

第1帖「桐壺」①

あらすじ

第1帖の「桐壺」は光源氏の誕生から12歳までが描かれます。物語の始まりの重要な要素が描かれていて2回に分けてお伝えします。

後宮こうきゅうにひしめくきさきたちの中で、低い家柄のうえ父も亡くした更衣が帝の寵愛ちようあいを独り占めしたのが物語の発端でした。それは掟破りおきての事態で、後宮の外れの部屋に住まいを与えられた彼女が帝のもとに通うにつけ、きさきたちの心いらだを苛立たせました。2人の間に生まれたのが、宝石が光るような皇子おうじ・後の光源氏です。が、皇子3歳の時に更衣は病で亡くなります。

かけがえのない愛の対象を帝は無くしてしまいました。愛は人を幸福にするのか不幸にするのか。これは『源氏物語』が全編で取り組むテーマです。

場面1

更衣が帝の寵愛を受け、気高く光り輝く皇子が誕生します。帝はこの美しい御子を誰よりも可愛がられます。

場面2

皇子が3歳の時、更衣は病に罹り里に帰ろうとしますが帝は許しません。病状は進みすっかり弱ってしまい、帝はやりきれなく思いながら退出を許します。更衣は帝との別れの場で辞世を詠みます。「もっと強い自分であつたら、こんな哀しい別れをしなくて済んだのに」と。更衣は実家に戻り息を引き取ります。帝は悲嘆と絶望に打ちひしがれ引きこもってしまいます。

Chapter 1: “Kiritsubo” I

Summary

Chapter 1 of *The Tale of Genji*, “Kiritsubo,” depicts Hikaru Genji—sometimes called “Shining Genji” in English—from his birth to the age of 12. As this chapter introduces key elements at the beginning of the story, it is covered by this program in two parts.

The story begins with Kiritsubo Consort, one of Emperor Kiritsubo’s concubines. Of low family background and her father already deceased, Kiritsubo Consort nevertheless is the sole recipient of the emperor’s favor among the many concubines jostling for position. This is a violation of custom and etiquette. Kiritsubo Consort, given a room on the outskirts of the palace to live in, irritates the other concubines whenever she makes the long journey past them to visit the emperor. Between the emperor and Kiritsubo Consort is born a prince like a shining jewel who is later given the name Hikaru Genji. However, when the prince is three years old, Kiritsubo Consort dies of illness.

Emperor Kiritsubo loses the irreplaceable object of his love. Does love make people happy or unhappy? This is a theme that is explored throughout *The Tale of Genji*.

Excerpted Scene 1

Kiritsubo Consort receives Emperor Kiritsubo’s favor and gives birth to a shining, noble prince. The emperor loves this beautiful child more than anyone else.

Excerpted Scene 2

When the prince is three years old, Kiritsubo Consort becomes ill and tries to return to her place of birth, but the emperor does not allow it. Her illness progresses and she becomes so weak that finally the emperor allows her to go, though he cannot bear the separation. Kiritsubo Consort recites her death poem at her parting with the emperor, expressing, in essence, that if she had been stronger, they would not have had to share such a sad farewell. Kiritsubo Consort returns to her family home and breathes her last. The emperor, overcome with grief and despair, withdraws into solitude.