


THE PILLOW BOOK OF SEI SHŌNAGON

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY IVAN MORRIS


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100. *Presumptuous Things*

A child who has nothing particular to recommend him yet is used to being spoilt by people.

Coughing.

One is about to say something to a person who is obviously embarrassed, but then he speaks first – very strange.

A child of about four, whose parents live near by, comes to one's house and behaves mischievously. He picks up one's things, scatters them about the place, and damages them. As a rule he is held in check and cannot do as he wishes, but, when his mother is with him, he feels that he can assert himself. 'Let me see that, Mama,' he says, tugging at her skirts and pointing to some coveted object. The mother tells him that she is talking to grown-up people and pays no more attention to him, whereupon the child manages to take hold of the object by himself, picks it up, and examines it – oh, how hateful! Instead of snatching the thing from him and hiding it, the mother simply says, 'You naughty child!' Then she adds with a smile, 'You mustn't do that. You'll damage it, you know.' The mother is hateful too. Since it would be unseemly to say anything, one has to sit there in silence, anxiously watching the child.

101. *Squalid Things*

The back of a piece of embroidery.

The inside of a cat's ear.

A swarm of mice, who still have no fur, when they come wriggling out of their nest.

The seams of a fur robe that has not yet been lined.

Darkness in a place that does not give the impression of being very clean.

A rather unattractive woman who looks after a large brood of children.

A woman who falls ill and remains unwell for a long time. In the mind of her lover, who is not particularly devoted to her, she must appear rather squalid.

102. *People Who Seem to Suffer*

The nurse looking after a baby who cries at night.

A man with two mistresses who is obliged to see them being bitter and jealous towards each other.

An exorcist who has to deal with an obstinate spirit. He hopes that his incantations will take effect quickly; but often he is disappointed and has to persevere, praying that after all his efforts he will not end up as a laughing-stock.

A woman passionately loved by a man who is absurdly jealous.

The powerful men who serve in the First Place never seem to be at ease though one would imagine that they had a pleasant enough life.

Nervous people.

103. *Enviably People*

One has been learning a sacred text by heart; but, though one has gone over the same passage again and again, one still recites it haltingly and keeps on forgetting words. Meanwhile one hears other people, not only clerics (for whom it is natural) but ordinary men and women, reciting such passages without the slightest effort, and one wonders when one will ever be able to come up to their standard.

When one is ill in bed and hears people walking about, laughing loudly and chatting away as if they did not have a care in the world, how enviable they seem!