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Content Warning: This document describes the exploitation and sexual abuse of a teenage girl.

Introduction: Lady Nijō, who was born into a high-status Japanese aristocratic family, was a lady-in-waiting and concubine to Retired Emperor Go-Fukakusa (1243–1304, ruled 1246–1259). She was dismissed from the Retired Emperor’s service in 1283 after having served him from when she was 13 (in 1271), and she subsequently became a Buddhist nun. She may have been dismissed because of her involvement with Kameyama, who was the ruling emperor and Go-Fukakusa’s brother (and rival).

[290] **The Confessions of Lady Nijō**

Spring with its seasonal haze arrived overnight, and the ladies-in-waiting sat in rows on the long-awaited morning, each wearing a magnificent costume designed to eclipse all the other. I joined them,

[291] attired, if I remember rightly, in seven budding-plum inner robes, a red outer robe, a green mantle, and a red formal jacket. My two short-sleeved underrobes were woven in a plum-blossom and vine pattern and were embroidered with plum blossoms and Chinese fences.

My father, Major Counselor Masatada, served the imperial medicinal draughts to Retired Emperor Go-Fukakusa. After the end of the formal ceremonies, the Retired Emperor had the participants come inside and summoned ladies-in-waiting from the Table Room for an informal party. The men had already drunk nine rounds during the ceremonies—three from each of three bowls. Father proposed the same number again, but His Majesty said, “This time, it shall be nine threes!”

After everyone was befuddled, the Retired Emperor gave Father the imperial bowl. “Let this spring be the time when the wild goose sheltering on your field comes to me,” he told him. Father made a deep bow. Again, His Majesty made a confidential remark as Father was about to withdraw after accepting the final round. I saw it all but had no way of knowing what was going on.

When I returned to my room after the Felicitations, I found a note. “From this day forth, I hope to tread where the snow lay yesterday.” It was accompanied by a cloth-wrapped package containing eight lined robes in colors shading from red to white—also a red singlet, a green mantle, a jacket, a divided skirt, a set of three inner robes, and another set of two robes. Startled and disconcerted, I was preparing for return everything when I noticed a poem on a thin piece of paper attached to one of the sleeves:

Although we may fail
to emulate birds with wings paired
in conjugal bliss,
accustom yourself, at least,
to wearing these crane-feathered robes.

It seemed unfeeling to reject a gift offered in such a spirit, but I sent it back with a poem and a note:

Would I do well
to wear these robes at night
all by myself?

[292, a genealogical table, is not reproduced]

[293] Surely the time would come
when tears would rot the sleeves.

“Perhaps if your affection were really to endure...”

Someone rapped softly on the rear door toward midnight, while I was away on night duty. The unsuspecting little maid opened it, and an unseen hand thrust something inside. It was the same package with another poem:

If in the future
you will be true to the pledge
spoken in the past,
please lie abed at night
with these garments spread alone.

It would have been awkward to send it away again, so I kept the things.

I wore the new robes on the Third, when Priestly Retired Emperor Go-Saga came to visit His Majesty. “The colors and luster of your robes are remarkably beautiful,” Father said. “Were they a gift from His Majesty?” It was upsetting, but I managed a show of indifference. “No, they came from Lady Tokiwai,” I said.¹

¹ Lady Tokiwai was Nijō’s great-aunt.

“On the evening of the Fifteenth, someone came from Kawasaki with word that he had been instructed to escort me there. It was inconveniently short notice, but I could not very well demur. To my surprise, everything looked much grander than usual when I reached the mansion. The folding screens, the matting, and even the curtain-stands and room hangings seemed to have been chosen with special care. I supposed that it must have something to do with New Year. So the day ended.

The next morning, people rushed around with talk of a repast of some kind, and there were consultations concerning courtiers’ horses and senior nobles’ carriages. My step-grandmother, the nun, arrived and engaged in whispered conversations. “What’s going on?” I asked. Father smiled. “His Majesty has declared that he will come here tonight to avoid a directional taboo, and we’re taking special pains because it’s the New Year season. I’ve brought you home to serve his meal.”

[294] “This isn’t the date of the seasonal change. What kind of taboo is it?” I asked.

Everyone laughed. “Listen to the child!” they say.

For a reason I could not have been expected to divine, some especially splendid folding screens and curtain-stands had been brought to the room where I always stayed. “Why are these decorations so elaborate? Is His Majesty going to see this room too?” I said. People laughed, but nobody gave me a clear answer.

At dusk, someone delivered three white singlets and a deep red divided skirt, which I was instructed to wear. The room was perfumed to an extraordinary degree. After the lamps had been lit, my stepmother brought in a beautiful short-sleeved robe for me to put on.

Father appeared a little later. He fiddled with the robes on display. “Hold yourself in readiness until His Majesty comes; don’t go to bed. A lady-in-waiting should never act willful; she must be perfectly obedient,” he said. I had no way of understanding what prompted the admonition. Vaguely annoyed, I leaned against a brazier and dozed off.

Just what happened next I cannot say. His Majesty arrived without my knowing it. Father busily supervised the placement of the carriage and the like. When the food came, he said in a flurry, “That worthless girl has gone to sleep. Wake her up.”

His Majesty overheard. “It’s all right. Let her sleep,” he said. So nobody disturbed me.

After having leaned for a while against the brazier just inside the sliding door, I had fallen into a sound sleep with a robe over my head. Some time later, I started awake to find the lamps dim, the curtains apparently drawn, and a man lying near me at his ease, just inside the doorway. In a panic, I tried to rise and flee, but he held me down. “You’ve haunted my thoughts ever since you were a little girl. I’ve been waiting for you to turn fourteen. “ He said other things—so many that I have no words to record them all—but I merely wept without listening. My tears drenched his sleeves, to say nothing of my own. Unable to soothe me, he did not resort to force but said, “I’ve

felt frustrated for so long that I decided to seize this opportunity. Other people must have made assumptions about us by now. Do you think a display of coldness is likely to end the relationship?"

I realized that he was right. It was not a secret tryst but a matter of public knowledge. And would not tonight's brief dream prove a source

[295] of misery tomorrow? Looking back now, I am astonished that I should have been so prescient.

Why couldn't the Retired Emperor have explained what he was going to do? Why didn't he talk it over with Father, I asked myself. "I'll never be able to show my face again," I wailed. His Majesty laughed, amused by my naïveté, and I felt worse than ever. I did not even answer any of his remarks for the rest of the night.

A stir outside indicated that dawn had come. "Isn't his Majesty supposed to go home this morning?" someone said.

"I'll be leaving just as though this had been a real tryst," His Majesty remarked half to himself. As he prepared to rise, he addressed me with mingled annoyance and compassion. "This quite unexpected behavior has made me feel that it was a waste of time to pledge my devotion back in those days when you wore your hair parted in the middle. I advise you to avoid a manner others might consider strange. People are bound to wonder if you shut yourself off from everybody." I made no answer.

"It's hopeless." He got up and put on his informal cloak. His attendants called for the carriage, and I heard Father ask, "Will you have some rice gruel?" It was as though Father were another person; I could not endure the thought of seeing him again. If only I might have recaptured yesterday's innocence!

Even after I heard people saying His Majesty had left, I stayed there with the robe over my head. A letter arrived with disconcerting speed. My step-grandmother and stepmother came in to ask why I was still in bed. Distressed by their questions, I said, "I haven't been feeling well since last night." They seemed to take it for granted that I was merely suffering from bridal nerves, which made me feel still more forlorn. The letter was produced with much fuss, but I was in no mood to read it.

"You're keeping His Majesty's messenger from going back. What about your reply?" people said in consternation.

"We'd better tell the Major Counselor," someone suggested. I found it all unbearable.

Father came in. "They say you're ill."

The others pressed the letter on him. “What kind of nonsense is this? Do you intend to let it go unanswered?” I could hear him opening it as he spoke. It was a poem inscribed on thin purple paper:

[296] For many long years,
 you have been as dear to me
 as a well-worn robe:
 I prize the lingering scent
 on the sleeve I spread alone.

When the others saw the poem they all said, “She isn’t a modern girl.” It was too depressing; I could not bring myself to get up. Father apparently decided in some agitation that a reply by proxy would be ruder than no answer at all. I gathered that he merely gave the messenger a present and said, “My childish daughter is still asleep; she hasn’t read His Majesty’s kind letter yet.”

A letter from an unexpected quarter arrived around noon:

If the smoke plume’s tip
 ends by trailing away
 in one direction,
 the fire of hopeless longing must surely snuff out this life.

“Unhappy though my existence has been, I’ve managed to go on in the hope that we might exchange vows someday, but what am I to do now? The thin, dark blue paper was decorated with a colored design in which I could make out the words of an old poem, “...that I may no longer feel the anguish of love.” I tore off the bit where “Mount Concealment” appeared and sent it back with this:

You cannot know
 the innermost feelings
 of the evening smoke,
 its heart too uncertain
 to drift in one direction.

I could not help realizing that I was being indiscreet.

The day drew to a close. I refused to swallow anything, even hot water and my attendants told one another that I must truly be ill. At twilight, I heard people announcing His Majesty’s arrival. No sooner had I begun to wonder what would happen this time than the door opened and he entered with a nonchalant air. “They say you aren’t feeling

[297] well. What’s the matter?” he asked. I merely lay there, unwilling to answer. He stretched out beside me and murmured all kinds of endearments. There seemed little alternative to saying, “If this were a world...” But I also felt that it would be too heartless to disregard the emotions

with which someone else would learn that the evening smoke had suddenly trailed off in one direction. At my wits' end, I made no reply at all.

His Majesty's behavior that night was callous. I think my thin robes must have ripped rather badly, but he did as he pleased with me. I hated being alive, hated even the dawn moon. The words of a poem kept running through my mind:

When, in days to come,
might gossip sully the name
of someone whose robes
have had their strings unfastened
though her heart did not consent?

How strange that I should have foreseen the future so clearly at such a time!

The Retired Emperor showered me with reassurances. "The marital bond transcends rebirth. I may not be with you every night, but you will always be in my heart," he said. Meanwhile, the sound of the dawn bells announced the close of the spring night, too short even for dreams. He got up, telling me he did not want to inconvenience the household by lingering in bed.

"Even though you may not be sorry to see me go, won't you at least come out to say good-bye?" he urged. My sleeves were drenched with the tears I had shed all through the night, but I shrugged on a thin singlet and went outside, unable to refuse so small a favor. It was the hour when the Seventeenth-night moon sinks toward the west while horizontal clouds trail in the east. What tutelage might have been responsible for the sudden attraction I felt as I looked at him standing there in a red-lined green-banded hunting robe, a lavender inner robe, and a pair of bound-patterned baggy trousers? I marvel at the complexity of a woman's heart.

My uncle, Major Counselor Takasaki, brought up the carriage. He

[298] was wearing a blue hunting robe. The single courtier in attendance was Lord Tamekata, who was an Assistant Chief in the Auditors' Office at the time. There were also two or three junior North Guards and some minor palace functionaries. A rooster heralded the dawn with knowing crows as the carriage arrived, and the sound of the bell from the Kannon Hall seemed to echo in my sleeves. I wondered if Prince Genji might have felt the same way when he composed the poem, "...my left sleeve and my right."

His Majesty lingered. "I'm going back all alone; please keep me company awhile," he pleaded. Even though it seemed presumptuous to fret over my inability to probe his mind. I stood there in confusion while the bright late moon gradually lost its color.

"Ah, it worries me to see you looking like that," he said. He swept me into the carriage, and we started away before I could so much as leave word of my departure. It was like an old romance. But what would the future bring? I composed this poem:

Dawn moon in the sky:

how grievous the memory
of the dreamlike night
when no temple bell was needed
to arouse one who had not slept!

On the way to the palace, he promised to love me always, quite as though he were a man who had just abducted a woman. A dispassionate observer would probably have found the situation delightfully intriguing, but I felt more and more miserable as the journey progressed. There was nobody to tell me what the future—not unless it might have been the tears I shed.

We arrived at the palace. The men took the carriage to the middle of the Corner Palace, and His Majesty alighted. “She is such a helpless child that I couldn’t bring myself to leave her alone; that’s why

[299] I’ve brought her with me,” he said to Takaaki. “I don’t want anyone to know about it for the time being. Look after her.” He entered his private apartments.

I felt threatened and ill at ease in the palace, which did not seem at all like the familiar place where I had served since my childhood. If only I had refused to come! I broke down in tears unable to stop worrying about the future. As I wept, I heard Father’s voice and wondered, with a twinge of pity, if he might be feeling anxious about me. Takaaki told him what the Retired Emperor had said. “She’s been put in an ambiguous position,” Father answered. “It would have been better to let her go on serving him as usual. There will be unpleasant gossip when the truth comes out.” I felt trapped and miserable as I listened to him leave. What indeed lay ahead for me? Then His Majesty entered the room and swore over and over that he would never stop loving me. In spite of my misgivings, my spirits gradually rose. Perhaps our relationship was the predestined result of a karmic bond.

His Majesty visited me for ten nights running. Foolishly enough, I could not help worrying about how the author of the smoke-plume poem must be feeling. Meanwhile, Father kept telling His Majesty that I ought not to stay in the palace under such circumstances, and so I went home. Unbearably sensitive to the eyes of others, I kept myself apart on the pretext of a lingering indisposition.

An affectionate letter arrived from His Majesty. “I miss you dreadfully after having seen you so often. Come soon.” His poem:

You cannot love me
as much as I love you.
I yearn to show to you,
unknown to others, these sleeves
drenched with the tears I shed in secret.

Although I had found his letters distasteful in the past, I greeted this one eagerly and happily. I am afraid my answering poem may have sounded a bit artificial:

I cannot think myself
 that one for whom you yearn,
 but my sleeves, too, are wet
 when I hear of the tears
 moistening your robe at night.

Before long, I went to the palace to resume my regular duties.

[300] Already beset by vague misgivings, I soon found myself the object of malicious gossip. “The Major Counselor thinks nothing is too good for her,” people said. “He presented her to the Retired Emperor with as much ceremony as if she had been a Junior Consort.” And life began to seem bleak indeed when the Imperial Lady Higashinijiōin showed herself increasingly displeased. I simply got through the days as best I could.

I was in no position to complain about the Retired Emperor’s failure to visit me at night, but it was disappointing to wait in vain time after time. Nor could I very well grumble like my companions about the women who visited him from outside the palace, but I rebelled inwardly against the conventions whenever I had to escort one of them. Was the time likely to come when I would recall this period in my life with nostalgia?” “The days went by and autumn arrived.

The approach of Higashinijiōin’s confinement, which was to take place in the Corner Palace, was causing concern because of the Imperial Lady’s relatively advanced age and history of difficult births. I believe the time was around the Eighth Month. Every conceivable large ritual and secret ritual had been commissioned—prayers to the Seven Healing Buddhas and the Five Mystic Kings, prayers to Fugen for the prolongation of life, prayers to Kongō Dōji and the Mystic King Aizen, and so on. At Father’s special request, he assumed responsibility for the prayers to Kongō Dōji this time, in addition to the ones to Kundaī, which had always been supported by Owari Province in the past. The exorcist was Jōjuin Bishop.

Shortly after the Twentieth, there were agitated reports that the birth was impending. There ensued two or three days of breathless waiting, which reduced everyone to state of frantic anxiety, and then word was sent to the Retired Emperor that there seemed to have been a change for the worse. His Majesty went inside and saw that the Imperial Lady looked alarmingly weak. He told the exorcist to pray just outside the curtain-stan. He also called in His Reverence of Omuro, who had been serving as chief officiant at the Aizen altar. “She doesn’t look as though she can survive. What shall we do?” he asked.

“The Buddhas and bodhisattvas have viewed that bad karma-results

[301] can be changed into good ones. I’m sure she won’t die.” The monk began to pray.

The exorcist hung a picture of Fudō in front of the Imperial Lady—possibly the very one that saved Shōkū’s life. Rubbing his beads, he intoned, “An ascetic who serves Fudō is the same as a Buddha; a monk who achieves command of the mantra enjoys Fudō’s eternal protection.” In a mighty effort to subdue the possessing spirits, he rubbed his beads again. “Long ago, when I was a boy, I devoted my nights to prayer in the hall; now that I am a man, I spend my days in

difficult, painful austerities. Can there be no divine response, no divine protection in return?" he said.

There were signs that the Imperial Lady was about to give birth. Encouraged, the monk redoubled his exertions, praying hard enough to raise smoke. All the ladies-in-waiting passed out singlet sets and raw silk robes under the blinds to the preside official, who handed them over to courtiers. Members of the North Guards presented them to the recitants.

The senior nobles sat below the stairs, looking as though they were hoping for a boy. The yin-yang masters put an eight-legged table in the courtyard and performed the thousandfold purification. Courtiers picked up the ritual articles, and ladies-in-waiting thrust out their sleeves to receive and transmit them. Escorts and junior members of the North Guards led in sacred horses, which His Majesty inspected and dispatched to the Twenty-one Shrines as offerings. How fortunate the Imperial Lady seemed! We felt that anyone born into this world as a human being and a woman would want to be exactly like her.

His Majesty summoned the chief officiant from the Seven Healing Buddhas altar and ordered him to have the Healing Buddha Sutra chanted by three junior officiants with especially fine voices. The birth took place just as the three intoned, "The beholders rejoice."

Amid all the congratulations inside and outside the hall, the rice steamer rolled toward the north.² It was a disappointment for the Retired Emperor, but the exorcist received the usual series of rewards.

[302] Although the baby was a girl, Priestly Retired Emperor Go-Saga made a great fuss over her. The fifth and seventh nights after the birth were observed with particular splendor. On the seventh night, the two former sovereigns chatted in Retired Emperor Go-Fukakusa's apartments after the celebratory banquet. Around the Hour of the Ox [1:00–3:00 AM], there was a tremendous noise in the Orange Tree Courtyard—a sound like storm-driven waves crashing onto a rocky shore.

"What's happening? Go and look," His Majesty said to me. When I went out, I saw ten ladle-shaped, bluish-white objects streaking through the air, their heads ranging in size from plates to earthen vessels, and their long slender tails shining with dazzling brilliance. I fled inside, aghast.

"Why are you so upset?" asked the senior nobles in the eave-chamber. "They were only meteors."

But then a voice shouted, "Something that looks like seaweed starch is scattered under the big willow tree."

² A sign that the baby was a girl. From *The Tale of the Heike*: "When an Empress gives birth, it is customary to roll a rice steamer down from the ridgepole of the building she occupies, directing it to the south for a Prince and to the north for a Princess."

The diviners were put to work at once. They reported that Priestly Retired Emperor Go-Saga's spirit had been wandering, and spirit-summoning rituals were begun that very night, along with prayers to the Taishan deity.

Around the Ninth Month, we heard that the Priestly Retired Emperor had fallen ill. His body swelled and he seemed to fail daily, despite constant frantic applications of moxa. Thus this year ended.