

2. Especially Delightful Is the First Day

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

It also enjoy the seventh day, when people pluck the young herbs that have sprouted fresh and green beneath the snow.³ It is amusing to see their excitement when they find such plants growing near the Palace, by no means a spot where one might expect them.⁴

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It is fascinating to see what happens during the period of appointments. However snowy and icy it may be, candidates of the Fourth and Fifth Ranks come to the Palace with their official requests. Those who are still young and merry seem full of confidence. For the candidates who are old and white-haired things do not go so smoothly. Such men have to apply for help from people with influence at Court; some of them even visit ladies-in-waiting in their quarters and go to great lengths in pointing out their own merits. If young women happen to be present, they are greatly amused. As soon as the candidates have left, they mimic and deride them – something that the old men cannot possibly suspect as they scurry from one part of the Palace to another, begging everyone, 'Please present my petition favourably to the Emperor' and 'Pray inform Her Majesty about me.' It is not so bad if they finally succeed, but it really is rather pathetic when all their efforts prove in vain.

4) The Palace grounds were usually kept clear of plants

5) Horse parading festival imported from China

8) This is the traditional day to give fancy cloth to princesses and promote court ladies

9) It was believed that if a woman was hit in the crotch with a stick used to stir the gruel in this festival, she would have a son.

10) A young man would not have his own house, so his wife would continue to live with her parents and he would visit.

8. The Cat Who Lived in the Palace

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

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

'Okinamaro, where are you?' she cried. 'Come here and bite Lady Myōbu!' The foolish Okinamaro, believing that the nurse was in earnest, rushed at the cat, who, startled and terrified, ran behind the blind in the Imperial Dining Room,²⁸ where the Emperor happened to be sitting. Greatly surprised, His Majesty picked up the cat and held her in his arms. He summoned his gentlemen-in-waiting. When Tadataka, the Chamberlain,²⁹ appeared, His Majesty ordered that Okinamaro be chastised and banished to Dog Island. The attendants all started to chase the dog amid great confusion. His Majesty also reproached Lady Uma. 'We shall have to find a new nurse for our cat,' he told her. 'I no longer feel I can count on you to look after her.' Lady Uma bowed; thereafter she no longer appeared in the Emperor's presence.

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

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

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

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

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

27) The Emperor loved cats, and literally gave this one a rank roughly equal to Sei's rank.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

11. The Sliding Screen in the Back of the Hall

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

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

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

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

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

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

38) The screen has scary images to scare all away from the Empress

39) Empress's brother

43) The Naniwazu is part of basic elementary education

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

46) Sei is about 30 in this scene, middle-aged by Heian standards, so "age" has come [her] way"

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

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

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

'Emperor Murakami,' continued Her Majesty, 'had heard this story and remembered it years later when the girl had grown up and become an Imperial Concubine. Once, on a day of abstinence,⁴⁸ he came into her room, hiding a notebook of *Kokin Shū* poems in the folds of his robe. He surprised her by seating himself behind a curtain of state; then, opening the book, he asked, "Tell me the verse written by such-and-such a poet, in such-and-such a year and on such-and-such an occasion." The lady understood what was afoot and that it was all in fun, yet the possibility of making a mistake or forgetting one of the poems must have worried her greatly. Before beginning the test, the Emperor had summoned a couple of ladies-in-waiting who were particularly adept in poetry and told them to mark each incorrect reply by a *go* stone.⁴⁹ What a splendid scene it must have been! You know, I really envy anyone who attended that Emperor even as a lady-in-waiting.

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

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

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

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

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

48) Days of abstinence are days that have been declared unlucky, either for a group or an individual. You are supposed to avoid doing anything leaving sex, work, visiting people to purge your bad luck

25. Flowering Trees

Plum blossoms, whether light or dark, and in particular red plum blossoms, fill me with happiness. I also like a slender branch of cherry blossoms, with large petals and dark red leaves. How graceful is the wistaria as its branches bend down covered with whorls of delicately coloured petals!

The *u no hana*¹⁰⁸ is a more modest plant and deserves no special praise; yet it flowers at a pleasant time of the year, and I enjoy thinking that a *hototogisu* may be hiding in its shade. When passing through the plain of Murasaki¹⁰⁹ on one's way back from the Festival, it is lovely to see the white of the *u no hana* blossoms in the shaggy hedges near the cottages. They look like thin, white robes worn over a costume of yellowish green.

At the end of the Fourth Month and the beginning of the Fifth the orange trees have dark green leaves and are covered with brilliant white flowers. In the early morning, when they have been sprinkled with rain, one feels that nothing in the world can match their charm; and, if one is fortunate enough to see the fruit itself, standing out like golden spheres among the flowers, it looks as beautiful as that most magnificent of sights, the cherry blossoms damp with morning dew. But I need say no more; so much has been written about the beauty of the orange trees in the many poems that link them with the *hototogisu*.¹¹⁰

The blossom of the pear tree is the most prosaic, vulgar thing in the world. The less one sees this particular blossom the better, and it should not be attached to even the most trivial message.¹¹¹ The pear blossom can be compared to the face of a plain woman; for its colouring lacks all charm. Or so, at least, I used to think. Knowing that the Chinese admire the pear blossom greatly and praise it in their poems, I wondered what they could see in it and made a point of examining the flower. Then I was surprised to find that its petals were prettily edged with a pink tinge, so faint that I could not be sure whether it was there or not. It was to the pear blossoms, I recalled, that the poet likened the face of Yang Kuei-fei when she came forth in tears to meet the Emperor's messenger - 'a spray of pear blossom in spring, covered with drops of rain'¹¹² - and I realized that this was no idle figure of speech and that it really is a magnificent flower.

The purple blossoms of the paulownia are also delightful. I confess that I do not like the appearance of its wide leaves when they open up. . . . But I cannot speak of the paulownia as I do of the other trees; for this is where that grandiose and famous bird of China makes its nest, and the idea fills me with awe.¹¹³ Besides, it is this tree that provides the wood for the zithers from which come so many beautiful sounds. How can I have used such a commonplace word as 'delightful'? The paulownia is not delightful; it is magnificent.

The melia tree is ugly, but I find its flowers very pretty indeed. One always sees them on the fifth day of the Fifth Month, and there is something charming about these dried-up, oddly shaped little flowers.¹¹⁴

108) Both the *u no hana* and the *hototogisu* (*cuckoo*) are associated with the Kamo Festival, which has pleasant associations for Sei

112) Reference to a Classical Chinese text, but not a very accurate one

113) The "grandiose and famous bird" is the Phoenix

114) The Fifth day of the Fifth Month is another festival Sei enjoys

26. Festivals

There is nothing to equal the Festival of the Fifth Month,¹¹⁵ when the scents of the iris and the sage-brush mingle so charmingly. From the Ninefold Enclosure of the Imperial Palace down to the cottages of the common folk, there is not a place where people are not busy covering their roofs with leaves of iris and branches of sage-brush. Everyone wants his own house to be decorated most luxuriantly. All this is a splendid thing which never occurs on any other occasion.

On the actual day of the festival the sky is usually cloudy. Herbal balls, decorated with braided strings of many colours, have been brought to the Empress's palace by the Bureau of the Wardrobe, and they are now attached to the pillars on both sides of the main hall in which stands Her Majesty's curtain-dais.¹¹⁶ They replace the chrysanthemums that have been hanging there ever since the ninth day of the Ninth Month, wrapped in their plain cases of raw silk. The herbal balls are supposed to remain on the pillars until the next Chrysanthemum Festival; but whenever people need a string, they tear a piece off the herbal balls, so that before long nothing is left.

During the course of this festive day gifts are exchanged, and young people decorate their hair with iris; they attach taboo tags to their clothes, and adorn their coats and Chinese jackets with long iris roots or sprigs of azalea, orange, and other attractive plants, which they secure to their sleeves with plaited cords dyed in uneven shadings. Though there is nothing new about any of this, it is very charming. After all, do people tire of the cherry trees because they blossom every spring?

The little girls who trip along the streets are also decorated with iris, but the flowers they wear are smaller than those worn by the grown-ups. The children are proud of themselves and keep looking at the flowers on their sleeves, comparing them with those of their companions. This is all delightful, as are the little pages who play with the girls and snatch away their iris, making them burst into tears.

I also like to see melia flowers wrapped in purple paper; thinly rolled iris leaves done up in green paper and attached to people's clothing; and iris roots tied to white paper. Some very elegant men enclose long iris roots in their letters, and it is a pleasure to watch the women who have received the contents discussing them with their companions and showing each other their replies. People who have chosen this day to send letters to a well-born girl or to a high-ranking gentleman at Court exude a particular grace. Indeed the Iris Festival is nothing but a delight until the *hototogisu* brings the day to an end by announcing its name.

115) Most of the traditions
in this festival are
related to bringing good
luck

116) A concealed throne

27. Trees

The maple and the five-needled pine, the willow and the orange tree. The Chinese hawthorn* has a rather vulgar name; but, when all the other trees have lost their blossoms, its dark red leaves shine out impressively from the green surroundings.¹¹⁷

I shall say absolutely nothing about the spindle tree.

I realize that it is not a specific tree, but I must mention the name 'parasite tree' since I find it so moving.¹¹⁸

I particularly enjoy the *sakuki* on occasions like the Imperial sacred dances at the special festivals.¹¹⁹ Among all the trees in the world this is the one that people have always regarded as the tree of the Divine Presence – a very pleasant thought.

The camphor tends to grow by itself, avoiding clusters of other trees. There is something rather frightening about its tangled branches, and this estranges one from it; yet it is because the tree is divided into a thousand branches that it has been evoked to describe people in love.¹²⁰ (By the way, I wonder who was the first person to know how many branches it had.)

One does not see the *hinoki* cypress very often; but the palace of 'three ridges, four ridges' was built with the wood of this tree.¹²¹ In the Fifth Month it gives a pleasant imitation of the sound of rain.

The maple is an insignificant tree in itself; but its red-tinged leaves, all spread in the same direction, look very pretty on the branches, and there is something charming about its flowers, which seem as fragile as dried-up insects.

* The name in Japanese translates to "side tree"

117) The leaves turn red in the summer, instead of autumn, so they stand out

118) "Mourning" as Sei uses it often means to be filled with sadness and pity. She is moved by the parasite's dependence.

119) Sakaki is a tree sacred to the Shintō religion

120) People in love have 1,000 troubles, like the 1,000 branches of the tree

It is rare to come across the large-leaved cypress,¹²² and not much is said about it; but I understand that pilgrims returning from Mitake often bring back branches of the tree as souvenirs. These branches are said to be rough and disagreeable to touch. Yet the tree has been given a name meaning 'tomorrow he will become a cypress'. What can be the point of such a prediction, and for whom was it made? I should really like to know.

The privet is also an uncommon tree. Its best feature is its tiny, delicate leaves.

The melia and the wild pear tree.

The pasania oak. It is strange that just this tree among all the evergreens should be mentioned as the one whose leaves do not change.

Of the trees that grow far away in the hills the so-called white oak is the least familiar; in fact about the only time one sees even its leaves is when they are being used to dye the robes worn by gentlemen of the second or third ranks. Though there is nothing very splendid or unusual about the tree, one always has the illusion that it is covered with snow, and it moves me greatly to recall the poem that Hitomaro wrote about the journey of the Storm God to Izumo.¹²³

Whether it be a plant or a tree, a bird or an insect, I can never be indifferent to anything that is connected with some special occasion or that has once moved or delighted me.

121) Reference to an old Japanese poem

122) The name for the cypress in Japanese literally translates to "tomorrow he will be a cypress"

123) Japanese poem reference

28. Birds

The parrot does not belong to our country, but I like it very much. I am told that it imitates whatever people say.¹²⁷

The *hototogisu*, the water-rail, and the snipe; the starling, the siskin, and the fly-catcher. They say when the copper pheasant cries for its mate it can be consoled if one puts a mirror before it – a very moving thought.¹²⁸ What misery these birds must suffer if they are separated from each other by a gorge or a ravine!

If I were to write down all my thoughts about the crane, I should become tiresome. How magnificent when this bird lets out its cry, which reaches up to the very heavens!

The red-headed sparrow, the male grosbeak, the kinglet.

The heron is an unpleasant-looking bird with a most disagreeable expression in its eyes. Yet, though it has nothing to recommend it, I am pleased to think that it does not nest alone in Yurugi Wood.¹²⁹

The box bird.¹³⁰

Among water fowl it is the mandarin duck that affects me most. How charming to think that the drake and his mate take turns in brushing the frost 'from each other's wings'!¹³¹

The gull. The river plover – alas, that he should have lost his mate!¹³²

The distant cry of wild geese is a most moving sound.

あはれなる野鳥の遠くを渡る声
あはれなる野鳥の遠くを渡る声

129) Reference to a Japanese poem

130) This bird is often mentioned in poetry because of the sound it makes.

131) Poem reference, the ducks symbolize faithful marriage

132) Poem reference

The *yuzuriha* has an abundance of pretty leaves, all green and glossy; but its stem is quite different from what one would expect for it is red and glittering. There is something a little vulgar about its colour, yet I really like the tree. No one pays the slightest attention to it during most of the year, but on the last day of the Twelfth Month it comes into its own. I understand that the food offered to the dead on that day is spread out on *yuzuriha* leaves, and this I find very touching. It appears that the same leaves are used to serve tooth-hardening food, which is meant to prolong life. How can this be? It is of this tree also that the poet has written, 'When the leaves turn red'. Indeed the *yuzuriha* is full of promises.

The common oak is a magnificent tree. To think that the God of Leaves lives there!¹²⁵ It is also fascinating that Captains and Lieutenants of the Middle Palace Guards should be named after this tree.

The hemp palm is an ill-shaped tree; but it is in the Chinese style¹²⁶ and does not grow outside the houses of common people.

124) The *yuzuriha* is an evergreen, so it is used for anything lasting. The poem quoted means he will stop loving her when the leaves turn red (i.e. never)

126) Chinese style is considered high-class

127) Sei probably only saw paintings of parrots

It is charming to think of the wild duck sweeping the frost from its wings.¹³³

The poets have extolled the *uguisu*¹³⁴ as a splendid bird, and so indeed it is; for both its voice and its appearance are most elegant and beautiful. Alas that it does not sing in the Ninefold Enclosure of the Palace! When I first heard people say this, I thought they must be mistaken; but now I have served for ten years in the Palace, and, though I have often listened for it, I have never yet heard its song. The bamboos in the Palace gardens and the plum trees with red blossoms should certainly attract these birds.¹³⁵ Yet not one of them comes here, whereas outside the Palace, in the paltry plum tree of some commoner's house, one hears the *uguisu* warbling joyfully.

At night the *uguisu* is silent. Obviously this bird likes its sleep, and there is nothing we can do about that.

In the summer and autumn the *uguisu*'s voice grows hoarse. Now the common people change its name to 'insect eater' or something of the kind, which strikes me as both unpleasant and unseemly. I should not mind if it were an ordinary bird like the sparrow; but this is the magnificent *uguisu*, whose song in the spring has moved writers to praise that season in both poetry and prose. How splendid it would be if the *uguisu* would sing only in the spring.¹³⁶ Yet it is wrong to despise this bird just because its voice deteriorates in the later seasons. After all, should we look down on men or women because they have been ravaged by age and are scorned by the world? There are certain birds, like the kite and the crow, that people disregard entirely and would never bother to criticize; it is precisely because the *uguisu* is usually held in such high regard that people find fault with it when they can.

I remember that on a certain occasion, when we had decided to watch the return of the High Priestess's procession from the Kamo Festival and had ordered the attendants to stop our carriages in front of Urin and Chisoku Temples, a *hototogisu* began to sing, not wanting to be hidden on this festive day. An *uguisu* sang in unison, perfectly imitating his voice. I was surprised by what lovely music these birds can make when they sing together high in the trees.

Having written so many good things about the *uguisu*, how can I properly praise the *hototogisu*? What a joy it is in the Fifth Month to hear its voice ring out triumphantly as if to say, 'My season has come!' The poets describe the *hototogisu* as lurking in the *u no hana* and the orange tree; and there is something so alluring about the picture of this bird half hidden by the blossoms that one is almost overcome with envy. During the short summer nights in the rainy season one sometimes wakes up and lies in bed hoping to be the first person to hear the *hototogisu*. Suddenly towards dawn its song breaks the silence; one is charmed, indeed one is quite intoxicated. But alas, when the Sixth Month comes, the *hototogisu* is silent. I really need say no more about my feelings for this bird. And I do not love the *hototogisu* alone; anything that cries out at night delights me - except babies.

133) Poem reference

135) Many birds were thought to have natural trees they liked, like *uguisu* and red plum trees. They would be associated together in poems.