the Crown Prince's son, Prince Chikahito, whose Assumption of the Trousers, they had been informed, was being arranged by Shōshi for the Second of the Fourth Month.¹⁴

The Crown Prince was to begin his visits from the Shōkyōden on the Ninth of the Fourth Month. All the stand curtains installed for the Change of Dress were made of triple-layered bombycine in the deutzia combination. The ladies' rooms in the corridors and elsewhere were decorated to reflect the individual tastes of the occupants, and the

14. The Change of Dress took place annually on the First of the Fourth Month. Prince Chikahito, the future Emperor Go-Reizei (1025-68; r. 1045-68), was the Crown Prince's son by Michinaga's daughter Kishi. Shōshi was his grandmother.

ladies themselves were wearing layered bombycines in the wild-pink combination.

That day, the Princess bestowed suitable gifts on the Crown Prince's nurses, supplementing the usual items with quantities of plain silk, damask, and the like. The gifts for the Prince's ladies-in-waiting, lower female servants, and maids probably followed the precedents set on earlier occasions.

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Kenshi was much worse. A twenty-one-day series of esoteric rites, undertaken by Bishop Meison, had produced no improvement. The Bishop's efforts were reinforced by those of other notable monks, who were directed to perform two- and three-altar rites, but the disease proved impervious to their outpourings of mystic invocations; the Grand Empress did not so much as yawn. Every conceivable purification and oblation ritual was tried.

In the quiet aftermath of the Kamo Festival, Kenshi had ample time to fret about her daughter in the palace, and she deluged the Princess and her ladies with costumes. The ailing Michinaga must have felt similarly harried by responsibilities—the Buddha Hall, the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the Ten Days of Fasting, and so forth. . . .

Kenshi's worries were assuaged by news of Teishi gleaned from the Emperor's ladies-in-waiting, who were frequent callers at the Biwa Mansion, and she found some consolation for her physical suffering in the constant visits of her anxious mother, Rinshi. But her condition was very frightening; the illness hung on with no hint of change. Casting about for something else to do, Rinshi summoned another group of eminent monks and told them to begin the customary sutra-reading rites. All the efficacious holy texts were recited—the *Life Sutra*, the *Kannon Sutra*, the *Healing Buddha Sutra*, and others. The Crown Prince sent a stream of official inquiries, and Princess Teishi's grief knew no bounds. It was too much, the Princess felt, that something should happen to her mother just when she herself was trying to contend with the uncertainty inspired by every aspect of her new situation. No success whatever was resulting from the current series of rites at the mansion, performed by Bishop Shin'yo of Miidera, Bishop Meison, and Jakushō. Rinshi was disheartened and gloomy. . . .

Michinaga had been intending every day to visit Kenshi, whose state caused him keen concern, but he had been unable to go. It was a dreadful disease, so unresponsive to treatment that even the ministrations of the Zenrin Archbishop Jinkaku were of no avail. Prayers of every conceivable kind had been offered at the mansion and at mountains and temples everywhere, but all had proved distressingly ineffective.

Michinaga's visit took place in bright moonlight on the evening of the Sixteenth of the Sixth Month [of 1027]. The spirits were driven into mediums, and he himself performed some mystic invocations, expressing great confidence in their efficacy. "How could the Buddhas and sutras fail to respond after I have prayed to them for so many years?" he said. He and Kenshi must have felt very sorry for each other, but they were both too ill to keep up a conversation. Excusing himself for leaving early and promising to come again soon, he went back home. . . .

Rinshi was spending all her time at the Biwa Mansion. Gloomy and pessimistic, she struggled in vain to adopt a cheerful attitude.

It was now the Eighth Month. The sad days slipped by, with Kenshi no longer aware of their passing. Feeling that something had to be done, Michinaga decided that the Grand Empress should go into retreat at the Hōjōji Hall of the Five Great Mystic Kings, where he proposed to arrange esoteric rites on her behalf. In a touching display of concern, he undertook a major reconstruction of the north side of the hall to accommodate her.

Daily messengers arrived from the Crown Prince, and Ishi and Shōshi were frantic with apprehension.

It was the sixth month of the illness, which had begun in the Third Month. Kenshi had stopped eating and was as thin as a shadow. Sometimes she would ask for a bath during a lull in her suffering, and the boiler-house servants would be pathetically happy as they went about their chores. The ladies-in-waiting and samurai competed with one another to be of service to their mistress, never allowing themselves a sound night's sleep, but they worried in private conversation about what such a long illness must lead to, and walked around brushing tears from their eyes. Since the lattice shutters were not being lowered at night, the gentlemen slept where they were, seated on the veranda with their backs propped against the balustrade. One's heart went out to them. . . .

Kenshi directed her ladies to prepare costumes for the Hōjōji retreat, which she had decided to begin on the Thirteenth of the Eighth

Month. If she recovered, she vowed, she would make a pilgrimage of gratitude to the temple in the Tenth Month. Furniture was transported on the appointed day, and rooms were suitably decorated. That evening, the ladies-in-waiting assembled before her in all their finery. Princess Teishi wore a coat in fallen-leaf colors over aster robes. Kenshi was a white figure, her two or three robes matched by her complexion. Her hair was disheveled at the knot where it had been tied in back, but not a strand was out of place below. One marveled at its length, which appeared to have increased during her illness.

On arriving at the temple, Kenshi took up residence on the north side of the eastern eavechamber in the Hall of the Five Great Mystic Kings. Michinaga occupied a room at the northwest corner of the building. A curtained chamber had been prepared for the Grand Empress's people in the northern eavechamber of the Golden Hall.

Five-altar esoteric rites were begun, sponsored by Michinaga with the aid of Yorimichi, Norimichi, Rinshi, and the Master of the Grand Empress's Household, Michikata, but two or three days passed without a sound from the possessing spirits. Michinaga and the monks were dismayed. Because Kenshi often sank into a comatose state at night, the monks would assemble to perform mystic invocations during the hours of darkness, but not even a yawn rewarded their efforts. Except that her condition remained unchanged, one might have believed that all the spirits had departed. Kyōmei and the others worried and lamented, humiliated by the futility of their ministrations, which they compared to scooping up water to throw at a rock.

Michinaga had assembled a large number of clerical vestments for the dedication of his 100 Śākyamuni images, planned for the Twenty-third, as well as other robes for an Eight Expositions Service, to be held immediately afterward. To his disappointment, it now appeared that he would have to cancel the ceremonies because of Kenshi's illness.

"There's no need to give up your plans," Kenshi protested. "I'm used to being sick by now, and I'll be able to hold out."

"How happy you make me!" he exclaimed. He rubbed his beads. "O Buddhas! For that noble speech, grant that she may be restored to instant health!" He went ahead with his preparations. Worshipers were to forgo the usual ostentation in making their offering-branches, he said; they must strive for decorous beauty instead.

On the dedication day, Shōshi arrived before dawn and went to the

northern eavechamber of the Healing Buddha Hall. As Princess Teishi and Rinshi were proceeding toward the southeast, a dozen or so yards from Kenshi's quarters, they were astonished to see the Grand Empress slip smoothly out on her knees to greet them. Overcome with joy, they interpreted the encounter at a miraculous boon from a Buddha.

The ceremonies began—first the dedication of the images at the Śākyamuni Hall and then the Eight Expositions. From the outset, the lecturers spoke of nothing but Kenshi's illness, which became the subject of endlessly repeated prayers. Michinaga distributed clerical robes to the participating monks, who numbered 100 as usual.

"If she directs a single thought to the hundred Śākyamuni images, it will mean another hundred years of life," one monk declared. The holy words of hope stirred the listeners to the bottoms of their hearts.

There were illustrations from the *Lotus Sutra* on the pillars, but most of the monks seemed too preoccupied with Kenshi to appreciate them.

The days of the Expositions passed swiftly. Michinaga distributed magnificent gifts to the monks at their conclusion. Shōshi regretted not having seen Kenshi when she was so close, but exalted personages are governed by inflexible restrictions on their conduct.

So the month ended. The nights lengthened with the coming of the Ninth Month. Kenshi was much worse. She seldom slept through until morning, and the strain of her nurses' labors left them nodding with fatigue, sturdy as they were. Asleep on her feet, Naishi-no-suke took to napping in the daytime.¹⁵

The distracted Michinaga recalled how Minister Kamatari, suffering long ago from an intractable malady, had recovered after a nun from China had made an offering of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-sūtra*. He summoned Ryūsei, Iseki, Keinyū, and other worthy Nara monks to do the same, but there was no response. It seemed to him that Kenshi was simply waiting to go. Unable to look at her without bursting into tears, he felt as though years were being taken from his own life.

"Nothing can do any good now," Kenshi said. "Whether I live or die, I want to be at Biwa."

"It would never do to go back to the place where you fell ill," Michinaga answered. "The spirits must have put the idea into your head."

Shortly before dawn on the Seventh of the Ninth Month, Kenshi

15. Naishi-no-suke was Kenshi's childhood nurse.

moved to the New Southern Hall. Her failure to recover was a bitter blow to Michinaga, who had been confident of the curative powers of a retreat at his temple. The east side of the main hall was decorated for her.

Early on the morning of the Ninth, several kinds of fish arrived from Yorimichi. . . . It had been some time since Kenshi had tasted any, but she pulled a robe over her head in utter indifference. Despite all that had been done, the end seemed at hand, and bitter grief filled every heart.

The Tenth of the Ninth Month passed. Esoteric rites were performed at the New Southern Hall, with the Rain Bishop Ninkai and Bishop Shin'yo as officiants. Many of the ladies who had worked so hard at the Hall of the Five Great Mystic Kings went off home, promising to return on the following evening. The yin-yang masters all agreed that the patient would improve on the Fourteenth, and on the preceding night she did indeed rally enough to exchange a few words with her people.

Early on the morning of the Fourteenth, Kenshi expressed a desire for a bath. Orders were issued to the samurai, and the delighted boiler-house servants set about preparing water, but then she said that she was in a hurry: a small amount would do. Her ladies instructed Kaneyasu in the Serving Office to boil water and bring it as soon as possible. Kaneyasu hastened to obey, and when it arrived Kenshi slipped down to the bathing chamber on her knees to take her bath. The robes and mats she had been using for the past several days were all removed. After the bath she put on bright, fresh clothing, lay down, and sent someone to fetch Michinaga. He was in the bath himself, her father answered, but he would come at once. He rushed off to her apartments in his bath attire, afraid that she might be dying. There was no doubt that she was worse. He spoke to let her know he was there, and she gestured as though to cut her hair.

"Do you mean that you want to become a nun?" he asked.

She nodded, and he performed the necessary acts with tears streaming down his face. Her voice was very firm as she pledged to keep the commandments. Rinshi, who had arrived in the meantime, was too distraught to realize what was happening. Bishop Shin'yo, Past Lecturer Kyōen, and other holy monks assembled to perform mystic invocations, but the Grand Empress was sinking steadily. At the urging of Nagaie, Yorimune, and Yoshinobu, who were also present, she recited the name

of Amitābha Buddha in a strong, clear voice. It was heartrending to hear her chant mingling with the monks' frantic invocations. There was pandemonium everywhere inside and outside the hall. In the midst of it all, Kenshi's brothers and others came crowding noisily in the room.

As Kenshi's life ebbed, Michinaga cried out in anguish, "How can you leave your old father and mother? Take us with you!" The ladies who had gone home had suddenly reappeared, and their wails reverberated through the hall at the sound of his sobbing.

Death came to Kenshi at the Hour of the Monkey [3:00–5:00 P.M.] on the Fourteenth Day of the Ninth Month in the fourth year of Manju [1027]. She had been ill since the Eighth of the Third Month. She lay covered by a robe and surplice belonging to Michinaga, placed over her by Rinshi, with her own brilliant robes pulled over her head. Her hair, which looked as if it had been cut to hip length, had been clipped just above the tie. The shorn locks had appeared to be about six feet long when Michinaga held them up for the Mii Bishop to look at. "See what long hair she had!" he said. Dazed by emotion, the Bishop had burst into tears. It was he who administered the commandments immediately afterward. When Her Majesty was pledging so firmly to uphold them, who could have thought that the end would come so soon?

The hall echoed with wails. As the ladies talked on about their terrible loss, even their mistress's age became a subject of mournful complaint. Dismal and inauspicious though the tearful voices sounded, one could not help recognizing the special sadness of their plight.

Michinaga pulled the robes away from Kenshi's face. "I can't believe it's true," he cried. "Please wake up!" Rubbing his prayer beads, he rambled on in tears. "How cruel the Buddha is! To think that he would let me survive to know such sorrow!" No words could do justice to his misery. Rinshi had sunk to the floor in a faint.

Yorimichi looked after his mother with medicinal decoctions. Her sobbing, ever more violent, continued even after the lamps had been lit. The faint sound of Princess Teishi's frenzied weeping came from the room to which her uncles had taken her. Her grief was most natural, infinitely pathetic.

Yorimichi took Rinshi by the hand and led her away. "You must go too," the brothers told Michinaga. "You aren't looking at all well." Their father scraped his feet against the floor, bursting into tears, but

they drew him from the room, unwilling to let him stay. His chronic ailment seemed to be bothering him more than ever, and they led him off with touching solicitude. Yorimune, Yoshinobu, and Nagaie remained near Kenshi with the ladies-in-waiting. Naishi-no-suke was in a dreadful state, lying unconscious in her room with no notion that people were trying to get her to drink medicine.

At Michinaga's request, Bishop Shin'yo had stayed on after completing the esoteric rites that morning. His presence could no longer make a difference, but they left his altar intact, a mark of the special regard in which he was held.

Long though autumn nights may be, there was no peaceful sleep for anyone that night. Michinaga was stupefied with grief.

Aware that he could not abandon himself to sorrow, Michinaga summoned Morimichi to inquire about funeral arrangements. "I never dreamed it would come to this when I performed the purification rituals after Her Majesty first fell ill," Morimichi said. "The results of the divination were unfavorable, but I thought they would be changed by all the things you were doing. What a terrible tragedy!" Tears started from his eyes. "Well now, as to the day for the funeral, it seems that tomorrow would be best. It is a day of ritual seclusion for the Regent, but you need not avoid it for that reason. It is only days of seclusion for the Imperial Lady Shōshi that must be shunned, and tomorrow does not happen to be one. If the present opportunity is missed, it will be some time before there is another."

"Then tomorrow it seems fated to be," Michinaga answered, weeping. "I could see that theirs was an extraordinarily close relationship."

"There is a broad flatland called Ōtani east of Gion," Morimichi said. "That is the place for the funeral."

"Then go and make the necessary arrangements tomorrow," Michinaga directed. Morimichi withdrew.

Since Kenshi had given up her imperial status, it would have been improper to use a palanquin. Michinaga decided on a string-decorated carriage instead, in accordance with precedents established after the deaths of Empresses Senshi and Junshi.

On the following day, Michinaga supervised the activities of Kenshi's household officials and others close to her, who had begun to crowd into the hall early in the morning. Crews set to work on the roads along

the funeral route. Michinaga admitted tearfully that he felt too drained to manage the walk. The sobbing household officials went about their business with frantic haste as the day drew to a close. Moved by the contrast with the happy splendor that had always characterized their mistress's outings, the ladies-in-waiting shed floods of tears.

Soon it was time to put the body in the coffin. Because the task was beyond the ladies' strength, it was performed by Yorimune, Yoshinobu, Nagaie, Koretsune, and Korenori. Appropriate objects were added. Yorimichi was in ritual seclusion and could not be present. Four or five carriages were provided for the ladies. Weeping without restraint, they all begged to be allowed to go, but of course there was room only for the ones who had been closest to the Grand Empress.

The reader may imagine the wailing when the hearse set out. The departure was especially poignant because it coincided with the removal of the flooring¹⁶ in the eastern corridor where Princess Teishi was to stay. Kenshi's nurses were too upset to see the body off, and Teishi's lamentations were more than the family could bear. How inadequate it seems to call such things pathetic or sad! It was chilling to see the ladies wearing mourning robes over the chrysanthemum and autumn-leaf costumes that had been their habitual attire in recent days. The funeral procession was a melancholy spectacle, utterly different in costumes and general appearance from the imperial lady's usual progresses, but it was also very grand as it moved along beneath the fine cloudless sky, which seemed a reminder of autumn's end.

A brilliant moon shone throughout the night, illuminating the mourners, the surroundings, and even the colors of the ladies' robes. Someone with a natural understanding of things gazed reflectively at the ladies' carriages, her thoughts moving from the unendurable sadness of the occasion to musings on the impermanence of worldly things. To console her aching heart, she recited these poems to herself:

fujigoromo
kaesugaesu mo
kanashiki wa
namida no kakaru
miyuki nārikeri

Like layered mourning robes,
our sorrows accumulate,
grief added to grief,
on this tear-bedewed journey
our imperial lady makes.

16. To create an earthen-floored mourning chamber.

hanamomiji
 orishi tamoto mo
 ima wa tote
 fuji no koromo o
 kiru zo kanashiki

An end now to sleeves
 woven of springtime blossoms
 and autumn leaves.
 How grievous it is to wear
 wisteria mourning robes!

Because Michinaga was in no condition to walk, his sons and some of the others carried him on their shoulders. It must have been hard for them.

The mourners found a spacious building awaiting them at Ōtani.¹⁷ Everything was clearly visible in the moonlight, which was brighter than day. The rites were slow to start, and it was late at night before the Buddha-invocations began. The chants of the monks, their voices broken by sobs, were so moving that it was difficult to restrain tears, even for people with no understanding of the fundamental causes and meanings of things. With the Hiei Abbot Ingen and the Provisional Archbishop Kyōmei serving as Leader and Invoker, Kenshi's remains vanished without a trace into smoke—a dreadful sight.

Naishi-no-suke acted as waitress that night, and of course the other ladies who had been close to the Grand Empress all descended from their carriages to help.¹⁸ I must leave the scene to the reader's imagination. Remembering the First Month, when she had also served her mistress's repast, Naishi-no-suke shed floods of tears.

The rites were completed near dawn, and then the Kohata Bishop Jōki and Assistant Household Master Yoritō took the remains to Kohata.

So Kenshi went alone to mingle with the clouds and mist, leaving the others to turn homeward without her. What their number was I do not know, but their plight was deeply moving.

17. Erected for the cremation.

18. It seems to have been customary to serve a final meal to the deceased.