

## Chapter One: The End of An Era

Richard closes *The Tale Of Genji* for the last time and looks around the table at the ladies. His ladies. Annie, with her newly silvered hair, is happy again with her first husband Bill, after the agony of watching her second husband, Hans, fade and die. Claire, is still immaculately groomed, but a little looser and softer since she and Henry attached themselves to each other. Retirement suits her. His keen eyes see that Katherine looks strained, he notes the strain and wonders at the source of it. Cindy, Mary are calm as always; Franny is quick to take offense at deviations from her sense of morality either in person around the table or characters in a story. Richard thinks it a miracle that she is still married or in the book club. Their new member Sally, her rough edges not yet sanded down in the conversations about their book, might not last.

He would like to continue with his ladies but has to concentrate on his exams and his PhD thesis. As he reads the last page to them he is conscious of satisfaction that these wonderful students have completed their work, and sadness that this strange alliance of the very old and his own young self is now to be severed. He looks at the faces, worn with time and sorrows but still bright eyed and thinks that he will never again look upon this generation as dull.

"If you need help in finding a teacher please let me try to find someone. Let me know what you would like to study."

Claire is the first to speak up, "Richard, we all want to thank you for your marvelous teaching. We have learned so much and we will never forget what you have taught us. These nights with you and *The Tale* have been a joy."

Annie looks sad but with the look of a writer storing up images. Mary is her placid self, used to the young leaving to lead their lives. Cindy, all ruffled hair, is sad that such a big part of her life is ending. Franny, of the tight mouth, looks disapproving as she does with everything. Katherine, this day dreamy eyed, smiles gently at Richard. All murmured their gratitude. Richard blushes and thanks them again and, after closing his pocket watch and gathering up his books, takes his formal leave. He will bike through the tree lined streets to the house where he lives with many other graduate students. Neatly and competently he places his book bag in the front basket, buckles on his black helmet that gleams under the street lights, grips the handlebars and rides off into the night.

Silence remains after his departure.