Excerpts from *The Pillow Book*
by Sei Shonagon

“In Spring It Is the Dawn”
In spring it the dawn that is most beautiful. As the light creeps over the hills, their outlines are dyed a faint red and wisps of purplish cloud trail over them.

In summer the nights. Not only when the moon shines, but on dark nights too, as the fireflies flit to and fro, and even when it rains, how beautiful it is!

In autumn the evenings, when the glittering sun sinks close to the edge of the hills and the crows fly back to their nests in threes and fours and twos; more charming still is a file of wild geese, like specks in the distant sky. When the sun has set, one’s heart is moved by the sound of the wind and the hum of insects.

In winter the early mornings. It is beautiful indeed when snow has fallen during the night, but splendid too when the ground is white with frost; or even when there is no snow or frost, but it is simply very cold and the attendants hurry from room to room stirring up the fires and bringing charcoal, how well this fits the season’s mood! But as noon approaches and the cold wears off, no one bothers to keep the braziers alight, and soon nothing remains but piles of white ashes.

*brazier* (n): *a metal container for hot coals to heat a room*

“Embarrassing Things”
While entertaining some visitors, one hears some servant chatting without any restraint in one of the back rooms. It is embarrassing to know that one’s visitors can overhear them. But how to stop them?

A man whom one loves gets drunk and keeps repeating himself.

To have spoken about someone not knowing the he could overhear. This is embarrassing even if it be a servant or some other completely insignificant person.

To hear one’s servants making merry. This is equally annoying if one is on a journey and staying in cramped quarters or at home and hears the servants in a neighboring room.

Parents, convinced that their ugly child is adorable, pet him and repeat the things he has said, imitating his voice.

An ignoramus who is the presence of some learned person put on a knowing air and converses about men of old.

A man recited his own poems (not especially good ones) and tells one about the praise they have received – most embarrassing.

*ignoramus* (n): *an extremely ignorant person; a fool*
“Moving Things”
A child who is full of filial piety*. The cry of a deer. . . .

How moving is the grasshopper’s cry at the end of the Ninth Month, and at the beginning of the Tenth, when it sounds so feeble that one can hardly tell whether it is really there!

A hen sitting on her chicks.

In a garden during the late autumn the dewdrops glittering like jewels on the asaji reeds.

River bamboo swaying in the evening breeze.

To wake up at dawn or in the middle of the night—this is always moving.

Two young people are in love with each other; but someone is in their way and they are prevented from doing as they want.

A mountain village in the snow.

An attractive man or woman in mourning.

It is dawn towards the end of the month; one has stayed up all night talking, and now one sees the moon over the crest of the hills, looking so pale and forlorn that one wonders whether it is really there.

A field in autumn.

Old priests doing their religious exercises.

A dilapidated house overgrown with goose- grass; the garden is rank with sage-brush and other weeds; the moon shines so brightly over the whole scene that there is not a single dark corner; and the wind blows gently.

*filial piety* respect for ones parents or ancestors